



HOUSE PARTY

Gather friends, buckets of booze and an extraordinary country house and have yourself one helluva good time. *CAROLINE PHILLIPS* profiles five of the best places in which to let your coiffed hair down



DESIGNER DREAM

1 BOHÈME, Somerset

This is a cool, modern house in which to bring together all generations of your family for a weekend shindig. Party central is near Stawley, Somerset. It's a converted 16th-century dairy farm-turned-cider press that is now glossy-interiors-mag-feature-meets-heaven. There's a 25-metre living/dining/playing space, another barn-turned-games room with a roaring fire in a monumental contemporary fireplace, acres of bleached wood floors and under-floor heating. Plus, there's an indoor swimming pool (steaming at 86 degrees) with picture windows overlooking ooh-ah views and fields of sheep.

Want a spa party? My Personal Sanctuary (MPS) will arrive with their fluffy towels and heated treatment beds. If you haven't come across MPS, you don't know what you're missing. They send tip-top mobile therapists to offer luxurious spa packages to the nation, in exclusive rental and private properties. Massages, facials, toe pampering...

If you fancy a dinner party with a twist, Sam Rom (erstwhile River Cottage head chef) will come from an estate in Devon to cook supper. (He rears his own meat there and also uses game from the land.) He'll serve up treats like wild boar with smoked apple sauce and slow-cooked beef cheeks.

Over the weekend, you can also enjoy an old-fashioned party: films projected county-sized onto a wall, games on a snooker table that might see Grandpa knocking balls with

grandchildren, ping pong, and endless rounds of Scrabble. All followed by bracing rambles with dogs (yes, they're invited). After all, Bohème is set in a 100-acre estate – offering walks on rolling hills midst gambolling lambs, and ground that is carpeted with apples.

Finally, there's the sleepover party. There are ten bedrooms, including the sought-after 'love nest' up a hidden staircase. At night you will sleep contentedly in the comfiest beds in a place quiet enough to hear quarter of a pin drop.

BOOK IT: Sleeps 20. From £3,960 for four nights. uniquehomestays.com



2 CASTLE OF PARK Glenluce, Dumfries and Galloway

Perfect for a small family party. This is a true Scottish tower house, built in 1590 and improved in the 18th century. It has big squishy sofas to fall into with a glass of red wine and a dining room fit for a Jacobean laird. You can snuggle in front of a wood-burning stove over a board game. All the party games you'll play are ones that



INTIMATE FAMILY GET-TOGETHER

Aunt Mildred would approve of: there's no television and no WiFi here. From the hall the laird's private stairs lead to bedrooms, each with its own privy – perfect for hide and seek. You need to select your guests carefully though – there are more cattle than humans nearby. But Castle of Park will give you a different perspective on life. Even the wide main stair, in its own tower, has a little room at the top – the cap house – from which you can glimpse the sea.

BOOK IT: Sleeps seven. Four nights from £372. landmarktrust.org.uk



3 SOMERLEYTON HALL, *Suffolk*

Want to step back in time? Then have a shindig at Somerleyton Hall, one of Britain's best-preserved stately homes and gardens. This historic pile is set in a gawp-worthy, 5,000-acre Suffolk estate. If you throw a big event or wedding, there's room to sleep up to 24 guests and you can seat 80 guests in its winter garden on a long banqueting table without the need for a marquee, and then dance till dawn in the ballroom. On offer is everything from gourmet banquets to afternoon tea, in surroundings ranging from the formal dining room to a folly overlooking a lake. They'll also organise waterskiing and sailing – or even floristry or butchery with their gardeners and chefs. But best of all is being able to completely relax and enjoy the wonderful charm of the house and its gardens. And when the party's over, you can get lost – after all, Somerleyton Hall is home to one of the finest yew hedge mazes in Britain.

BOOK IT: Sleeps 24. Two nights from £15,000, including dinners and breakfasts. somerleyton.co.uk



4 FLORIN, *Ceredigion, Wales*

Want a party somewhere Granny would love? 'Stylishly decadent,' she'll call it. Think Victorian house and dramatic, trad living spaces with flouncy curtains and roaring fires. Seven spacious bedrooms – and a four-poster master suite bedroom. Plus, a library with a pool table. Florin is a luxury holiday house set in five acres of magical *Alice in Wonderland*-style gardens – with ornate fountains, secret gardens and magical pathways entwined with roses, not forgetting the treehouse. Head with marshmallows and toasting fork to the garden house for an al fresco party. (There's a woodburner, pizza oven, stone barbecue, wine cooler, hanging chair, sofa and rustic benches...) Or cosy up in front of a log fire with guests and a hot toddy following a feast (rack of Welsh lamb, naturally) in the dining room during winter months. The conservatory and dining room seat 50. What's not to like?

BOOK IT: Sleeps 14. Four nights from £1,665 for four nights based on eight people staying. uniquehomestays.com



5 HEDSOR HOUSE, *Buckinghamshire*

Fancy going to the country but can't be bothered? If you want a knees-up in a Georgian mansion just 45 minutes from London yet nestled in 100 acres of green Buckinghamshire parkland, Hedsor House is just the ticket. As you vroom down its long, winding driveway – past Highland cattle and sweeping fields – you'll think you're in the most rural of English country estates. It's great for elegant weddings, spectacular parties and corporate away days. (It was also Nicole Kidman's home in *The Golden Compass*.) You'll enjoy cosmopolitans on the lawn, canapés in the Centre Hall and a scrummy spread in the ballroom with its 150-year-old panelling. And perhaps clay pigeon shooting, archery or quad biking too. When the party's over, just clamber up the Grand Staircase and retire to one of 11 beautiful bedrooms (with WiFi and luxurious new decoration and furnishings), kick off your shoes and dive into a four-poster. Little wonder it's known as the partygoers' playground.

BOOK IT: Sleeps 22. From £3,450 +VAT per night, house hire only. hedsor.com

