

Entertaining

LIBBY MOFFET



Raising THE BAR

Homes are stepping up to cater to the ongoing cocktail trend that began during the pandemic

From custom-made drink trolleys to dedicated rooms featuring sultry lighting and colourful stone surfaces, home bars are adding a new splash of glamour to Australian residences.

Leading interior designers report that demand for bar spaces has continued to rise since the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020-21 put the spotlight on home entertaining.

"We all became specialised bartenders over Covid, brushing up our cocktail-making skills in an attempt to differentiate Friday and Saturday nights from the humdrum of the work-from-home [WFH] week," says interior designer Yasmine Ghoniem, director of YSG Studio.

"Lockdowns are well and truly over, but the habit of making a cocktail is here to stay."

Justine Hugh-Jones, principal of residential design practice Hugh-Jones Mackintosh, agrees.

"Everyone's asking for home bars," Hugh-Jones says. "Particularly with WFH, people want to delineate their home space – and what's better than a sundowner or cocktail at the end of the day to say work's over?"

Interior designer Greg Natale says while home bars have always been popular in his eponymous design studio's large-scale projects, he's noted a "distinct increase" in requests across all clients.

"A beautifully designed home bar or cellar isn't just functional, it's a statement piece that enhances the home's value and atmosphere and the owner's lifestyle," Natale says.



Natale says his practice often integrates bars into walls, incorporating 4-5m of joinery that blends with surrounding architecture, or creates dedicated bar rooms with features such as central islands and customised cabinetry.

While the aesthetics can often lean towards a "moody, masculine vibe" with rich dark materials, that's not always the case, says Natale,

whose creations include an impressively large bar featuring white stone and furniture in a home in Sydney's Neutral Bay.

YSG's Ghoniem says her studio has incorporated bars in dining rooms and kitchens using feature stone and integrated downlights on shelving to "really show off the bottled merch".

Regardless of its location, Ghoniem says it's

Home bars can feature luxurious stonework, with innovative lighting and decorative flourishes that help the mood



important that a bar's design is a conversation starter, pointing to a favourite "bar on wheels" she designed for a penthouse project.

Crafted by Maiden, the eye-catching trolley features a blue granite drink preparation surface that complements the apartment's kitchen benchtop, as well as an integrated lamp that can be switched on at night when the party spills out to the balcony.

Hugh-Jones says she often designs bar zones within kitchen and dining areas, but in a recent project in Sydney's Mosman her firm created a

dedicated cellar room off the living area. Featuring black steel framed glass doors, the room includes a high table as well as relaxed lower seating.

If space is an issue, the designer recommends incorporating a beautiful drinks trolley into the styling of a room.

"A trolley says 'come sit down and have a conversation, just relax,'" she says.

Bars can also be a "really sexy" addition where homeowners can indulge in more daring finishes such as jewel-coloured stone, according to Hugh-

Jones, who created a feature wall of onyx for a bar in a San Francisco residence recently.

When it comes to the practicalities of creating a great bar, the designer believes seating is key.

"You need to have good seating next to a bar so you can connect to the person making the drink," she says.

Ghoniem recommends using a stone surface such as granite, which is less absorbent than marble, in case of spills.

"You also need drawers to store cocktail-making utensils that you don't want on show. An

integrated bar fridge located under the counter is a plus too, so mixers are at the ready when guests arrive," she says.

Natale points to the need for custom cabinetry and shelving to keep bottles and glassware organised, and says the right lighting can make a bar space more intimate.

"Dimmable sconces, LED strip lighting, statement pendants and integrated cabinetry lighting are strategic ways to light up your bar," he says. "We often bring in a lighting designer to help nail it."