



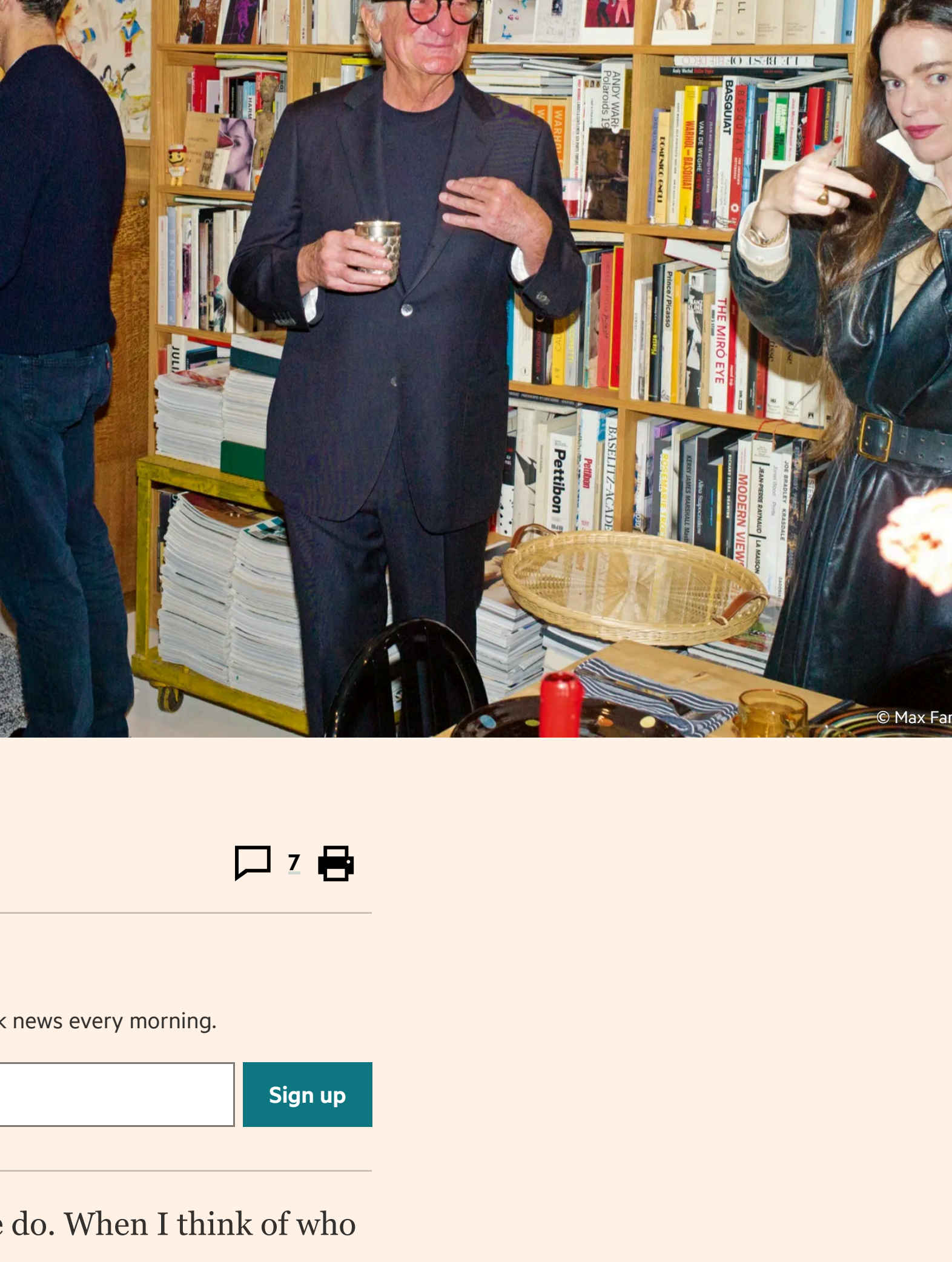
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## How to cast the perfect dinner party

Laila Gohar's guide to curating a guest list



Laila Gohar. Photography by Max Farago MARCH 3 2023

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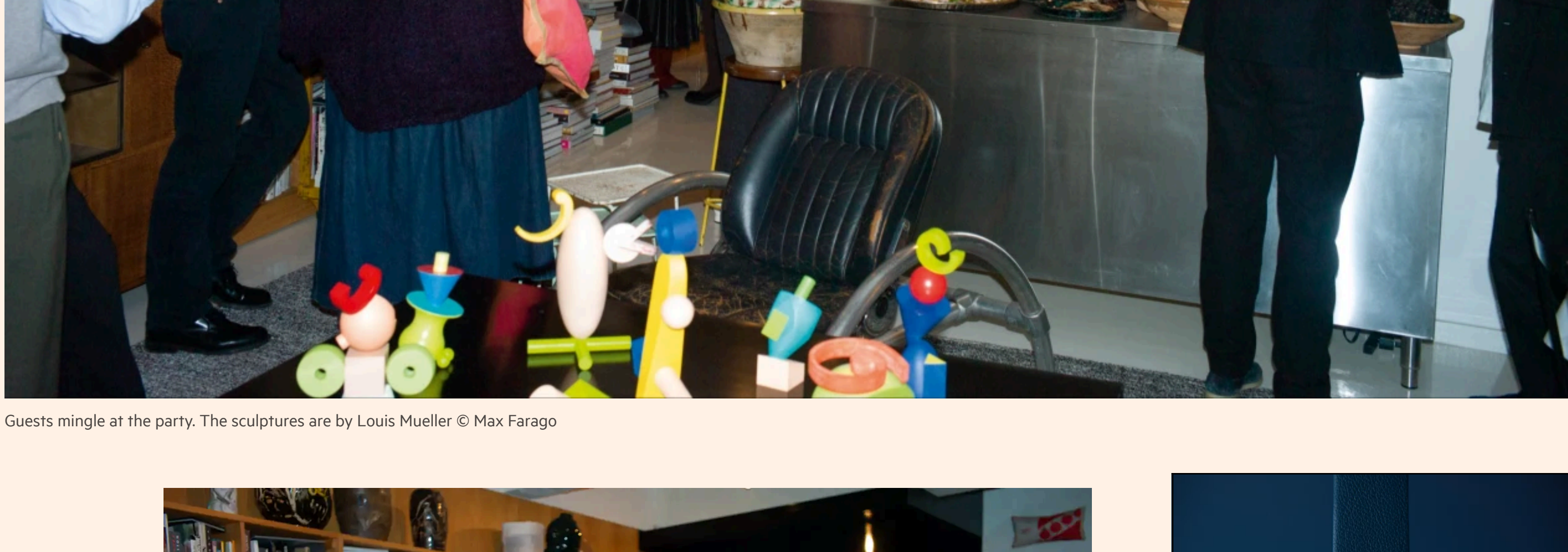
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Good food does not make a good dinner party. People do. When I think of who to invite over for dinner, the process is similar to that of casting. Two characters are constant fixtures – my boyfriend and my best friend – but the rest is a game of musical chairs. The others are made up of a cast of friends – old and new, young and old. I love hosting dinners with other people as it is an opportunity to mix guest lists. I recently hosted a dinner party with my friend Max Farago, a photographer and gallerist, in honour of his friend Louis Mueller, an artist who Max represents through his gallery, Farago. The dinner was held at the home of Michael Bargo, an interior designer, stylist and antique dealer based in New York City.

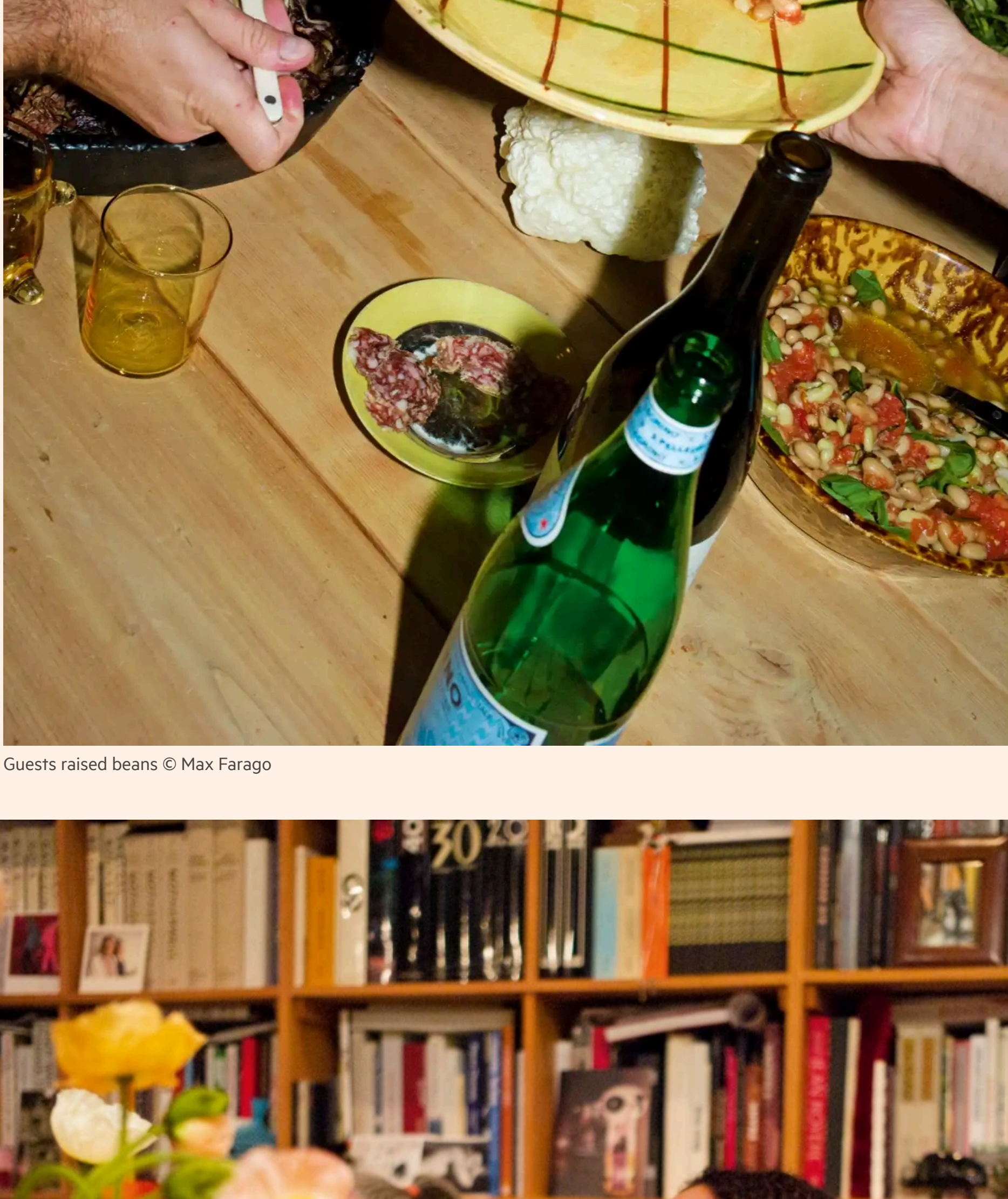


Guests mingle at the party. The sculptures are by Louis Mueller © Max Farago



Laila prepares the braised radicchio © Max Farago

I have a theory that there are two types of dinner guests: “characters” and “glues”. Characters are big personalities. They enjoy storytelling and tend to be animated and performative. At times the room feels like their stage. They can also be provocative. These types of people are entertainers and help create an atmosphere that is lively. Too many characters, though, and they compete for attention, throwing off the balance. Glues, on the other hand, are people who are easy to talk to and accommodating. They listen more than they talk and have the ability to make their dinner-table neighbour feel comfortable and heard. They hold the characters together. But if you end up with too much glue, you run the risk of a dull night.



Guests raised beans © Max Farago



From left: Paper magazine founder Kim Hastreiter, Harper's Bazaar editor-in-chief Samira Nasr and curator Alex Tieghi-Walker at the dinner party © Max Farago

“If someone asks to bring a friend, do yourself a favour and just say yes. There's always room for one more at my table

Our guest list stood out for its range in ages. Louis, the artist being honoured, is in his eighties, and we had guests aged from their late twenties upwards. Layering of ages creates so much depth at dinner parties. I often think people forget this, which means dinner parties can become too homogeneous. A word of advice: next time you throw a dinner party, go out of your way to invite two people who are at least 50 years apart in age. They may surprise you and strike up a friendship.



Pork loin with tonnato, capers and radish © Max Farago

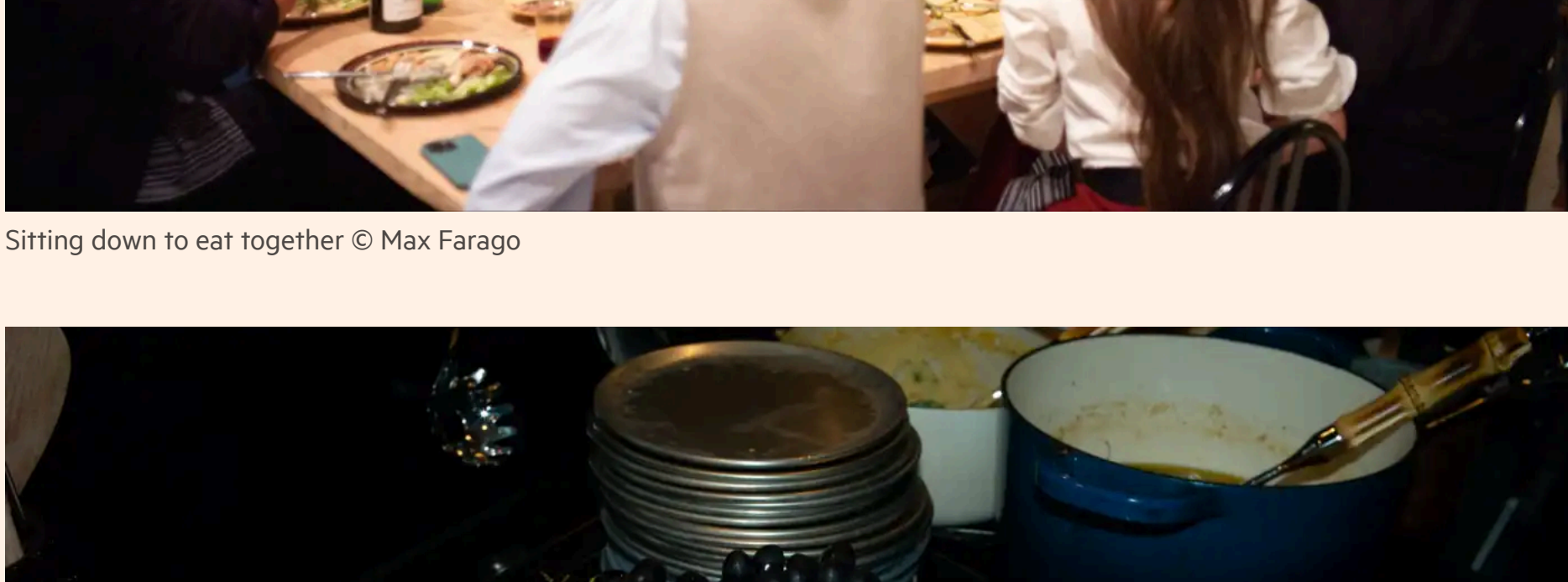
### The rules

- Make a guest list. But be flexible and break away
- Try to mix “characters” and “glues”
- Keep a balance of ages...
- A balance of people who know each other and who don't...
- And a balance of careers

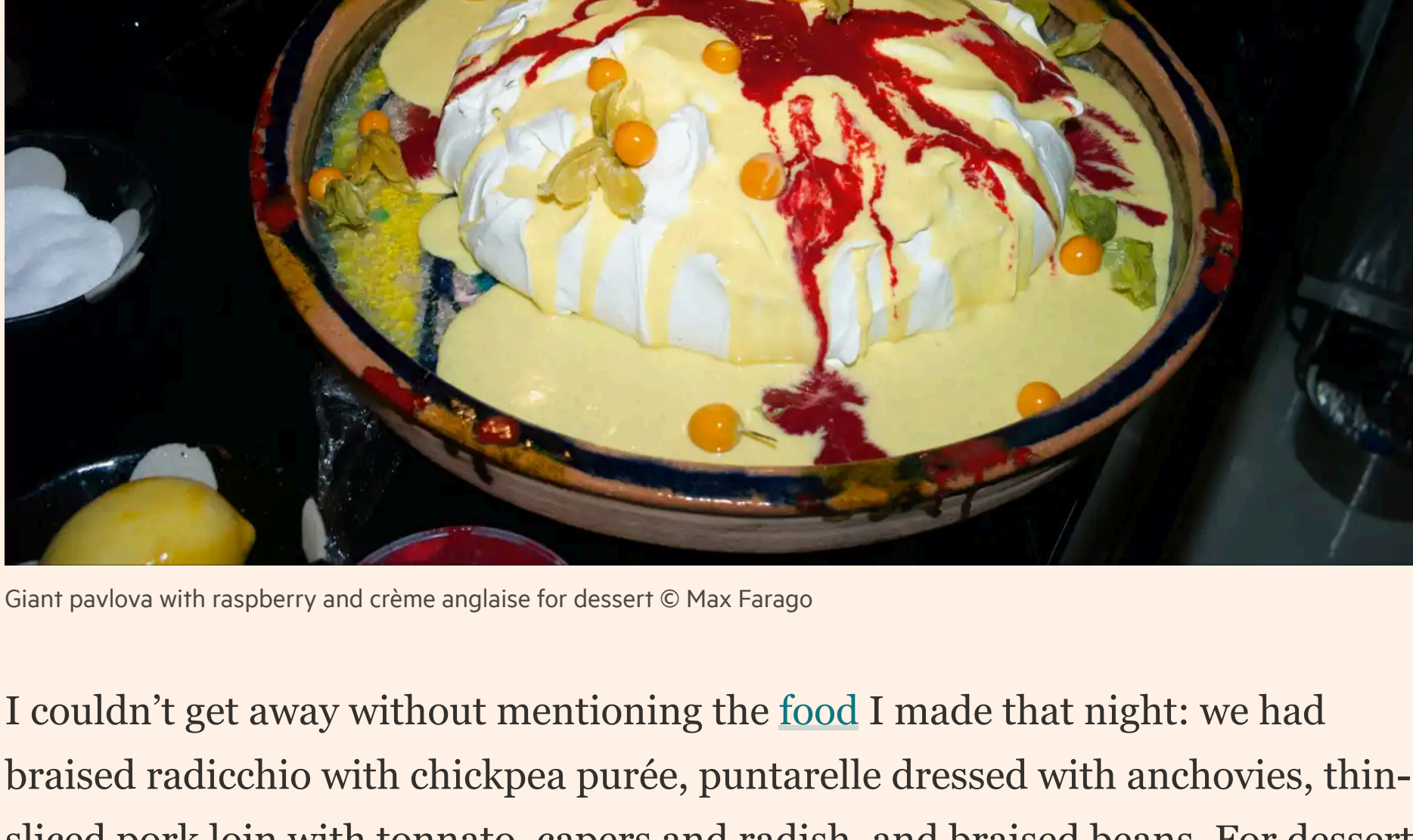
My two co-hosts and I work across art and design, and it felt important to invite people who work in different disciplines, as well as people who didn't all know each other. It makes for more exciting talk. The artist **Louise Bourgeois** was famous for her Sunday salons where she would host people, some she knew, others she didn't, with no agenda except for allowing space to connect. She wove a giant web of people

for more than 30 years, once saying, “I want them to have a good time and drink a lot. They say, ‘I want to show you my work’, and what they really mean is, I want to be endorsed and congratulated’.”

Creating a guest list is an important piece of the hosting puzzle. And, just as it's important to create one, it's important to be flexible and break away from it. My general rule is that if I'm making food for five or 15 or 105, it could always be six or 16 or 106. Of course you could run into some logistics issues, but if someone asks to bring a friend, do yourself a favour and just say yes. Saying yes is so much easier than saying no. And your guest will be happy. There's always room for one more at my table.



Sitting down to eat together © Max Farago

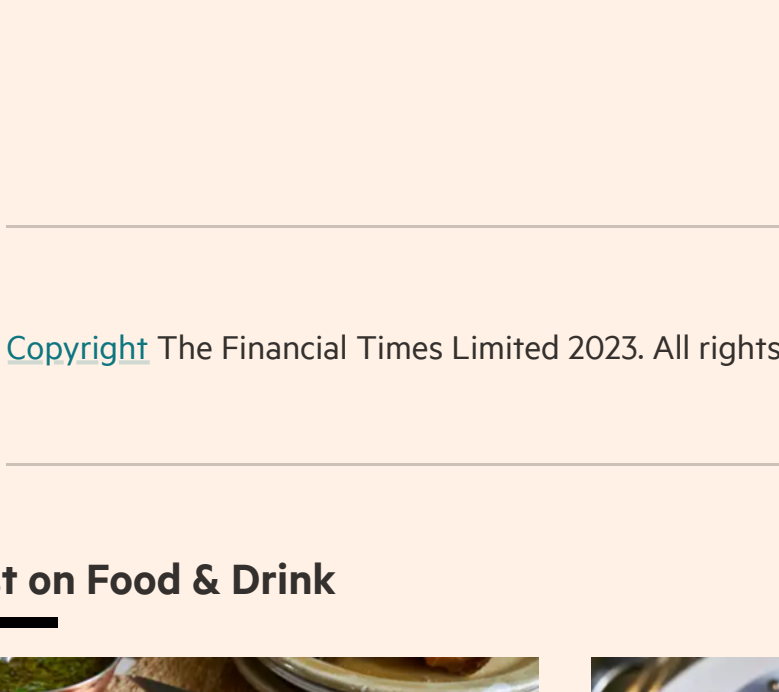


Giant pavlova with raspberry and crème anglaise for dessert © Max Farago

I couldn't get away without mentioning the **food** I made that night: we had braised radicchio with chickpea purée, puntarelle dressed with anchovies, thin-sliced pork loin with tonnato, capers and radish, and braised beans. For dessert there was pavlova with raspberries, husk cherries and crème anglaise. I heard people say it was delicious. But what will remain for many years beyond the memory of the food itself are the friendships that were struck that night. And that's what any dinner party worth its salt is about.

@lailacooks

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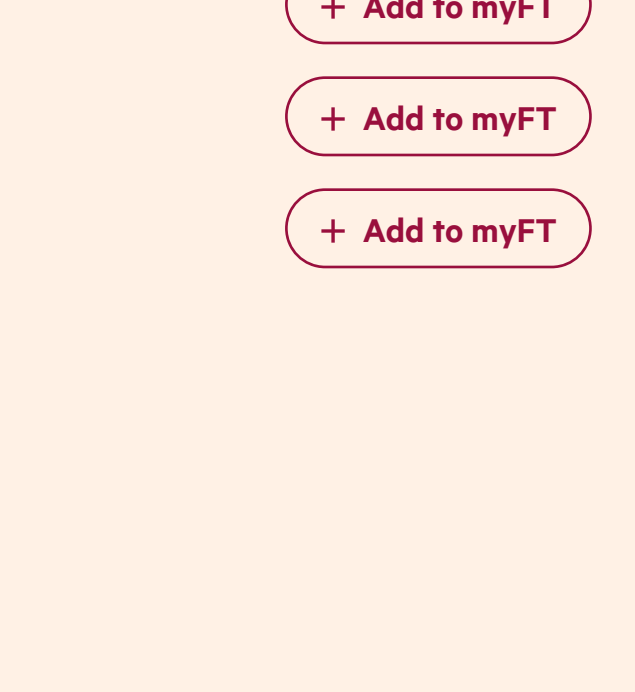
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