



THE BIG FEAST

Saima Khan of The Hampstead Kitchen is a private chef, brand consultant and philanthropist, and has cooked for the likes of Brad Pitt, Sheryl Sandberg and Arianna Huffington. Her style is about bringing people together and creating a space for them to relax and connect. 'My friends and family always expect me to feed them! I just buy produce I like, then create dishes.'

THE DECOR

I love texture, so there's a lot of low lighting with tealights and Moroccan candles on the floor. I use frankincense, so when guests come into the home, they feel welcomed and warmed by the aromas.

THE FOOD

My go-to dish is slow-cooked lamb, then I build around it with rice, chargrilled chicken and so on. I always serve the 'Obama Dip', or Booraniyeh Esfenaj, made with yogurt and vegetables such as spinach, beetroot or aubergine. It got its nickname when we served it at the White House for the former president and first lady. All in all, my tip is to just create lots of food and be relaxed! Sharing platters encourage people to talk, however, we always set a soft rule that everyone has to serve one another and no one can start eating until we all have food on our plates. On New Year's Eve, I make an upside-down lamb dish with roasted aubergine and invite some of my closest friends. We watch the fireworks from my living room window, as I have a great view of the London skyline.

THE GUEST LIST

I prefer to invite small groups, and tend to choose people who share common values and outlooks. But once, I invited a friend who is a high-flying executive to a dinner party with a bunch of freelance creatives. He enjoyed the evening and left feeling that he needed more time to just be social! No gathering is complete without my three closest friends, Mani, Ash and Ehab. I let guests sit where they want; I don't like seating plans unless it's a business dinner where you need to seat people strategically for networking purposes. I usually give each guest a little goodie bag of my baklava, or any leftovers, as I am usually travelling and hate wasting food.

Find out more at thehampsteadkitchen.com or find The Hampstead Kitchen on Instagram @hampsteadkitchn

THE DRINK

I tend to have drinks out on the coffee tables so people feel in a party mood straight away! I always make rose and elderflower coolers or a pomegranate-based drink; either a margarita or mojito with mint and pomegranate seeds.

POMEGRANATE MARGARITA

Makes 1

1 lime, sliced, plus
25ml fresh lime juice
Sea salt, for rimming
the glass (optional)
2tbsp pomegranate seeds
1 tsp pomegranate
molasses (optional)
40ml tequila
25ml sugar syrup
Several dashes orange bitters
Handful crushed ice
Fresh mint sprig, to garnish

Prepare the rim of your cocktail glass (highball or martini) with the edge of a lime slice and then salt the rim with sea salt, if you like. To cool the glass, either place it in the freezer or fill with ice and leave to chill. Add the pomegranate seeds to a cocktail shaker and bash the seeds to realise the juices. Add the tequila, lime juice, sugar syrup, orange bitters and crushed ice. Shake vigorously, then strain into the prepared glass. Garnish with additional pomegranate seeds, a sprig of mint and a lime slice, if desired. Serve or drink immediately and with leisure.



'MY TABLE IS ALWAYS A VIBRANT FEAST FOR THE EYES'

THE TABLE

My table is always a vibrant feast for the eyes: colourful runners with contrasting napkins (colours dictated by the season – in winter, it's greys, blacks, dark browns, mustards and purples), lots of vintage candlesticks, tealights, and fresh aubergines, pomegranates, artichokes and red onions. I decorate the table with food, not flowers, as I want the meal to be the focus. Black or grey plates let the colours of the food really pop, and olive branches and twigs placed around the table create a natural, rustic and inviting look – not too styled and exact.

THE MUSIC

I always play background music to welcome everyone inside. Most of my dinners are for close friends and family, so I tend to create playlists with a focus on Arabic and Persian music. I love Umm Kulthum, a famous Egyptian singer who is like the Aretha Franklin of the Middle East! Then, of course, after a few too many drinks, we all try to belly dance – and fail miserably!



TUMBLER, £9, Conran Shop

STONE BOWL, from £22, Graham & Green

PLATE, £29, Conran Shop

NAPKIN RINGS, £10 for 4, Amara

SERVING BOARD, £20, John Lewis & Partners

SERVING SPOONS, £12, Habitat

TABLE RUNNER, £35, Heal's

ROSA LINEN NAPKINS, £40 for 4, Soho Home

OLIVE BRANCH, £8, Neptune