

NOVEMBER 2009

# House Beautiful

## GREAT HOUSES FOR ENTERTAINING

the **35** best  
**THANK  
YOU**  
notes

how to  
**dress up  
BASIC  
WHITE  
CHINA**





HOW DO YOU LIKE TO  
ENTERTAIN?

## IT'S ALL ABOUT THE KITCHEN

Start by  
imagining a  
cathedral.  
Now add the  
stove of  
your dreams

Interior design by  
FRANK DELLEDONNE

Interview by JAMES SERVIN

Photographs by  
FRANCESCO LAGNESE

In the kitchen of designer Frank DelleDonne's Summit, New Jersey, house, the dining table is surrounded by chairs of different styles: French country, English modern, and 1940s Italian metal. The hood over the Wolf range and the vertical slat cabinets were inspired by a cupboard DelleDonne came across in an antiques store; design by Joan Picone. Walls and trim are Farrow & Ball's New White.







### HOW DO THEY LIKE TO ENTERTAIN?

- Pass hors d'oeuvres so guests will circulate through the house.
- Serve buffet-style, with food that can be eaten in one forkful.
- Mix serving bowls. If they match, it will look like a catering hall.
- Holiday drink: Veuve Clicquot pink Champagne.

**JAMES SERVIN:** I could live in your kitchen.

**FRANK DELLEDONNE:** Well, you're not the first to say that. People like to gather in the kitchen, and they're always telling me they don't want to leave it. It's almost like...I want to say a church. I went for height and drama, but painting it several shades of white makes it open and inviting instead of overpowering.

**Do you worry about staining all that white marble?**

You know, I inherited my grandmother's house in Italy, and she had white marble countertops. They're 500 years old, they're stained, and they're beautiful. If the marble isn't stained, it means you're not really cooking. And I'm a serious cook.

**The dinners you must have!**

I come from a huge Italian family, and they come over all the time for family dinners. Sometimes there are three or four of us cooking in the kitchen. The Wolf range, which was a housewarming gift from my parents, has a hood that's so powerful it can give you a bouffant if you stand under it.

**What do you cook?**

Southern Italian peasant food. Lots of grains, lots of fish, and tons of vegetables.

**I'm intrigued by that unusually tall butcher block.**

I'm six foot two, so 42 inches is the perfect height. It's crazy to have to bend over to chop. I also use it as a serving buffet when I entertain.

**Did you ever cook professionally?**

No, but my first business was a chain of ice cream stores called What's the Scoop. I opened them when I was 19 with my brother and four cousins. The business ended up going bankrupt. My parents let me fail, which is brilliant. When you fail at 19, it definitely shapes you. You become a very shrewd thinker. You think everything through.

**Why don't you have a dining room?**

I completely resisted one. Having grown up in a home where there was an invisible force field around the dining room—it was off-limits, except on special occasions—I vowed never to do a dining room.

**So you always eat in the kitchen?**

I'll also have small dinner parties in the living room, at the round table. The living room is all about entertaining. I have a lot of seating, but there's plenty of room to move around. And sometimes I use the library as an intimate dining space.



**I can understand why. It's so cozy and inviting with that caramel-toned wood.**

It's European pine—I'm a sucker for pine—in a cognac finish. I love everything about cognac, from the color to drinking it. And the last thing I wanted was one of those testosterone-mahogany libraries that the husbands of my clients always want. It makes me want to put the husbands in a little box and place the box on a shelf until the end of the project.

**English Tudor cottages were your inspiration when you designed the house. What appeals to you about the style?**

It's so warm and welcoming. But I'd say the decorating is more California meets Italy and France—relaxed, but with an underlying formality. Plus a little *oomph*.

**Including in your bathroom. That tub!**

I was inspired by a tub at the Excelsior hotel in Rome, which had radius corners. I love the idea of a soaking tub, and I really use mine. It's a very calming and peaceful bathroom, but by no means flat and ordinary.

**I'd say the same for your bedroom.**

I wanted it to be consistent with the tone and flavor of the rest of the house, but more serene. My starting point was the antique mirrors on the built-ins. They're like the ones I've seen at Versailles, and in so many homes in Europe. They add a dreamy effect, a mystery.

**Those gray walls are surprisingly beautiful.**

Gray is so misunderstood. Most people associate it with '80s prom dresses and the wardrobe from *Dynasty*. It can be a very hard, cold color, but there are the most amazing tones of gray, especially when it's a washed French gray. This is a strie wallpaper, so it adds not only subtle color but texture as well.

**What was your bedroom like growing up?**

I shared a room with two brothers, and I was in charge of the decor. We had blue taffeta fringe, with swags and jabots on the windows, and French provincial furniture. I think we were all scarred for life.

**Does anyone from your huge Italian family ever stay in the guest room?**

My nieces and nephews sleep there, and they say that oversize ceiling fixture is like the moon. It grounds the space, which feels a bit like a tree house—my house is high on a hill, and the room is on the second floor. When couples spend the night, they say the twin beds remind them of their childhood. It gives them a warm feeling.

**You really know how to live, don't you?**

This is what I tell my clients: a hearse can't pull a U-Haul. You can't take anything with you, so you might as well enjoy.

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO

ABOVE: The pattern of the library's ceiling beams is repeated in the slats of the pine bookshelves and in the backs of the Italian metal chairs. The floor is French limestone. OPPOSITE: A Venetian-inspired hallway arch frames the antique kitchen table and Antonio Murado paintings from Lucas Schoormans Gallery. Upholstered chairs by FD Interiors are in Bergamo's Terrazza. The handcrafted pendants are by O'Lampia Studio. The bowl is from Espasso; Pottery Barn glasses.





The living room is made for entertaining: "I can go from cocktails to dessert in the same space," DellaDonne says. He hosts small dinners at the round table, a reproduction of an 18th-century piece by Barton-Sharp. The camelback sofa, three-piece "sectional," and coffee tables are by FD Interiors. Betsy Eby painting, Willis Lee photographs.



An oversize hanging light by FD Interiors lends balance to the high-ceilinged guest bedroom, painted Ringwold Ground by Farrow & Ball. Botanicals are from Niermann Weeks. OPPOSITE: "The master bath has a hotel-like quality to it, in the best possible way," DelleDonne says. BainUltra tub; Jado faucets; Cesame Belle Epoque console sink.





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FRANK DELLEDONNE

Antiqued mirrors on the built-in closets add “a little bit of smokiness and mystery” to the master bedroom. DelleDonne designed the headboard and covered it in Royal Suede by Edelman Leather. Sferra bedding; Ralph Lauren blanket. Painting by Erin Parish. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

