

Echoing colors of a home's kitchen and entertainment areas in an adjoining wet bar is a subtle way to bring the secondary refreshment area out of the familiar trap of neglect and disuse. *Photo courtesy U-Line.*

Getting

Out from the Shadows



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take turns making and serving them.”

A popular amenity listed by builders, wet bars often have a stuffy reputation, suffering limited usage because they hide behind paneled cabinetry in traditional offices or serve as decorative waystations between living rooms and kitchens. Even a large, showy set-up placed in a basement game room may be underutilized, but designers say a few quick strategies can restyle it as a functional, fashionable hub that puts the finishing touch on your social gatherings.

By nature, Hobbs says, a wet bar should be self-contained with adequate storage, plumbing and refrigeration capabilities. “It should all be right there,” she notes. “This may sound like

common sense, but the must-haves for a wet bar include a sink, refrigeration (even a small mini-refrigerator) and a wine cooler — preferably one that stores red and white wines at different temperatures.”

As a “transitional area,” usually situated between a kitchen and living room or overlooking a dining area, a wet bar needs to be integrated into the primary entertainment zone, Hobbs says. “Otherwise, you just have this neglected space,” she explains.

Bar seating is an attractive possibility that creates a conversation area, extending a subtle invitation to linger: “Most wet bars I see don’t have seating, but it’s a nice touch if you want to put some barstools there,” Hobbs adds. “Just remember, it’s not a restaurant bar, so two to three stools are plenty. People can park there while you’re mixing their drinks, but that’s not going to be their seat for the night.”

If you have a bar that’s situated on the outskirts of another room, Hobbs says furnishing the space with glassware selections that coordinate with primary color schemes is a “fun and festive” way to tie the two spaces together, and opaque glasses are another option she favors.

Presentation counts and Hobbs says stocking a bar with glasses of various sizes and shapes adds visual interest, while guests appreciate having their specialty drinks served in the appropriate glassware.

Ken Upton of Ken’s Creative Kitchen in Annapolis agrees that the proper drink served in the proper glass can make or break

the mood. “I would rather drink cheap wine in a beautiful glass than fine champagne out of a paper cup,” he says. To ensure you’re prepared, Upton recommends stocking your bar with a rocks glass, a classic V-bow martini glass (without decorative accents), a shot glass, wine glasses and beer glasses. When visitors arrive, cut limes and lemons in generous quarters and put them in attractive bowls. “For an extra nice touch,” he adds, “put out a few starched linen napkins on your bar and hand one to your guest with the drink.”

Upton also suggests making a statement with your bar display. He regularly polishes and sets out a sterling shot glass, bar spoon and shaker, and says that although the ornaments are too pretty to use, they instantly make the wet bar look “ready for business.” Hobbs advises against placing liquor or wine bottles directly on a bar. “I prefer crystal decanters filled with your favorite wine or spirit placed on a beautiful, decorative tray,” she explains.

Hobbs notes that whimsical drink accessories are meant to be seen. “Decorate with your accessories,” she advises. “I love incorporating beautiful things when entertaining. Items ranging from square cotton cocktail napkins with a handmade stitch to decorative glasses make a difference.”

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EXPERT OPINION

With home staging professional Cathy Hobbs

Hobbs offers the following suggestions for revving up a wet bar:

Create an atmosphere. If you want guests to actually sit at a wet bar, make it fun. Have barstools coordinate with the color and feel of a room, and choose an interesting design for the stools and bar.

Pre-mix in preparation for large parties. Even experienced caterers use this trick. Drinks such as cosmopolitans, mojitos and sangria can all be made in advance.

Cover up and light from above. Hobbs prefers to hide liquor and wine bottles behind cabinets with frosted glass inserts and then light the interiors of the cabinets from above. The result is soft and adds a decorative element.

Keep all your items easily accessible. From glassware to bar tools, they should be within reach for easy party and drink preparation.