

Southern Living®

We're Saying Goodbye To Perfect Parties This Holiday Season—Here's Why

Plus, the entertaining mantras the South's best hostesses swear by.

By [Patricia Shannon](#) | Published on November 25, 2025



Credit: Alison Gootee

We're ready to [welcome the holiday season](#), but this time with a look back at what works—and what we're happy to leave behind. For Southern entertaining experts, one theme reigns, and that's [fussy entertaining is a thing of the past](#).

"I think we have simply relaxed into what hospitality truly means," says Jill Higgins, owner of Thomasville, Georgia, [1861 Distillery](#) and author of [In Good Spirits: The Simple Art of Socializing](#). "Beautiful tables and special details still have their place, but the trend to make everything perfect is passing."

Though we're happy to usher in a new, fuss-free era in entertaining, it might be easier said than done. Lucky for us, Higgins, along with Cassie LaMere, founder and creative director at [Cassie LaMere Events](#), and Bonnie Lloyd, Houston-based entertaining expert and co-founder of [Lloyd Cellars](#) and [Prescription Vineyards](#), are here to lend their expertise so you can embrace the perfectly imperfect [art of entertaining this holiday season](#).

Perfection to Connection

"I think there is a reason people have moved from perfection to connection," says Lloyd.

Rather than focusing on the perfect china, perfectly pressed linens, and a scratch-made menu, Lloyd says it's all about how people feel the minute they walk in the door. "I grew up in Houston, and Southern hospitality has always been about warmth," says the vintner. Evenings spent dancing in the kitchen, when a record is playing, wine is flowing, and glasses are refilled before one even realizes they're running low, are among her favorite entertaining moments. "For us, that's when the magic happens. When it feels easy and real."

Every Detail Tells a Story

"Every element of a gathering tells part of the story," says LaMere.

Though fussy details and overly complicated menus might be falling out of favor, LaMere says an attention to detail never will. From the time of day to where you'll be entertaining, these elements can help define the whole experience. "I always suggest hosts embrace their space rather than trying to reinvent it, and lean into what feels natural," she says. "Maybe your dining table has been lovingly curated over generations, or you prefer to host fireside with guests cozied up in loungewear." No matter the style, allow your event to take a highly personalized stance. You'll be rewarded with a gathering that feels intimate and fosters connection, no matter the size of the guest list.

Setting the Mood

“For me, music is as essential as wine,” says Lloyd.

“[My husband] Rob and I love music, and we love to blend eras too—one minute it’s Fleetwood Mac, the next it’s Maggie Rogers or Leon Bridges,” says Lloyd. “It creates this effortless energy that carries the night.” While music is the star, for the Lloyds, no gathering is complete without an end-of-the-evening toast. “A simple ‘I’m so grateful for this group’ can make everyone pause and smile,” she says. Plus, it’s a great way to subtly cue that the night is winding down.

Keeping It Simple

“The beauty of entertaining in a simpler way is that any time of day works—from after-work drinks to inviting friends back for dessert after dinner out,” says Higgins.

Not to mention, it can simply make the guest list—no matter the size—feel more manageable. While Higgins shares 21 reasons to gather in her book, with each built around a signature cocktail and food menu item, creating a quick timeline to follow can help simplify your hosting duties in a similar way.

The Gift of Home

“Hosting is an opportunity to create a moment in time that is designed just for your people,” says LaMere.

While reserving a room at your favorite restaurant or simply meeting for drinks can provide a wonderful environment for gathering, there’s something about entertaining in your own space that somehow feels just a bit more special. “As a result, you create a space where guests feel seen and appreciated.”

Embracing Imperfection

“Something will go sideways—it almost always does! That is usually what people laugh about and remember later,” says Higgins.

Higgins says a plastic container mishap that resulted in toxic fumes wafting from the oven has become one of her favorite gatherings, if for no other reason than the raucous laughter that the incident inspired. If your food is late, keep the drinks flowing and remember guests will mirror your energy. “If you are relaxed, they will be too.”

The Joy of Hospitality

“Rather than trying to be the ‘hostess with the mostess,’ we’re gathering in ways that are more honest and relaxed,” says LaMere.

Let go of orchestrating a perfectly executed entertaining performance, says LaMere, and instead focus on creating an environment that immediately puts guests at ease. “People have embraced being a little messy, and what we honor now is showing up as yourself, whatever that looks like and means to you on any given day.” Mismatched china, family recipes, and serving up your unique personal style to create a joyful experience are all on the menu for entertaining in 2025.