

Open-Door Policy



Serena & Lily's powerhouse co-founder happily juggles life, family, and frequent dinner parties in her turn-of-the-century Mill Valley, California, estate

By Brielle M. Ferreira Photographs by Jonny Valiant Styling by Erin Swift



The dining table is custom from The Wooden Duck. The Josephine dining chairs and Birds Nest hanging lamps are by Serena & Lily. Opposite: Lily Kanter prepares to greet guests at the door with her husband and son.



Kanter (in orange) chose Ann Sacks smoked subway tile for the backsplash. The barstools are from Maine Cottage. The pendant fixture above the island is from Restoration Hardware. The faucet is by Lefroy Brooks, and the range is by Wolf.



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tending a cocktail party at the home of Lily Kanter—CEO and one half of the eponymous design brand Serena & Lily—is very much like stepping into the pages of one of the company’s

carefully curated catalogs: welcoming, warm, and cheerful. Nothing has been overlooked. There are stacks of neatly folded napkins; an artful spread of well-designed crudités, mingle-friendly skewers, and spring rolls; and a fully stocked bar manned by what are arguably the cutest cocktail slingers in Northern California: Kanter’s young sons, ages 8, 9, and 12. “They’re very good bartenders,” she says with a laugh. “They know how to make a great martini.”

And while they won’t be able to taste their concoctions for some time, their mom makes sure there are plenty of kid-friendly alternatives on hand: little finger sandwiches in funny, cookie-cutter shapes, and miniature hot dogs and hamburgers. “My goal is to make sure that everyone is having fun,” says Kanter. This, of course, includes the hostess herself, who makes a conscious effort to stay out of the kitchen during party time, greeting each merrymaker at the front door with a drink and a smile. “I like to be wrapped up with everything by the time the first guest arrives,” she says. “I want to be out there enjoying myself, too!”



With a variety of drinks chilling on ice and a fresh, ready-to-serve crudités basket, guests feel free to help themselves and find it easy to unwind—taking turns going for a swing on the Serena & Lily hanging chair (below).





AN INSIDE LOOK

One side of the living room (above) sports a sofa from Verellen and a Bark Diamond Chakki ottoman and Brazilian Hide rug from Serena & Lily; at the other end (left), a Lee Industries sofa joins a chair and ottoman from Maine Cottage. The shelves are painted Tasty Apple by Benjamin Moore. Walls in the bedroom (below and below, left) are painted Shale from Serena & Lily's color collection, forming a backdrop for the company's Aqua Border Frame duvet on the bed and Fog Spade fabric on the chaise.



So in the days leading up to her weekly Friday night shindigs, Kanter is a blur of activity, crafting the perfect playlists with eclectic selections from Elton John, The Beatles, Jason Mraz, and Adele; plotting out her centerpieces (arrangements of her favorite fresh blooms); and prepping a wide variety of menu options that require nothing more than a quick reheating right before dinnertime. "It may seem like a lot to have everything done beforehand, but I'm no good at multitasking," she explains. "And I want to be able to give my guests all of my attention. That's what it's all about."

As handily as Kanter and her family have perfected their hospitality, though, they also heavily rely on another, more quiet co-host: their historic Mill Valley home, which Kanter and her husband thoughtfully remodeled and outfitted with entertaining in mind, from the custom teak table in the dining room that seats up to 16 to the elaborate open-air party room outside, complete with a skylit eave, brick fireplace, and oversize heating lamp. But it wasn't always so ready for company.

When the couple first set eyes on the early 1900s home, they knew it would need a lot of work, but they were up for it. "I saw something special here," Kanter says. After completely gutting and rewiring the ancient plumbing and electrical systems, she fearlessly tackled the next hurdle, bringing the home's Edwardian-meets-Craftsman architecture and handsome, original woodwork into the 21st century. Trying wherever possible to preserve the home's vintage charm and character, Kanter had the trim, molding, beaded board, and wainscoting throughout covered in bright white paint, and then had the original wood floors refinished to a suitable sheen. While the kitchen and baths had to be completely taken down to the studs and rebuilt to better accommodate the functional necessities of a family of five, everything else was approached with a light touch. "The house had incredible bones, and we wanted to highlight them," she says. "It was important for us to maintain the era of the home and to keep it authentic."

Coincidentally, this is not the only way the family honors the house's past. Originally built in 1907 for a family with eight children, the home became well-known at the time for being a community hot spot. It was the site of the first tennis court in town, and many poetry readings were held on its grounds. That open-door policy is one Kanter and her clan are eager to uphold. "We like to think we embody that same spirit," she says. "We love this house, and we want to share it, too." **For more information, see Sources, page 104.**

Friends enjoy the casual yet tasty spread in front of the fireplace in the outdoor entertaining room.

