

AD IT YOURSELF



AD IT YOURSELF

29 Bar Cart Ideas That Deserve Three Cheers

A proper home bar setup can elevate your end-of-day happy hour *and* enhance home decor savvy, even in a small space

A space dedicated to serving wine, cocktails, and drinks is a welcome addition in most homes, especially during the holiday hosting season. Luckily, there are lots of bar cart ideas to consider for your own space. There's sure to be something that fits in with your own home design aesthetic, whether it's an antique wood bar cart or a midcentury stunner. And the best part: You don't even need a proper bar cart (though adding one to your furniture wish list is always an option). An acrylic tray positioned atop a bookshelf or bar cabinet, or the top of a side or console table can all fill in as a makeshift but functional and stylish bar cart.

A glassware-and-libations pitstop for a festive soiree only needs a few supplies—many of which you probably already have on hand. Putting a bar cart together doesn't take up hours either. This is an easy DIY afternoon project of curating and styling. "Entertaining is all about the experience," says designer and HomeGoods style expert [Beth Diana Smith](#), who follows a three-step formula when prepping a bar cart: "Set the stage, deliver on drink-ware, and accessorize."

How do you decorate a bar cart at home?

Good designers know that sometimes less is more, and that adage also applies when it comes to home bar ideas and bar cart ideas. "You don't need to fill every inch of a bar cart," says Roxy Owens, founder and designer of [Society Social](#). "You don't need to adopt a minimalist aesthetic, but if too many items are crammed into the space, it can be intimidating for guests to use and it will make your space look cluttered." Malka Helft, principal of [Think Chic Interiors](#) in New York, likes clustering bottles based on the color of alcohol and bottle itself more than the type of alcohol.

You should also take the bar cart design, or surface you're using, into consideration. Are you styling a rattan bar cart for an outdoor bar? If so, shatterproof barware and colorful straws and stirrers may be in order. But if you're creating a vignette on a stately piece of furniture, bar cart styling that includes glass decanters, a statement wine rack, or a collection of stunning coupe glasses could better round out the design.

How should I stock a bar cart?

Focus on the essentials. "Don't feel pressured to stock every last fancy-schmancy liqueur or bitter," Owens says. "All you need are a few quality spirits to make the classics, a [good set of bar tools](#) (lime squeezer, muddler, strainer, and mixing tin are key), and some interesting glassware." Plus, buying less means you can splurge on higher-quality top-shelf spirits. If you have a surplus of wine or liquor, choose the best-looking bottles to display in your home bar and stash the rest out of sight in the pantry.

When it's time to entertain, designer and luxury home decor expert [Kim Seybert](#) says she always has the classic liquors on hand: gin, vodka, tequila, and bourbon. "If I know my guests favor a type of liquor, I make sure to stock it, along with fresh-squeezed juices, soda water, tonic, and freshly cut lemons," she says. However, Seybert urges novice hosts to keep it simple. "Do not overextend yourself," she continues. "Serve one red wine, one white wine, and two mixed drinks. Choose a great [wine glass](#) for red or white, or purchase a versatile double old-fashioned glass for mixed drinks or wine. Use a wine bucket so the bottle can chill without putting it back in the fridge."

Also make sure to have options available for guests who don't imbibe,. For

parties, keep one or two non-alcoholic beverage options chilled. And don't forget about extras that can really make those mocktails pop. "For non-alcoholic drinks, I always include a festive garnish like cranberries, mint sprigs, or a colorful themed straw," Smith continues. "Just because it's non-alcoholic doesn't mean it has to look it."

How can I spice up my bar cart?

Now that you've got your basics covered, it's time for a shot of style. "Color, pattern, and texture all come into play when styling your bar cart," Owens says. "Colorful straws and custom coasters add signature style and function. Cloth cocktail napkins are a small touch that can go a long way."

Vintage bar accessories like shakers, cocktail stirrs, or picks can also be a charming addition as well as conversation pieces. Another way to keep your bar cart looking one-of-a-kind is by stocking it with spirits that come in unique bottles. "Purchasing spirits from a small or local distillery can yield pretty packaging as well as equally delicious and unique spirits," Owens advises.

Coffee-table books are another great addition to this space. You can go with the obvious choice, a collection of cocktail recipes, or pick something a little unexpected like a travel book about New York or Paris.

What goes on top of a bar cart?

It's best to keep heavy and otherwise bulky liquor bottles on the bottom shelf of your bar cart. Save the top for more decorative elements like beautiful barware or a really outstanding bottle or two of spirits. You can also pull in personal touches, like a framed photo, to add an unexpected focal point to the area.

Greenery and florals bring in a new texture and a pop of color. An herb—such as rosemary, mint, or basil—will further enhance your cocktail recipes as garnishes. Not to mention that the verdant addition will also work as aromatherapy.

What if I don't have room for a bar cart?

No bar cart? No problem! Seybert does not own a bar cart, but that doesn't stop her from creating a special place to serve up cocktails when she's hosting. A waist-high storage chest with a mirror behind it in her living room serves as her bar when she entertains. "The liquor, wine, ice buckets, mixers, and garnishes sit on one side of the chest; an assortment of glasses, cocktail napkins, and straws sit on the other," she says. "Bringing the bar to the party area allows me to serve and refresh drinks seamlessly while entertaining."

Similarly, Smith suggests creating a base for cocktail essentials using a glass or lacquer tray, or oversized placemats. It's a visual way to contain all of the elements to one designated area.

According to designer Corey Damen Jenkins, "Space can be a premium—especially for those of us living in apartments—and a literal bar cart may not be possible. So why not go for a decorative tray that can easily live day-to-day on the kitchen counter or a console? Consider capturing something vintage from an antique store, flea market, or auction, or perhaps nab one that's been in your family for years. That way you have a special story to share when you bring it out to serve your guests."

Likewise, Seybert always includes a tray or two in her home bar. In addition to holding key items, they can also be used as a practical device for serving or carrying drinks to guests in another room. "I have a collection of trays in various colors and sizes and coordinate them with the theme and color of my tablescape," she says. "I complete my bar setup with a nod to the holiday we are celebrating—[such as] a fall arrangement in a small bud vase or a few Christmas decorations."

24. Stack books



Books brighten up a bar cart, as do colorful bottle labels. Photo: Werner Straube

“Don’t forget your favorite cocktail recipe books,” Owens says. “Books are always a great way to decorate, as they add color and interest to any vignette.” Stack a few vintage cocktail books on the lower level or use them as a base to elevate a particularly pretty bottle. A wealth of cocktail knowledge will be right at your fingertips, just in case you forget the difference between a manhattan and an old-fashioned.

25. Art Deco



Chicago interior designer Marshall Erb pairs a silver tray with a bar cart for a layered look. Photo: Courtesy of Marshall Erb

Use a vintage mirror for inspiration that melds an antique bar cart into modern interiors. Marshall Erb, a Chicago designer, styled an Art Deco bar cart from Antiques on Plank Road with a contemporary lamp and sculpture, but also included an ornate silver champagne bucket. “This brass-accented, mahogany bar cart allows for multipurpose use depending on my hosting needs,” Erb explains of this pretty portable, wheeled cart. “Whether that’s to act as a console table to serve food at dinner parties or stand in as a champagne station for upscale soirees.”

As for styling, he recommends keeping an open mind, “Bar carts don’t always have to be thought of as party central, heavily laden with bottles of booze,” Erb adds. Fluctuate between modern maximalism and edited minimalism and adjust the bar cart accordingly. During the summer months, a table lamp and fresh flowers work as accessories to keep things lighter and less cluttered. The holidays are a perfect time to stock the cart with a couple of seasonally festive bottles and glassware so you can entertain at a moment’s notice.

26. Brass is beautiful





Baker uses the bar cart as a thread to a wine cellar. Photo: Suzanna Scott

This California project featured a modern brass staircase, so Regan Baker Design incorporated brass throughout the home, including the bar cart. The house featured a large wine cellar on the ground floor, but didn't previously have a bar area within the formal living and dining areas. "The use of the bar cart allowed us to create a small but beautiful space, easily accessible within the formal entertaining areas of the home," Baker says.

27. Load it up

