


What to Gift the Host with the Most



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With the holiday party circuit in full swing, many of us find ourselves facing the question of the hostess gift. Wine is always nice, and flowers too (just make sure to gift them in a vessel so your host doesn't have to scramble for one). Scented candles are another easy go-to, but but unless you know your hosts parfum préféré such a token can really fall short. So what do you give the host with the most? For inspiration, we checked in with a few of our favorite tastemakers to see what tokens have delighted them the most over the years. (*A hint: It really is the thought that counts.*) Happy gifting!

Olivia Chantecaille, creative director, Chantecaille

“The best hostess gift I’ve ever received was a painting from my friend the artist Will Cotton. I was hosting a dinner party at my home, and when I served dessert, Will surprised me with a small painting of a cupcake—he’s known for his paintings of confections and pastries. It was so thoughtful. I was incredibly touched. Like Will, I love art and pastries, and that painting is something that will always be very special to me. When my daughter was born, we decided to hang it in her room because it’s so sweet and festive. Every time I see it, I think of Will, that wonderful party, and his thoughtful gesture.”



Stephanie Fishwick, Stephanie Fishwick Calligraphy & Illustration

“The most thoughtful hostess gift I’ve ever received was a copy of *The David Hicks Book of Flower Arranging*, a first edition. My husband and I were hosting a dinner party, and the gift was from my friend Cate West Zahl, who is a painter here in Charlottesville. Cate also brought a pair of rad vintage Levi’s in my size, a pack of American Spirits, and a delicate glass pot de crème caramel. You really can’t beat that.

“I’ve never asked Cate, but after nine years of friendship, I now suspect creative gifts must be her gift. She never comes to our home without a wild handcrafted arrangement from her garden with some bit of seasonally appropriate ribbon or string tied around the glass vase. She has been known to pull over on the way to a dinner and do a little ‘night pruning’ if she sees something fantastic! I even dried one of her arrangements and still have it to this day. Cate gets invited to lots of parties, so I suppose she has perfected the art of giving hostess gifts. Her gifts are great because they show her personality and yet are so considerate of the hostess.”



Carolyn Roehm, Author

“One very special gift from years ago I still remember was a beautiful bottle of Château d’Yquem Sauternes. Never underestimate how wonderful of a gift wine can make, if it’s something remarkable and the perfectly researched pairing for the occasion.

“At this particular party, many years ago when I was living in Europe, I had actually driven across the border from Germany into Illhaeusern, France to pick up a block of foie gras from one of the legendary restaurants there to prepare at home. For what was bound to be the best foie gras in the world, it was made twice as special by my friend who brought a bottle of Château d’Yquem Sauternes to go alongside it. The best food, best wine, and best company is the magical combination for any occasion—it’s always worth going all-out.”



Janice Parker, Janice Parker Landscape Architects

“The holidays at my house are all about gatherings at the table. For me the most meaningful gift is the holiday dinner centerpiece arrangement that I receive each year from my two sons. A tradition that incorporates the ever-evolving expression of their tastes, past selections have ranged from perfectly potted blooming amaryllis bulbs to Williamsburg arrangements.

“I love everything about a Williamsburg arrangement—the American history and cultural references shine through. Floral shops and imported cut flowers were not available in Colonial times! Using magnolia grandiflora leaves, with the shiny, glossy green leaf and the brown velvet undersides, is by itself a study in contrast and textures. The addition of pine, pine cones, and holly boughs add the scent and seasonal reference of winter. The fruit is nestled into this green lush base. Miniature fruits are the nicest: lady apples, green Seckel pears, lemons, limes, and if you are lucky, a magnolia blossom or two. The smoothness of the petals and waxy ivory color is delicious.

“These centerpieces last a very long time. They remind me of the ingenuity, creativity, and courage of the Colonial times—making beauty of what you have, honest and simple. Focused simplicity becomes harder to practice when so much is available to us, but that’s the magic. Whatever their choice, the centerpiece brings cheer and the welcome scents of the holiday into our home throughout the holiday season.”



Jamie Drake, interior designer, co-founder of Drake/Anderson

“I had known artist Françoise Gilot for a few years but had never entertained her at my home. She expressed a desire to see my place, and a date was selected for a drink to be followed by dinner at a nearby restaurant. She arrived and presented me with a simple white box tied with a bright ribbon. Inside was the most charming and beautiful stone bird. It was from her own collection, ancient Egyptian, and to this day it perches on an acrylic plinth on my desk, keeping an eye on me as I sleep.”

Michael Aiduss, interior designer

“My good friend and tailor, Kirk Miller of Millers Oath, is consistently the most thoughtful giver of host gifts. He always manages to source the perfect accessories for the custom suits that I already own. Each shirt, tie, pocket square, or bow tie creates the look for each season and occasion.”

Danielle Rollins, interior designer

“My mother gave me the most thoughtful hostess gift last year before a holiday party to celebrate Christmas in my new home. She had a gingerbread replica done that is absolutely awe-inspiring. Home is the place I love to be the most, and I’m such a homebody at heart. I love being with friends and family more than anything and having a place to build memories in. The gingerbread house my mother gave me served as the centerpiece for holiday dinners, and everyone just loved it.”



Alice Ryan Miller, publicist

“My friend Olivia Joffrey, a Montecito-based illustrator who works in gouache and ink, designed note cards as my hostess gift. In return I gave her an illustrated print of ‘The Sugar Plum Tree,’ the enchanting poem by Eugene Field about a magical candy-bearing tree. The print is affordable at \$25 and makes a nice present for a family with small children. For my other Montecito friends, I sometimes bring the botanical print ‘The Exquisite and Robust Flora of Montecito,’ which is a fitting tribute to my community’s resilience of late. Each one is boxed and wrapped in custom paper; the packaging brings as much joy as the gift itself.”

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CONTRIBUTORS

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