

# club anthems, house hits

Inspired by the ambience of exclusive private clubs, designers are now creating intimate, atmospheric dining spaces for the home, says Nicole Swengley.



This private dining room in Belgravia by Taylor Howes was designed around the homeowner's wine collection.

It's hard to think of a more exclusive inner sanctum than the private dining room of a members-only club. The best offer a level of physical and mental cossetting akin to the enhanced sense of well-being that only the finest health spas can induce. No wonder, then, that creating a clubby-style dining ambience in one's own home is becoming an increasingly popular option.

"Homeowners have found how difficult it is to create an atmospheric space within an open-plan living area, which is why separate dining rooms have come back into fashion," says Karen Howes, director of Chelsea-based interior design company Taylor Howes. "But people don't want their eating area to resemble a chic restaurant. They want to create that very exclusive, comfortable, clubby feel within their homes."

"Dining rooms need to work as proper entertaining spaces," says interior designer Suzy Hoodless, who recently created a "formal but fun" family dining room in west London for a City executive who often entertains corporate clients at home. "It's all about making guests feel special, and the clubby look is perceived to be warmer and more intimate. People don't like stuffiness, they want intimacy and comfort."

Anyone in search of inspiration need only visit the cream of London's private clubs – Annabel's or Mark's Club, for example – or enjoy a cheffy meal in one of the seven private dining rooms at Mosimann's Club. Here members and their guests enjoy the high level of glamorous cossetting associated with a less frenetic era than our own. The amiably comfortable private dining room at Shoreditch House, meanwhile, has the whiff of an old-world gentlemen's club, and the wood-paneled private dining room at Dean Street Townhouse in Soho wouldn't have looked out of place in the upper echelons of 19th-century society. The glamorous private dining rooms of some renowned hotels and restaurants also provide good research – the opulent Pomerol room at Marcus Wareing at The Berkeley, the art deco-inspired private room at Scott's restaurant in Mayfair and the elegant private dining room at Tom's Kitchen in Chelsea.

Designer Martin Brudnizki, whose interiors for The Club at The Ivy have won many plaudits, believes that a modern interpretation of this bygone look has huge appeal. "The clubby look is popular because most contemporary homeowners didn't grow up in the heyday of gentlemen's clubs," he says. "People love the 1930s and 1940s style of furniture because it looks fresh to their eyes." He believes it's essential, however, to avoid pastiche by offering a contemporary take on the style. "The Ivy has a timber-paneled private dining room but the way the panelling has been designed and installed gives it a much cleaner look than in former days," he says.

Brudnizki, whose portfolio includes Scott's and the bar and restaurant at Dean Street Townhouse, has also designed clubby dining rooms for residential properties. Yet when clients ask him to create a replica interior of a private members' club within a domestic environment he prefers to modify their expectations. "What's right for a public space, however exclusive, isn't going to look right in the dining room of a domestic home," he says. "You want to feel enveloped by the space but the interior isn't the main event. It should be a backdrop to the event and one that heightens the experience of dining there."

He cites the dining room he is currently creating for a client who lives in a 1930s country house in Germany. "It has a clubby feel, but it doesn't feel 'stuffy' because I've created contrasts of light and shade using a variety of surfaces and finishes," he says. "Etched plaster panels



reading material. At a period house in Chelsea he sank a run of Georgian-style walnut bookcases with creamy sycamore interiors into the walls of the dining room, using them to display crystalware (pictured left). "The leaves that expand the dining table are also stored in the bookcase bases to avoid any damage by moving them too far from the table," he says. Like Brudnicki, he was keen to give the room a more contemporary feel. "There are similar bookcases in the Sir John Soane museum but 'floating' them off the floor is my way of bringing them up to date," he says.

"To make it more like a gentlemen's dining club, I designed a series of 'club' chairs which look more relaxed and less formal than high-backed seats," adds Gosling. "My client had the idea of giving the room an Italian feel, so we covered the walls in Venetian plaster and wrapped one side of the room with antique *egnomis* panels to reflect the light and make the space look bigger."

Gosling drew on personal experience to give the room a clubby feel. "I've been a member of The Athenaeum in Pall Mall for many years and am on the Arts Committee which deals with the aesthetic fabric of the interior, so I'm able to cross-pollinate elements of running a real club with the creation of domestic dining rooms. Each now mirrors the other," he says.

As the owner of a London boutique hotel-cum-private members' club, interior designer Paul Davies is well placed to observe this crossover. At a Knightsbridge penthouse, for example, he used lots of dark glass, chrome, mirrors, leather and Murano glass chandeliers, just as he has done at his nearby hotel, No 11 London. He says his clients – mainly 40-something, international high-flyers living in more than one place – "want a seamless transition when entertaining at and away from the home". This means "installing the facilities you'd have in a club, such as a bar, special lighting and a sound system, within the home".

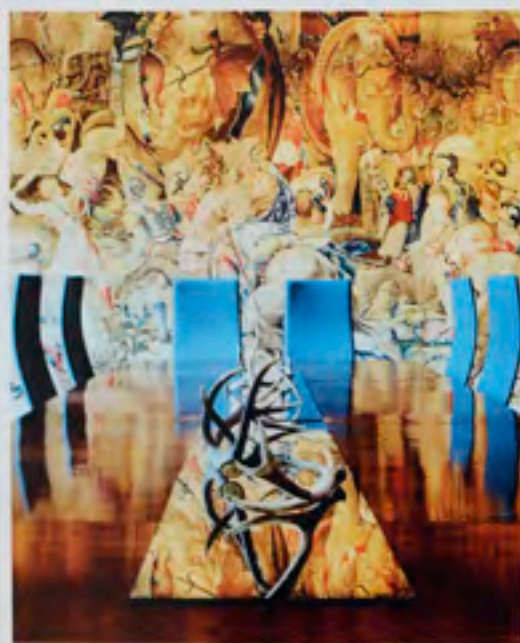
Translating the clubby look for a contemporary home environment is, says designer Mark Humphrey, "all about

originality, craftsmanship and the use of luxurious materials". Humphrey created the interior of Mayfair members' club *Jalouse*, which won Best New Club 2009 in The London Club and Bar Awards. "The same people who go to *Jalouse* want to have a bespoke dining room with that very specific look at home," he observes. "I like mixing precious skins, such as ostrich or crocodile, with onyx, ebony, titanium and carbon fibre. I use a lot of sculptural pieces that incorporate illumination and a motorised element; for example, a table that turns into a cocktail bar at the flick of a switch."

And while the interior of *Jalouse* is more high-tech, 21st-century nightclub than low-key, 19th-century gentlemen's club, it seems the club/home crossover endures. One of Taylor Howes' clients requested a dance floor alongside their contemporary, clubby-style dining room at a house in Kensington. A chandelier by Kevin Reilly – with flickering candles powered by internal light bulbs – hangs above a wenge table in the dining area. To one side is a bar and open wine store, to the other is the stone-floored dance area with a concealed, iPod-controlled sound system. It marries the best of both worlds: post-prandial comforts, pitch-perfect mood lighting, a sexy dancefloor – and the comfort of home. ✦

#### JOIN THE CLUB

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## "Dining rooms are generally used more at night, so you can make the ambience very dramatic."

wine cellar is lit with colour-changing fibre optics while black damask wallpaper creates a dramatic backdrop for quirky artworks and a large wall mirror. Meanwhile, a bespoke sideboard with purple lacquered top and wenge base contains baize-lined drawers for cutlery and cupboards for storing stemware.

In the centre of the space is a contemporary, eight-seater dining table with a distressed oak top and bronze frame and base. "It looks slightly rustic, as if hammered out of old oak barrels, and very much fits with the feeling of being in a cellar," says Howes. The dining room, which is in the basement of the house, lacks any natural light. Yet Howes believes this is an advantage. "You don't need natural light for evening use and it's an opportunity to create a really moody space," she says.

"Dining rooms are generally used more at night than in the day, so you can make the ambience very dramatic," agrees interior designer Joanna Wood. "Personally, I like dark dining rooms because they feel more intimate, yet they still offer the opportunity to install extravagant and beautiful light fittings. Whether this is a Venetian crystal chandelier or a contemporary Swarovski design, a spectacular light really adds to the drama."

Wood attributes the current demand for clubby dining rooms to "a more conservative mood" and a psychological "return to traditional values". Still, this doesn't mean it's necessarily all about wood panelling and leather upholstery. "Recently, some American clients wanted a deeply clubby look for the dining room of their Belgravia apartment, so we lacquered the walls in a deep red and decorated the room with antiques and Persian rugs. Installing leather-trimmed bookcases around the fireplace makes the room feel very cosy and gives the space a dual purpose."

Designer Tim Gosling similarly believes the dining room-cum-library works well. And not do bookcases need to contain

Top: Tim Gosling's take on private dining in Chelsea, London. Above left: a wall tapestry is reflected on the table in a dramatic design by Suzy Hoodless.

contrast with bronze lacquer on the walls, while the oak floor has a limestone border and skirting. A 1950s Venetian Murano glass chandelier hangs above the table which is surrounded by a dozen original 1930s chairs that we reupholstered. The room looks elegant because it fits seamlessly with the rest of the house."

The driving force behind the club-style dining room often stems from a desire to share a passion for design and art as well as fine dining with friends. The owner of a Belgravia house, for example, asked Taylor Howes to create a dining room around his extensive wine collection (pictured on opening pages). The wine, in a temperature-controlled zone, is on view behind a bespoke glass screen, with a slate floor uniting the cellar and dining area. "Atmosphere is crucial," says Howes. So the