

ASK THE DESIGNER: Furnishing for the Season of Entertaining

By Jean Bisnaire
Niche Decor

'My kids are back at school, I've settled into my Autumn routine and the holidays are just around the corner. How can I get my living and dining rooms holiday entertainment ready?'

Whether we want to admit or not, the weather is changing and the holiday season is upon us! We're transitioning from outdoor entertaining ? backyard barbecues, pool parties and sunshine to cozy dinners and evenings in. Thanksgiving and Christmas are fast approaching so it's important get ahead of the game and start thinking about these things now!

The biggest dilemma my clients face is how to accommodate a large group of people in an average sized living room. The first thing to consider is furniture layout. During the year your room is set up for whoever lives in the house. Depending on the size of the party you are having you may need to add or remove furniture. For large groups, consider removing a sofa to allow for more room to mingle. This is also the time of year that we bring out occasional tables, or drop leaf tables and use them as an extra server, or as a bar area.

If you're looking to purchase some new furniture, there are a few things to keep in mind. In terms of sofas, a lot of people enjoy the look of a sofa with two large seat cushions instead of the traditional three. This is a tidy look as having fewer seams reduces visual clutter. On the downside, people don't like to sit on the seam where the cushions can separate. So, on your two cushion sofa, you will likely only seat two guests. Something else to consider when choosing your sofa is the size of the arm. If you choose a sofa with a wide padded arm, your guests will have an extra ledge to sit on or lean up against.

If you are planning to keep your existing furniture but need to add some extra seating, there are some really great multi-function pieces on the market now. I love marrying form and function by finding stylish accents and furniture that can also serve as extra seating or storage for your guests. Try swapping out your coffee table for a collection of small ottomans. Pushed together the ottomans act as a cocktail table. As people arrive and the sofas are filling up, pull the ottomans apart and you have just easily created four more seats! The same effect can be achieved by using a short bench or ceramic garden stools. Another easy seating solution is to buy a set of host and hostess chairs for the head of the dining table. Prior to eating, while everyone is catching up, bring those two chairs out in to the living room for extra seating. Something with a pattern or textured fabric will punch up your décor and feel more like occasional chairs than dining chairs until you need them at the table.

Once you're ready to serve up your delicious holiday meal you will need a sturdy table with durable seating. With the economy in its current state, more and more clients are opting to shop local and want products made on Canadian soil. We're seeing a lot of custom solid wood tables. The wood is all harvested from sustainable forests and made right here in Ontario. You can choose your base style, top thickness, and exact dimensions so that you are sure to seat as many people as you comfortably can in your room. You can hide centre leaves in the table so that year round it's less cumbersome, and expand it when entertaining. You also have the option of doing end leaves if you prefer a seamless tabletop. With a huge variety of wood types, stain colours and textured finishes you can be sure to get the perfect table for your needs. Custom furniture can take anywhere from 6-10 weeks so if you are considering a new table, be sure to get your orders in soon.

There was a time where leather upholstery was the best choice in terms of easy cleaning- those days are over. The number of beautiful fabrics that have built in stain resisting properties is on the rise. This makes it easy to get a fashion forward look without having to worry about spills. Drink up and remember to create spaces that you are relaxed about entertaining in.