




Photographs by
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LOWIT



How to HOST a party the ELLE way

Words by
LOTTE JEFFS

'Tis the season to be sociable.
But why go out when you
can bring the party to you?
Here's how the ELLE editors do it





BEFORE THE PARTY

There's always a moment, before the first party guest rings the doorbell, when your home seems heavy with the weight of possibility. Your living room – crisps in bowls, cushions plumped – is holding its breath. Champagne glasses stand to attention on the counter, and bottles are lined up, ready for action. You swish on red lipstick, hide your slippers under the bed. And then, bang! It all happens at once: people arrive bearing booze. You're given six bunches of gladioli and there aren't enough vases, someone turns up with a pineapple (why?!), the playlist is on, corks are popping, you're being hugged and kissed by every arrival.

Then suddenly you're grinding to DJ Khaled's *Wild Thoughts*, you're insisting everyone does shots, you're in the garden with the smokers wearing someone else's coat. And before you have a chance to think, 'Hey, I'm hosting a really good party,' everyone has left (apart from that one person asleep on your sofa). The bottles are empty and the only sound is the ping of WhatsApps, saying: 'Home safe, thanks for a great night (dancing girl emoji).'

Hosting a party can be messy and stressy, but it can also be The. Most. Fun. You don't need a big house, or a big budget – just a bit of imagination and planning. And if there's one thing the ELLE team has in common, beyond a love of Jacquemus and matcha lattes, it's that we all know how to throw a good bash. From Editor-in-Chief Anne-Marie Curtis's Christmas shindigs, and Travel and Lifestyle Director Sue Ward Davies' legendary birthdays, to Fashion Writer Billie Bhatia's annual 'Fuck You Cancer' party to mark the end of her mum's treatment, and my own 'salon soirées' – between us, we have the dos, don'ts, fashion-insider secrets and house party ephemera to rock your world. And here, we share it with

It's never a good idea to invite everyone you know to everything. ELLE Editor-at-Large Stacey Duguid (the woman behind our *Mademoiselle* column) has these words of wisdom: 'I'm the most shocking hostess on the planet. Within minutes, I'm high on my own supply (champagne). I also over-invite – now I'm officially banned from hosting Christmas parties. Four years

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I like to be a host and a guest. We had a fab Boxing Day party, but we take it in turns to out-do each other

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ERDEM

ago, I invited 80 people to our house, and they all showed up. There were kids, adults and dogs everywhere, and nowhere for anyone to sit, not enough snacks to eat and I was giddy from booze. I had a great time. My husband did not.'

ELLE Travel and Lifestyle Director Susan Ward Davies always advises: 'Let any new friends bring a plus one.' Susan invites

people she knows love to dance, as this gets the vibe going early on in the night. And she also says if you want to get good guests, you have to be a good guest yourself. 'Never bail. Go early, stay late, talk to everyone, and dance!'

'Always plan your playlist in advance,' says ELLE Content Director Hannah Swerling. And she's right: there's nothing worse than someone trying to find Beyoncé's *Lemonade* on Spotify because you've unplugged

bowls painted by Luke Edward Hall, a platter of canapés on a pink dish from Suite One Studio, and leopard-print linen napkins from House Of Hackney. Extra points for flowers on the table from Worm London, and a candle from Tom Daxon burning with a good smoky scent.'

ELLE Commissioning Editor Hannah Nathanson says: 'I like a party with good places to sit down – not really comfortable sofas that swallow you up and make you want to go to bed, but surfaces on which to perch elegantly or seats that will keep you awake and inspire good conversation. It also helps with party longevity.'

We all know that guests congregate in the kitchen, so prepare for this: make sure there's music on in there and that the lighting isn't too garish. Habitat sells small globe lamps in different colours for £20. I put a pink one on in my kitchen at parties for a bit of ambience. As for paper plates – they are totally acceptable, we promise. But if you want your party to feel classy, as Lena says, step away from the plastic cups. Bulk-buy cheap wine and champagne glasses, or hire them (everything tastes better in actual glass). ELLE Fashion Writer >

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Wear trainers and a dress so you can dance happily. I drink tequila soda at parties – it makes me jolly!

MOLLY GODDARD

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The parties I have in France are the most fun, when I'm with all generations of my family

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JACQUEMEUS

Billie draws the line at cheap paper napkins: 'This isn't a hotdog stand at the fun-fair,' she says with a hair flick. Controversially, I swear by Tiger's £1.99 paper napkins – the designs look far from cheap. Something team ELLE does agree on is the importance of a designated smoking area. Billie says: 'Even if it's the front of the house, put out an ashtray and some plant pots.'

I love it when someone has a party for a unique reason. Ever thought about celebrating the solstice, a full moon, the first of the month, harvest festival, your dog's birthday? A light-hearted, funny reason for a party sets the tone. I recently painted a room in my house pink, which I'm calling the 'salon', and I hosted a dinner party to celebrate (I asked my guests to wear co-ordinating colours). A nod to the theme is enough when it comes to decor – anything more risks looking like a children's party.

As for dress codes, Susan has the right idea. She says: 'As a guest to even a low-key affair, making an effort shows the host that you have been looking forward to it, and you should always make them feel it is the high point of your weekend.'

Fashion Features Director Kenya Hunt says: 'If I were hosting a dinner of eight or more, I will wear some sort of loungey dress or long skirt with one of the many pairs of Moroccan slippers I bought in Essaouira. This approach lends itself to a sense of elevated ease, important when moving around a lot. This wouldn't feel out of the ordinary for my guests to see me in this way. Our friends and I used to organise a dinner party every year after Thanksgiving, and we'd always have a dress code. But if it's a scenario where you're hosting six work friends for an evening meal at your place, a dress code could read as obnoxious.' And as for fancy dress? 'I avoid it like the plague! Not my thing.'

Really loud music,
a great DJ,
lots of dance
space – and be
friends with your
neighbours!

CHARLI XCX

Don't be afraid to be
the first one dancing.
It might not seem like
a radical idea, but be
the party starter!



DURING THE PARTY

Travel Director Sue, the person with the most party experience of us all, has high expectations when it comes to her guests: 'I have no time for people who accept an invitation and then just "pop in for one" because they don't want a late night (this is only allowed if you have a new baby or an exam the next day),' she says. But let's assume all your fabulous friends have arrived and are in it for the long haul, what should you be doing? Certainly not clearing up after everyone. Nothing kills a vibe more. For me, it's all about stealth cleaning: in between chatting to people I'll quickly and quietly swoop through the house getting rid of rubbish. Things should get unruly, but never unpleasant.

What you should be doing as host is keeping glasses topped up and chatting to guests as much as you can, then your aim is to relax and have fun. If you are hosting with a friend or partner, know your roles. One does drinks while the other meets and greets; one of you should be with your guests at all times. The best party hosts pay attention to the details: if people bring hummus or guacamole, spoon it into your nicest serving bowl immediately, drizzling a little olive oil over it and adding a sprinkle of black pepper – it makes all the difference. Crisps come out of bags and go into bowls – it's not Freshers' Week. Do try

CLARA AMFO

to maintain the perfect degree of drunkenness throughout. If the host is off her head, the crowd will quickly lose interest and the party will take a weird turn. But you don't want to be so sober that everyone else just gets annoying. A glass of water for every glass of wine is a good tip. Also, eat a large bowl of pasta before guests arrive, as you will be too busy to eat the canapés. Keep the mood jolly, intervene if it looks like anyone is getting into an emotional conversation that might end in tears, and have an eye on who might be on the verge of being mindlessly drunk and get them into a taxi. Every party has a momentum of its own. ELLE Beauty Editor Joely says: 'Don't try to force games into the situation – they will arise naturally if the time is right.'



AFTER THE PARTY

In the Forties, the legendary newspaper advice columnist Ann Landers wrote: 'At every party there are two kinds of people: those who want to go home, and those who don't. The trouble is, they're usually married to each other.' In my relationship, I'm the one who wants to go home, while my wife has the fear that something amazing might happen as soon as we leave. My advice to you, dear host, is to know when to call it quits. Take a look around you: has the music gone weird because someone you don't know has hopped on the Bluetooth and is playing experimental German techno? Are people slumped on sofas, not talking? At this point, you are well within your rights to turn up that dimmer switch, yawn loudly and say something along the lines of 'Well, that was fun!' They should get the hint.