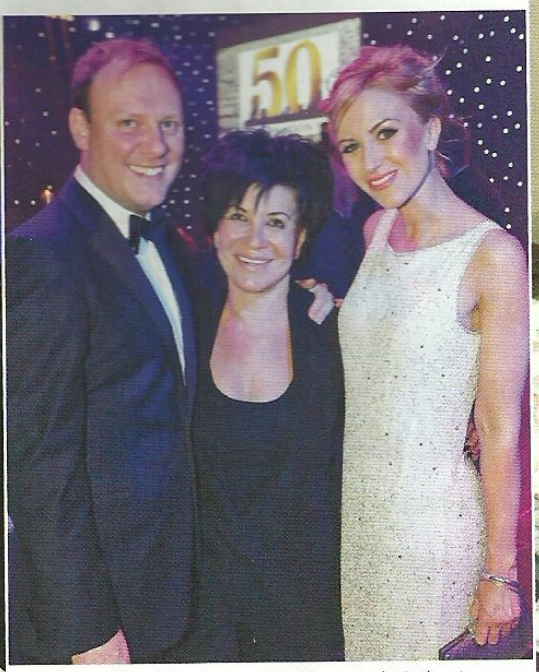
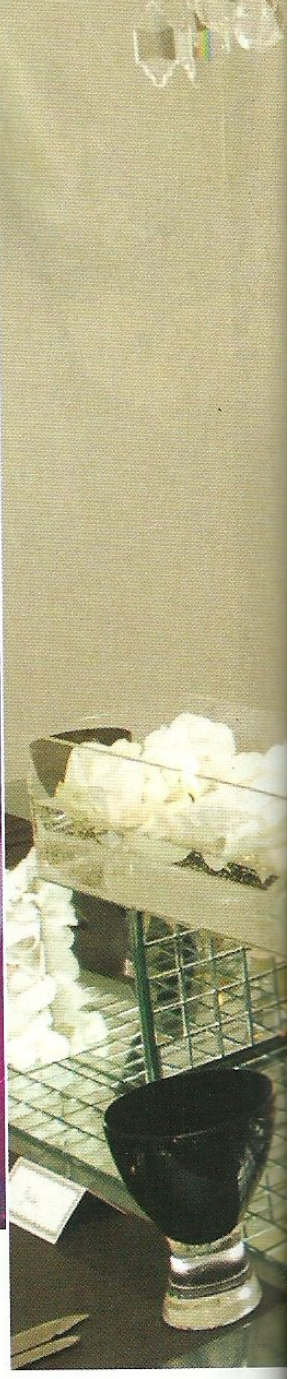
Be the hostess *with the* mostess

Liz Taylor has planned thousands of events from private parties to large celebrity bashes. Here, the Hale Barns expert gives you seven tips to make sure your parties always go with a swing

Right: Liz with television presenter Ruth Langsford at the 50th birthday party of her husband, Eamonn Holmes
Below: Liz with Alan Halsall from Coronation Street and his wife, former Wild at Heart actress Lucy-Jo Hudson





Above: Liz with Antony Cotton and Katherine Kelly from Coronation Street. Liz was the official events organiser for the soap's 50th anniversary
Right: Liz Taylor, ready for her next dinner party, in her dining room

Arranging a party can be a stressful business. There is an awful lot think about with food and drink to prepare, the décor to get right and a guest list to finalise. The 'jobs to do' list can seem endless.

But Liz Taylor has it down to a tee. She has arranged thousands of events, from intimate affairs to grand occasions. And this year marks her 25th anniversary as a managing director of event organisers, Taylor Lynn Corporation.

The award-winning planner has arranged celebrations for big names from business, sport and television, including Manchester United's Gary Neville, television presenters Eamonn Holmes and Ruth Langsford, and Coronation Street favourites Antony Cotton, Simon Gregson, Alan Halsall and Jennie McAlpine.

So whether you want to host a housewarming party to show off your new home or renovation project to friends, to meet your new neighbours or simply to relax and enjoy your home with family, Liz's expert guide will help you create the perfect event.

Guests

Keep your guest list manageable and make sure the people you are inviting have enough in common to be able to mingle and chat comfortably. 'A guest list of around 15 people is ideal for a cocktail style party, but this will also depend on the size of your home and format of the night,' said Liz. 'But if you want to serve a sit-down meal, go for fewer people and choose depending on how many you can seat and cater for.

'Give everyone a couple of weeks notice. You can't beat a printed invitation, I think, and include an RSVP contact and start/end times, so everyone will know what to expect. Also let them know if you are providing food.'

Preparation

Even if you just moved in, you should clean and scrub the house from top to bottom. Make sure the bathrooms are well stocked with supplies, vacuum throughout and buy some gorgeous scented candles to light on the night.

For al fresco parties, scrub decks, mow lawns, jet clean patios and ensure all your pots and flower beds are in great shape, perhaps buying or hiring in

some new planted pots for that extra special touch.

'It's all in the detail,' Liz said. 'Clean mirrors, doorknobs and your front steps and before guests arrive move your car into the garage to give everyone lots of parking space. I sometimes add colorful flowers in pots near the front door or for an evening event, tea lights in storm jars along the driveway or inexpensive lanterns add a real sense of arrival.'

Party style

If the party is to be hosted inside the most elegant atmospheres can be created with dimmed lighting and scented candles. Liz suggested the Jo Malone range. 'It will cost a little more but burn for hours and smell wonderful.

'The purpose of a housewarming party is to show off your new house,' she added. 'I have found that simple stylish decorations will work best. Consider table centrepieces and flowers for added colour and warmth and be sure to dress dark areas in your hallway, such as under the stairs, with an array of beautiful candles or lights to welcome guests.'

If the party will mainly be outside, Liz uses chunky candles in storm jars along the patio, hires patio heaters or chimineas for warmth and drapes twinkling lights in trees or uses garden lighting to set the mood.

Changing weather conditions must always be taken into consideration with an outdoor party - have an indoor contingency plan for guests should the heavens open - think gazebos for the patio and, for larger events, a marquee or other similar structure is a must. →

Warm, rich colours could be the perfect addition for a special Valentine's Day meal

Above: Splash out on some live entertainment if your budget will allow

Above: Marquee and outdoor events are also becoming increasingly popular
Right: Flowers can add colour and warmth and use candles or lights to dress dark areas such as under the stairs

Wow

'Whatever type of party you go for, I always advise on choosing one key thing which will give your event the wow factor - whether this is placing hundreds of tea lights around the garden, using stunning table decorations or a surprise entertainer to amaze guests.' Liz said. 'I think it's important to find something which will make your night memorable.'

Catering

Catering will depend largely on your budget, time and culinary ability. Try to prepare the food yourself if you can on the day of the party - light snacks, buffet and finger food are usually best and easiest to serve.

Liz said: 'If you can't face the mess or haven't found the kitchen utensils yet, just bring in the caterers! Be sure the finger foods are replenished throughout the party and try to personally serve some of the food - even if you didn't make it yourself.'

Keeping drinks simple is Liz's advice - serve a premium bottled beer, wine or Champagne and always keep mineral water or soft drinks handy and in stock for people who do not drink alcohol, or are driving.

Keep the party going

'If your budget allows, splash out on some live entertainment - a contemporary string quartet playing on your lawn or a fabulous firework display to round off the night. Alternatively create a great playlist to set the mood of the party.'

The hosts should greet every guest as they arrive and show them where to put coats. Give them a brief tour of the home (they'll be dying to look around), show them to where the main focus of the party will be held and introduce them to other guests - it will help to break the ice.

As the party goes on, mingle. It's your responsibility as the host to make sure everyone feels welcome and pampered. Move around and ask if your guests need a drink refilled or anything else.

Enjoy

'The key is to have fun,' said Liz. 'If you're having a good time your guests will probably enjoy themselves too. Your housewarming party could be the start of a whole new passion for fabulous entertaining in your new home.' ■

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