

ATLANTA ●

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No Invitation Required

Put the formality aside and enjoy your dining room year-round

by Ashley M. Wilborn

Food has a way of uniting people. In fact, most of us don't even consider inviting people over unless we have plenty of good food and drinks on hand. Usually, the crowd ends up gathered in the kitchen, drinks and plates in hand. No one thinks to gather in the dining room, if there is one. This room seems to have become the catchall for a buffet at the least, and for very special occasions at most. Remodelers and interior designers are realizing that the best ways to get modern families to use their traditional dining rooms again are to take the tradition out of the equation, tear down some walls and try some out-of-the-box interior design.

Revitalizing the room

"A growing trend we're finding is to consolidate existing unused space for more useful functions," says Scott Forest, project coordinator for SewHouse Inc. "Homeowners are taking over the old living rooms as larger, informal dining spaces. ☛



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Get the Party Started

Looking for a fun way to decorate your dining area and maximize the space you've got? These tips will give you a head start in creating the perfect dining room.



The old dining rooms get enveloped into newer kitchen spaces, now large enough for the eat-in island that could never fit.

Many families, like the Chamberlains of Tucker, are finding remodelers like Small Carpenters in Largo to give their dining areas more harmony, while still keeping a traditional table and chairs, so they have more flow between the areas.

"It's really less of a dining room now than a central place between our living room and our new addition, the music room," says David Chamberlain, who hosts Singsbrab Boogie, a rockabilly and western swing music show on 89.3 WRFG. "It's a small house that's been broken up into more points of interest. Now it unfolds, so to speak, rather than us being slapped in the face with the house."

Designer Gina McNew can relate to the need to revise her space, but instead of remodeling, she redesigned. When she inherited her grandmother's traditional wedding china, she immediately and reverently placed it, museum-like, in her formal dining room, rarely to be touched. Her dining room didn't gather dust, but only because her grandmother's plates had to be wiped, and she says she had to "schlep into the dining room once or twice a month to polish the silver." When guests visited, she watched their hesitant body language as they peeked their heads around and said, "Oh, how nice," and walked around the room to get to the kitchen, where everyone inevitably gathered.

"It looked like a display that said 'Do not disturb,'" McNew says. Then she had an epiphany. "Finally, I realized I didn't have to be obligated to display it, so I packed all the china away, then I went about decorating the dining room the way I had always hoped."

Packing away the china was just the beginning. "It changes constantly now," McNew says. "I can change the hutch seasonally, change the plates and match the decor. It's all about feeling like I can walk into this room, and because I have fun with it, when people come into my house, people feel comfortable. Now they stop, look in and say, 'Oh, this is pretty,' and then gather around in—people are curious."

Color me hungry

McNew attributes part of her dining room's new life to the paint colors she chose—perimeter, yellow and shades of burgandy, which she says are inviting and cozy. Other interior designers are seeing the same trend. Homeowners are leaning toward colors that are taken from foods that remind us of harvest, abundance and prosperity, such as shades of green, orange and deep wine or berry reds.

"A cozy feeling is usually associated with shades of orange—it invokes food, as do the brown tones," says Dewey Salika, creator of the Dewey Color System, a personality test used by human resource departments. He also is the chair of the Color Marketing Group, which predicts color trends one to three years ahead. "If I were starting over in my dining room, in Atlanta, I would think of using a really pretty color combination—in brown, orange and white," he says. Salika also says bringing the colors of nature into the home, particularly during Thanksgiving, is not only inviting, but also instructional. ☐

1

How many for dinner tonight?

How many people do you want to come to your parties, or how many guests do you want to entertain on a regular basis? Once you determine that, you can determine whether or not to expand your space, or just get a bigger table with more chairs.



Center yourself

Create a centerpiece of all shapes and sizes of candles and light them when you sit down to eat. Almost anything can be used as a centerpiece, as long as the size is proportionate to the table and the rest of the furniture.

2



"We bring them in because, to us, instinctually, we are more relaxed in restaurants, and when you bring nature in, you allow yourself to relax more, feel better. It's why we make our dining room decor fall-like so often," Sadler says. "In the winter, it's somewhat about nesting; it's tied to our sense of security. We need to feel emotionally that we are going to make it through the winter."

Musical chairs

Even though families are starting to open up their dining rooms to give them more flow, spaces still seem to dictate tables that are square with a "king" and "queen" position at each end. With traditional sit-down dinners in the dining room, this has, of course, created plenty of drama as to who gets to sit closest to the host or hostess, or to mom or dad.

Aeriah Davis and Susie VanFossen of SherJules Designs are trying to reshape that trend. "We're trying to use more round tables, instead of square, which work better for games and puzzles," Davis says. When the Chamberlain family renovated, they decided on a round table, as well.

"We chose a circle table, rather than break up the room with a square, and thought that the round table would be a more democratic seating arrangement," Chamberlain says.

Because of this slow shift in perspective, people also continue to have the traditional accompanying furniture, but with a twist for parties. "China cabinets are not as popular as buffet-style furniture," Davis says. She suggests to her clients that, just as they are repurposing rooms, they also should repurpose the furniture. "People that have china cabinets that they can't get rid of could color out the glass with spray paint (or tissue paper), line it with fabric and put their good china in their cabinets where they will actually use it," she says. Then the reworked hutch can be used as storage for games, puzzles, letter-writing tools, craft supplies or as seasonal clothing storage.

For single people, or couples without children, instead of adding a new hutch to the dining room, VanFossen suggests creating a sitting area off to the side of the dining table, like a reading corner with comfy chairs and an accent lamp. That makes a perfect Sunday morning spot to read the paper.

McNew reminds us that we don't have to stick with convention when decorating or remodeling our homes. "An architect puts labels on the rooms because, when you do the plans, you have to sell the space. But if a particular room isn't conducive to the way the family lives in a house, that doesn't mean you have to use it as its labeled," McNew says.

Whatever you decide to do with your dining room, just remember—it's all about your taste.

3

Be dramatic

Always have a dinner switch for your dining room chandelier, but don't overdo it. It's always better to see the person you are talking to, says Scott Reilly, owner of DetronModern, a furniture store in downtown Atlanta.



CLEAN LINES give your living space a sleek, contemporary feel.

4 Be eclectic

Mix your old chairs or tableware with some contemporary pieces, suggests *Ann Sternberg*, chief executive officer for *NY Loft Kitchens and Home Interiors*.

5 Repurpose your design

Think outside the (dining) box. Instead of just adding bows around chairs, *Driss* suggests tying wreaths around the chair backs for depth. If you have extra ornaments from your Christmas tree, try hanging them from your chandelier. *McNew* has even been known to hang a feather box from her chandelier.

6 Get comfy

McNew suggests replacing your hard-backed chairs with *Dorson's* chairs. They can be slipcovered or embellished with easy decorations, such as hanging a table runner over the back of the chair to add drama, color or texture," she says.



Photo courtesy of NY Loft LLC

Salute the individual

If you put the same *kosher* at each place setting, make it interesting. "Part of creating a festive atmosphere is being clever about it," Dolly says. He has placed individual boxes of *chicks*, still growing in their pots, at each place setting, along with scissors for everyone. That's one great, low-maintenance way to get your guests to fend for themselves, and it lends an air of frivolity to the setting.

7

8

Celebrate the small things

Look at how you and your family live your daily lives and discover your own unique ways to make the dining room a more interesting place for everyday use.

Make your decorations interactive

Dolly suggests the Ingo Maurer Zettefz chandelier, which includes clips for paper instead of heavy hardware. You can leave a message for your guests, or take snapshots of your friends throughout the night and clip the pictures to the chandelier at the next party for a fun conversation starter. **PH**

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