



Happy hour

Dinner guests line up three-deep in the bar just off the foyer of a stately Georgian home, creating a convivial mood that rivals even the most popular watering holes in town

BY REBECCA POWERS | PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOE VAUGHN

Politicians work the room. Designers make rooms that work.

But when interior designer Mark Davis decided to convert a tiny main-floor room into a cocktail bar, his decor-savvy friends figured the idea had about as much winning potential as a dark-horse candidate.

His concept was this: Turn a 10-by-11 room just off the foyer (a place where homeowners typically put an office or paneled library) into his own Leopard Lounge — an entertaining space reminiscent of the famous bar of the same name at the Chesterfield Hotel in Palm Beach, Fla. — which explains the leopard-print patterned carpet on the floor. When the remodel was done, the room proved to be as appealing as vodka and lime.

Now, cocktails before dinner at Davis' 3,500-square-foot Grosse Pointe Park Georgian home finds guests queued three-deep at the bar. "If we're having 20 people for dinner, they come in here," Davis says. "We try to get them into the living room, but they stay here."

The room's recipe for success is one part intimate dimensions, one part sophisticated style and one part gregarious host with a dash of lighthearted gossip. The main ingredient is a room that hugs the guests, a space so small that conversation is automatic, the same way company works in a kitchen as guests lean into a comfortable place against a counter.

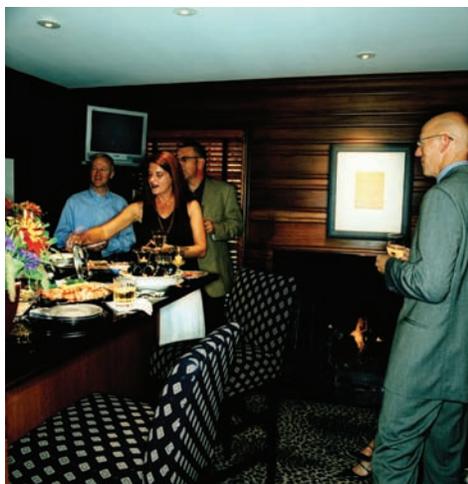
Davis, a partner in the Ferndale design firm of Teich Davis Interiors, didn't want to put his ice bucket and tongs in the kitchen when he entertained, and he certainly didn't want to tend bar in the basement. "I hate going to someone's home and being sent to the basement," Davis says. "I hated it when I was a kid."

His Leopard Lounge certainly has none of the usual basement-bar accoutrements. There are no Tiffany-style lamps and no beer-label mirrors. Behind his bar, hardbound



PARTY ANIMAL: Lively leopard-print carpet by Langhorn sets a light mood in this cherry wood-paneled Grosse Pointe Park bar that has become a favorite of regular dinner guests ready to unwind from workweek pressures. Decor in the tiny but sophisticated room rejects the usual basement-bar clichés of faux Tiffany lamps and beer-logo mirrors. A naturally sociable host, Mark Davis (above) mixes martinis behind his granite-top bar where ample seafood hors d'oeuvres are compliments of Tom's Oyster Bar in Grosse Pointe Park.

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books mix with old-fashioned glasses on the shelves. Bookends are metal whippets, like Davis’ dogs, Ricki and Fred. In other regards, however, Davis does stick to bar basics. The television is wall-mounted and the drinks are classic. “People drink pretty normal stuff — whiskey and water, Scotch and soda, occasionally a martini (vodka),” he says. “I have only two friends who drink gin anymore. And notice there’s no blender.

“We never charge. All our drinks are free.” And when the drinks are gratis and the guests are shoulder-to-shoulder, light banter flows easily. Someone comments that Davis’ double-breasted navy blazer makes him look like the social director on *The Love Boat* and that starts a soap-opera-style discussion about 1970s and ’80s sitcom characters. “Who was that little girl on *The Love Boat*?” someone asks. No one can recall and lighthearted chat skips along from *Sex in the City* to the merits of film director Stanley Kubrick, then on to swimming-pool shapes, automatic doggie doors and olives.

“I don’t like olives,” someone says.

“You like olive oil, don’t you?” another counters.

One guest, who’s been silently going through the alphabet in a determined effort to remember the name of *The Love Boat* girl, comes up triumphant. “Vicki,” he announces.

Then someone else mentions classic bar food and the group wonders about those pickled eggs you see occasionally and says, “You wonder, how old are they?”

The food on Davis’ black-granite bar is courtesy of Tom’s Oyster Bar in Grosse Pointe Park — boiled shrimp, steamed mussels and smoked salmon with capers and red onion. “Have you noticed how much Grosse Pointers like salmon?” Davis says. And the conversation turns to the age-old eastside-westside debate. Someone mentions kelly-green Bermudas. And, as the sun sets and dinner begins to look as though it will be fashionably late, the conversation continues.



ON THE HOUSE: Barstools (above and opposite) upholstered in a diamond-pattern fabric by Kravet and a pair of smaller-scale black leather chairs (opposite) by Old Hickory Tannery make for comfortable visiting beside a fireplace with an Italian-made Curvet glass screen. At left: Hospitality includes steamed mussels with garlic, butter, white wine and shallots; shrimp boiled with Old Bay seasoning, beer and lemons; smoked salmon with capers and red onions; all from Tom’s Oyster Bar, Grosse Pointe Park.

