

## Small Oven, Big Table and Cozy Seating for 16

By PAULINE O'CONNOR

ONE might expect a hostess giving a dinner party for 16 without a caterer to be at least slightly harried in the face of her guests' imminent arrival, especially if most of them were members of that jaded club known as the fashion industry, a crowd that typically scores high on the difficult-to-please meter.

But a few minutes before a dinner two weeks ago, Hilary Bowers, a founder of the designer-goods Web site Yoox ([www.yoox.com](http://www.yoox.com)), was totally cool.

"I'm an old hand at these," said Ms. Bowers, an Edie Sedgwick look-alike, who returned to New York six months ago from Milan, where she had worked for three years. "In Italy, I didn't even have an oven," Ms. Bowers said, "and the kitchen was upstairs, so when I gave dinner parties I had to keep running up and down stairs to get the food."

In her SoHo loft, Ms. Bowers works out of a small U-shape area that also houses her washer and dryer. She says she gives large dinners twice a month. "The secret is to make something that you can just stick in the oven and not need to look after while your guests are there," she said. On this night, that something was roast pork loin encrusted with 11 herbs. Two friends, Dana Gers and her husband, Olivier Gers, looked on as she whisked two pans out of the small oven, spooned diced potatoes around the meat and slid them back in.

As she sliced cherry tomatoes for the salad, Ms. Bowers extolled the virtues of FreshDirect, the online delivery service that supplied most of the evening's provisions: "I save so much time just ordering the night before," she explained. Time not spent grocery shopping was spent in the flower district, where she had shopped at 7 that morning for the boxes of grass and tulips decorating the table. (Ms. Bowers always does the flower arranging herself.)

At around 8 the buzzer started ringing, and Mr. Gers, who works for Fremantle Media, which produces "American Idol," scooted over to man the martini station, converted from its everyday use as Ms. Bowers's office. Guests began trickling into the 2,750-square-foot space, minimally decorated with a few chaises and a series of



Photographs by Lara Kline for The New York Times

brilliantly colored geometric paintings by Alberto Blagetti, the previous occupant.

A small-world moment came when Mr. Bowers started to introduce Whitney Casey, a reporter for ABC News, to Capucine Hoybach, a fashion editor at Departures magazine. "Cappy!" Ms. Casey shrieked. It turned out that Mrs. Hoybach and Ms. Casey knew each other from their days as volley-

**MOTHER OF INVENTION** Hilary Bowers, above, at her oven. Top, guests arriving; top right, a tulip centerpiece close up. Above left, the loft's sparse but tasteful furnishings. Olivier Gers serving green beans.



ball teammates at the University of Southern California. "We haven't seen each other in five years," Mrs. Hoybach said.

Shortly after 9, everyone was herded toward the long dinner table. Mrs. Gers, vice president for marketing at Ferragamo, was enlisted to help decide the seating arrangements. "Separate the couples," commanded Ms. Bowers. Salad, green beans, a tarragon-chive dressing and several bottles of wine were placed on the table along with the pork loins. There was a polite skirmish over who would carve and serve. Mike Eaton, a partner in a television production company, went and dished out the meat and potatoes with gusto. "I'm sensing a past life here coming back," said Olivia Chantecaille, the creative director of the Chantecaille skin-care line.

Sitting opposite Ms. Chantecaille was her boyfriend, Eric Villency, a former model who became president of the furniture company Maurice Villency when he was 26. ("They ran out of Villencys," he joked.) He described meeting Ms. Chantecaille for the first time when they were seated together at another dinner party. "We had our backs to each other all night," he recalled, grinning somewhat. "But after dinner the hostess made everybody go out dancing, and that's when we started talking."

Wine flowed, and plates were cleared to make way for macaroons and tarts, courtesy of Mrs. Gers. The guests drifted away, clustering in knots. A Bumble and Bumble hair colorist, Sabrina Myers, doled out advice on how to get platinum tresses. Ms. Myers had recently toned down Ms. Bowers's own platinum locks. "The next day, her mother came to the salon to find me," Ms. Myers said with amusement. "She told me, 'I wanted to thank you in person for making her look normal again.'"

At midnight, Ms. Bowers shrugged off the prospect of tidying up. "That's my other secret," she said. "Worry about the cleaning tomorrow."



With a TV producer behind the bar and a fashion executive in charge of dessert.