

Happy Hour at Home

With many favorite watering holes temporarily shuttered, socializing over cocktails moved back into the home, and luxury designers embraced the challenge.

By Roger Grody



The pandemic has forced many activities, from conferencing with colleagues to working out, into the home, and happy hour has been no exception. Enjoying a cocktail after a long day at the office has been an honored ritual for a century, but in 2020 home became the only place to unwind. Luxury architects and interior designers have always created alluring home bars, but demand for that amenity has accelerated.

Los Angeles-based Landry Design Group (LDG) specializes in high-end residential architecture, and the firm's luxury clients insist

on versatile resources for entertainment. In addition to more attention to dedicated home offices, home gyms and spaces for meditative or creative pursuits, founding principal Richard Landry recognized that homebound residents were rediscovering the pleasure of their home bars during the pandemic. In some LDG commissions, an entire room is dedicated to the bar, while in others, it fills a niche in a more multipurpose space, but either way its design is always consistent with the home’s prevailing design concept.

In an award-winning residence in the Hollywood Hills, LDG created an inviting bar and wine cellar whose curvilinear qualities reflect the entire structure’s elegant expression of modernism. “An attractive place to enjoy a glass of wine or cocktail with a loved one is a pleasant amenity, whether it visually anchors a room or is discreetly hidden away,” explains Landry.

“With imaginative uses of forms, surfaces and lighting, the aesthetics of a home bar can rival its function,” adds the acclaimed architect. The hillside residence, designed for a prominent television producer, is distinguished from the austere, box-like homes favored by some contemporary architects in L.A. Rather, this home is a graceful study in curves, inside and out, and its bar space conveys a sense of motion consistent with Landry’s overall vision for the project.

Joseph A. Berkowitz, founder of JAB Design Group — the firm specializes in upscale residential environments in metro Philadelphia and beyond — appreciates the value of a dedicated space for a cocktail at home. The veteran interior designer, whose portfolio reflects a broad range of styles, recognizes the emotions a bar introduces into a space. “Whether it’s a full sit-down bar, a bar cart or just a tray with bottles and glasses, it makes the room feel warm and alive,” says Berkowitz. “Even the bottles become accessories, each telling their own story,” he adds.

In a contemporary South Florida penthouse, JAB created a stunning bar with an Art Deco attitude — the feature is relatively modest in size yet undeniably a focal point — whose “dashboard veneer” matches the exotic wood that frames an

ocean vista. Berkowitz says of the bar, “It creates a sense of division between the living room and dining room, yet is still open enough to show off the views.” Gold leaf accents, stylish underlighting and ample storage (including a wine refrigerator) are built into the custom cabinetry.

A more understated expression from JAB Design Group is an intimate walk-up bar in a Philadelphia penthouse loft, where space would not accommodate a full sit-down bar. Contrasting its blonde wood framing is a uniquely textured black “leathered” marble backsplash and elegant detailing in the form of black leather-clad stainless steel cabinet hardware.

Juliet Gold Design creates sleek,

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modern interiors from its offices in New York and Miami, and recognizes the importance of providing a home-based substitute for a trendy lounge or bar, even when space is at a premium. “With rare exceptions, any luxury homeowner will have friends who appreciate a well-prepared cocktail from a well-stocked bar,” says Gold, who contends the pandemic has only amplified that principle. “How much has it increased in value? Pour me a drink and I’ll do the calculations,” she quips.

For a contemporarily-styled unit near New York’s SoHo district, Gold was able to conceal a bar behind a retractable panel in the living room, which transforms the space into a sexy lounge when fully revealed. The home is one of seven condominiums at The Residences at Prince, carved out of the Old St. Patrick’s School and Convent, a Federal-style landmark erected in 1825.

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In a suburban Westchester County residence, Gandelman transformed a small space off the dining room into a handsome home bar with rich grey, meshed cabinetry and contrasting Calacatta marble countertop. A mother-of-pearl backsplash counterbalances the bar’s more masculine elements and appears iridescent under accent lights.

Explaining that unique backsplashes are an A-List Interiors signature, Gandelman states, “Every other kitchen on Instagram has a subway tile backsplash, but our firm is known for juxtaposing a lot of interesting materials and textures.” For a larger bar in a contemporary Greenwich, Connecticut project, Gandelman selected a mirrored backsplash to showcase spirit bottles that become their own decorative elements.

Lisa Vail of Vesta Home recently created a cozy bar in a Beverly Hills residence designed by architect William Hefner. Clad in marble and illuminated by contemporary pendant lighting, the bar occupies the corner of a room dedicated to table games. Vail reports that home bars were popular in the ’80s and ’90s before falling out of favor for more than a decade, but has observed renewed interest in the amenity. “With the



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Above, JAB Design Group created a soothing sit-down bar at a New Jersey oceanfront vacation home. Below, Designer Anelle Gandelman’s glass backsplash showcases the aesthetic qualities of spirit bottles.



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pandemic, developers are realizing that homes are now entertainment spaces, and more owners are requesting luxury home bars,” Vail says.

Like Berkowitz and Gandelman, Vail views bottles and glassware as design elements and advises they should be curated with care. “It’s important to choose bottles and accessories that reflect the aesthetics of the bar and the home,” she says. Vail reports that for a Bay Area commission, “We accented the bar with crystal decanters and stemware that created an ethereal glow.” While some designers have been successful in incorporating original artwork into the bar environment, Vail advises, “In the home bar, the bottles and glassware are the art.”

Interior designer Juliette Calaf, founder and principal designer of Miami- and San Juan, Puerto Rico-based Juliette Calaf Design Studio, agrees the pandemic has directed greater attention to the home bar. She

is currently engaged in a commission requiring an elaborate bar and cigar lounge in a luxury San Juan condominium, incorporating vintage mid-century modern furniture. “I like to integrate the bar into the overall setting,” says Calaf, who adds, “Some clients prefer an intimate feature for themselves, but for those who love to entertain, the bar takes more of a center stage.”

Sunny Isles Beach is one of the toniest communities in Greater Miami, where penthouses — lavish residences that feel like palaces floating over the Atlantic Ocean — regularly command stratospheric prices. At the gracefully curvilinear Regalia, a tri-level penthouse currently priced at \$32 million includes a sleek cocktail lounge with wraparound ocean views, glass-ensconced wine cellar and a backlit exotic stone bar that rivals South Beach’s trendiest restaurants or clubs.

With good design, it’s always happy hour at home. 