

DINE IN

A place in which to savour and socialise, the dining room can turn its hand to any occasion

WORDS KERRYN RAMSEY

The dining room has had an extreme makeover, with formality and restraint off the menu. Now a multifunctional zone, the space works as a breakfast bar, coffee spot, party focal point and even an office and homework area. The key to a successful dining room is to factor in all its uses. Whether it's a Sunday roast or a formal dinner party, your dining room needs a sense of cohesion to appear warm and welcoming. >





Transparent 'Louis Ghost' chairs look chic, while creating the illusion of space.



Save your colour statements for easy-to-change accessories.

How to get it right

For a dining room that's both functional and fabulous, consider these four key elements

1. size

Be aware of the size of the room when choosing colours and furnishings. In a compact room, avoid heavy furniture and a dark colour palette. To give the appearance of space, consider a glass tabletop and chairs without armrests. Choose blinds rather than curtains, and an elongated cylindrical pendant light to accentuate the height of the room. An expandable table is a space-savvy option.

Meanwhile, more expansive rooms will feel empty if the table is too small, particularly in an open-plan zone with myriad windows and bi-folds. To shrink

a large room to a more manageable size, interior designer Glenda Barnes suggests adding tall plants, rich drapes or additional pieces of furniture, such as a china cabinet.

2. occasions

Do you always invite the extended family over for special occasions? How frequently do you have dinner parties? Is the area an informal eatery which doubles as a work station? Consider your way of living before determining your decor. For example, a crystal chandelier might be out of place in an informal space, while stackable chairs are equally obtrusive in a formal room.

3. theme

Modern, country, industrial, baroque-inspired or a clever combination – determining your style will help you select everything from tables to teaspoons, chandeliers to chairs.

Work from the bottom up and start with flooring; then, when choosing colours and materials, consider the amount of light in the room. For a contemporary look, choose understated furniture, then introduce decorative objects and tableware to accentuate the theme – this makes it easy to change the look for different occasions.

4. traffic

Accessibility needs to be considered when positioning furniture. Make sure guests don't have to vacate their chairs when other people need to pass. "You need 900mm to a metre between the table and the wall," suggests Rod Coligado, restaurateur of Sydney's Bin 24.

When choosing a buffet, make sure the doors can open fully. There's nothing more frustrating than having to shift a heavy dining table every time an extra teacup or napkin is needed from the console.



'Martin' stackable chair in Black, \$40, Ikea.



'Cambridge' dining chair, \$249, Freedom.



'Elizabeth' dining chair, \$179, Oz Design Furniture.



Replica Emeco 'US Navy' aluminium chair, \$149, Matt Blatt.



'Louis Ghost' chair, by Philippe Starck in Black, \$530, Kartell.

Chair market

The traditional dining suite of a matching table and chairs has been trumped by the mix-and-match option; a rustic timber table, for example, is often these days paired with modern moulded polypropylene chairs. A more daring option is to select entirely mismatched chairs, choosing similar colours or styles to form a cohesive theme. "Mixing different designs, finishes, colours and patterns is a great way to create an individual look," confirms Samantha Harris of Freedom.

For accommodating numerous guests, bench seats are no longer solely for the outdoors. Team long benches with a generous table for a relaxed, informal vibe.

Good back support should be a priority when choosing chairs. "It's important that they don't hurt your spine," says Tina Engelen of Collaborative Architecture Practice. The backrest should provide a natural curve, following the contours of the spine.

Comfort also needs to be on the agenda. "I love the look of timber chairs, but I can't sit back and relax," admits Tina. "Padding can help. I prefer upholstered chairs for long dining sessions."

The quality of foam is the key when choosing an upholstered chair; well-padded seats with cotton batting offer comfort and longevity. Superior upholstery will provide shape for the chair and won't sag, preventing uneven wear on the actual frame. >



Bench seats can look just as stylish as traditional chairs and can even add to the sense of space in the room.



'DSW' side chair with maple base, \$616, Living Edge.



'Louis XV' chair with rattan back, \$699, La Maison.



'East Hampton' chair in Burnt Oak, \$280, Town & Country Style.



'April' upholstered chair in Dune, \$1260, Zuster.



Cherner side chair, from \$1228, FY2K.

Arrange furniture to give guests – and the host! – enough room to move around the table.



While round tables are more convivial, a rectangular table will slot more neatly into most spaces.



Table talk

If your dining table is in constant use, it needs to be both stylish and durable. While designer brands are offering tables in high-tech materials – cast aluminium, powder-coated laser-cut steel and glossy polyamide – timber has also had a strong resurgence, particularly sustainably forested hardwoods. “Solid timber is timeless,” says interior designer Glenda Barnes. “A current trend is to have the table base painted in a colour while the top is left as natural timber. Turned timber has also made a comeback.”

Size is also a priority when selecting a table – a large table will even add a sense of scale to a little space (remember to leave at least 900mm between the table and the wall). “The bigger the better,” suggests Glenda. “It means more room for dinner parties, Christmas lunches, Saturday brunches and school projects.”

While round tables are sociable and can accommodate larger numbers, rectangular tables will work well with almost any room. To make a large table seem more intimate, group two or three chairs in the middle, leaving room for extra serving space. >

MODERN, COUNTRY, BAROQUE-INSPIRED OR A CLEVER COMBINATION – DETERMINING YOUR STYLE WILL HELP YOU SELECT EVERYTHING FROM TABLES TO TEASPOONS



‘Bjursta’ dining table in Birch Veneer, \$279, Ikea.



‘Braxton’ dining table, \$1099, Freedom.



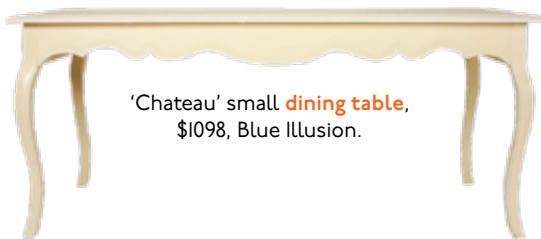
‘Varenne’ dining table in Antique Black, \$2499, La Maison.



Timber tables are always in fashion and can be modernised with contrasting chairs.



'Martha' dining table in Antique White/Weathered, \$3570, Town & Country Style.



'Chateau' small dining table, \$1098, Blue Illusion.



'Stella' meals table in Dune, \$3710, Zuster.



Large mirrors can visually double the size of your dining room and amplify the glow of candles.



Lighting

A common mistake when choosing lighting is to make the dining room too bright. "I love low-level lighting because it makes me feel like I'm at home, not at work," says architect Tina Engelen, who believes it is better to under-light a space, supplementing it with candlelight or soft-glowing rechargeable table lights. "I would never put a downlight over a dining table. They are too bright and can make you feel tired. In contrast, uplights placed around a dining room setting are a beautiful way to give light."

When choosing a pendant light, it's important to bring the light down to shine on the table, not the people. "Australians never hang them low enough," says Tina. "A pendant light needs to be hung just above your eye height when you are seated, so you can look at each other around the table without the light being in your eyes."

WHEN ADDING A FLORAL ARRANGEMENT, BEWARE OF TALL FLOWERS THAT MAY BLOCK GUESTS' VIEW ACROSS THE TABLE



Final touches

Mirror: "To create the illusion of space, a long, rectangular mirror adds depth to a room," says interior designer Glenda Barnes.

Music: "Music should be treated as background noise, but it also prevents any uncomfortable silences during a dinner party," says restaurateur Rod Coligado. To create a good vibe, he suggests reducing the amplifier's base control by 30-40 per cent, and magnifying the treble by 20-30 per cent.

Rug: The right rug can tie together the theme of a dining room, define the space and absorb some noise. Just make sure it's big enough that the back legs of your dining chairs sit on the rug, even when guests push them back to get up.

Decorative elements: A centerpiece dresses up any table for a special occasion. But when adding a floral arrangement, beware of tall flowers that may block guests' view across the table and obstruct conversation. **BB**