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December 2022 | Issue 214 | £4.99 | UK Edition

SEASON OF WONDER

How to make Christmas magical this year

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gift guide

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FAUX?

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Christmas tree

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Christmas kitchen styling can range from a transformative lick of Annie Sloan paint – as seen here – to smaller touches for making guests welcome (p104)

A letter from home



It's the anticipation of Christmas, the run-up to the big day, and the preparations for festivities that so many of us enjoy in our English homes. It's stir-up Sunday, decorating the tree with our loved ones, choosing just the right presents and wrapping them exquisitely that many of us delight in at this special time of year.

The Christmases I remember most fondly are the ones where everyone got involved. Our foraged wreath might not have been quite be what a florist would create and a slightly wonky gingerbread house is always inevitable, but there's much more festive spirit in allowing everyone to create their own little piece of Christmas magic, rather than feel a pressure to make everything perfect.

Our December edition this year, is therefore designed to take the stress out of preparing for the festivities and offer achievable ideas for creating welcoming, stylish touches. Packed full of beautiful ideas and inspiration, you'll find deceptively simple tips and tricks from interior designers and experts who reveal how they prepare their own homes for Christmas (p84), a carefully curated selection of more than 100 gifts (p38), inspiration for preparing the home with seasonal touches (p118) and for hosting friends and family (p104). It's an issue designed to offer many ideas, so you can select a few that speak to you. Planning ahead, taking your time and enjoying the whole process is key, so we hope that the collected wisdom in these pages help you add some beautiful, comfortable touches to your home as you host and prepare for a very Merry Christmas.

Samantha

Samantha Scott-Jeffries, Editor

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CONTACT US

Editorial 020 7349 3700

The English Home, Jubilee House,
2 Jubilee Place, London SW3 3TQ

Email theenglishhome@chelseamagazines.com

Website theenglishhome.co.uk

Advertising/Publishing 020 7349 3700

The Chelsea Magazine Company Ltd

Email info@chelseamagazines.com

EDITORIAL

Editor Samantha Scott-Jeffries

Managing Editor Sarah Feeley

Art Editors Claire Hicks, Rebecca Stead

Acting Art Editor Andrea Lynch

Sub Editor Lea Tacey

Decorating Editor Katy Mclean

Features Editor Suzanna Le Grove

Homes & Lifestyle Editor Clair Wayman

Editor-at-Large Kate Freud

Editorial Assistant Charlotte Dunford

ADVERTISING

Group Sales Director Catherine Chapman

020 7349 3709; catherine.chapman@chelseamagazines.com

Head of Sales Operations Jodie Green

Advertisement Manager William Bernard

020 7349 3749; william.bernard@chelseamagazines.com

Senior Sales Executive Laurina Barry

020 7349 3712; laurina.barry@chelseamagazines.com

Advertising Production 01202 472781; allpointsmmedia.co.uk

PUBLISHING

Chairman Paul Dobson

Managing Director James Dobson

Chief Financial Officer Vicki Gavin

Publisher Caroline Scott

Marketing Manager Bret Weekes

Operations Manager Sarah Porter

EA to Chairman Sophie Easton

ONLINE

Group Digital Manager Ben Iskander

Email & Digital Creative Manager Jenny Choo

PRODUCTION

Reprographics Manager Neil Puttnam

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SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE

The English Home
Tower House, Lathkill Street
Market Harborough
Leicestershire LE16 9EF
Tel 01858 438 854

Email theenglishhome@subscription.co.uk
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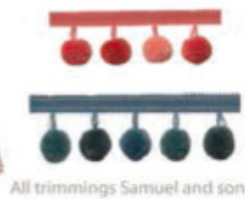
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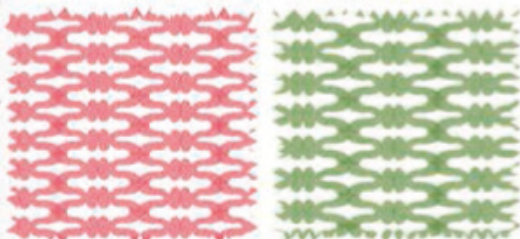
Frilled cushion in Emma Verty and Tea for two



Rectangle cushions in Piccadilly green



Fabric Emma verty



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Knot verty



Cushion Knot verty



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NOTEBOOK

Our monthly edit of news, shopping inspiration and inside information >



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Sparkling adornments

Prince Albert is usually credited as having introduced the Christmas tree to England in 1840 – but English Heritage says it was actually Queen Charlotte, the German wife of George III, who set up the first known

Christmas tree at Queen's Lodge, Windsor in December 1800.

No longer decorated with real lit candles, today's Christmas trees are oh so revealing of the decorator's personality, whether adorned with themed perfectly matching ornaments or an eclectic mix of old favourites and new additions.

To add some sparkle, Waterford's hand-crafted luxury crystal, dating back to 1783, is renowned for impressive brilliance and clarity. Its Christmas decorations feature intricately cut facets that will produce refractions to glisten and glow in the home enhancing the festive spirit. waterford.com >



Distinctive By Design

Jan Constantine marks two decades

Celebrating 20 years in business, designer Jan Constantine is globally known for her signature style of hand-embroidered textiles, including bespoke pieces for Liberty, Harrods and Fortnum & Mason.

Especially famous for her bold cushions, Jan has designed a new range of stockings for Christmas.

Growing up in Lancashire, she loved sewing from an early age, greatly influenced by her tailor mother and dressmaker-milliner grandmother.

After a career in fashion in London, Jan launched her textiles business in 2002. Based in Cheshire, she designs every item to be a future heirloom. "I want to create something that will bring joy to people and be handed down, just as the embroidery skills of my artisans have been handed down through many generations," she says. janconstantine.com



Where the Art Is

Hand-drawn homeware by Victoria Eggs

While working in Australia designing T-shirt graphics emblazoned with British imagery for menswear brand Ben Sherman, English-born Victoria Eggs realised just how many nostalgic memories these symbols of life in Britain conjure up.

Returning home to England, this Fine Art graduate developed her own designs capturing her cherished childhood memories: the excitement of visiting London, the tempting scent of fish and chips at the seaside, the joy of licking the spoon while baking and the delight and magic of Christmas. She sold her first mug at Spitalfields Market in 2011 and today her hand-crafted UK-made home items are sold worldwide, including at Harrods. victoriaeggs.com



Festive Wonder

Chase and Wonder launch first crackers

When Faye and David Aspinall met aged four at school, they had no idea they would one day marry and launch a business – Chase and Wonder.

Specialising in British-made luxury gifts and home items including fragrance – all beautifully illustrated by Faye and David – they have just launched their first Christmas crackers.

Hand-poured and hand-rolled in their Cheshire workshop and recyclable, there are four designs and each cracker contains a different scented candle.

They started dating while David was studying Graphic Design at Central Saint Martins and Faye a Masters in Fashion at the Royal College of Art. Faye then worked in the US and for 18 months David flew back and forth. Unable to live apart, they resigned and started a business in 2010 – and their first customer was Liberty. chaseandwonder.com ▶





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Symphony Of Curves

*Decorative plasterwork by
Geoffrey Preston MBE*

Awarded the MBE in Her Majesty The Queen's 2021 Birthday Honours List, Geoffrey Preston is one of the best architectural sculptors in the world, specialising in exquisite handmade decorative plaster and the art of stucco from his studio in Devon.

Often creating large ornate pieces of sculpture for stately homes and illustrious clients, a newly opened online shop sells a collection of his relief sculpture. These range from the petite (sweet little flower studies of roses and anemones) to the grand (a stunning overmantel in hand-modelled stucco created in collaboration with the decorators at Sibyl Colefax and John Fowler).

Initially modelled in clay using fingers, thumbs and small boxwood tools, a mould is made from the finished clay model which is used to cast in plaster in small runs or limited editions.

Long fascinated by flower sculpture, Geoffrey has found a rich seam of inspiration in the representation of flowers in 18th-century plasterwork and other decorative arts, from chintz textiles to the painting of Sèvres and Nymphenburg porcelain.

After studying sculpture at Hornsey College of Art, he trained as a stonemason and carver. As founding director of two of the country's most respected building conservation companies, he worked on many significant projects, and set up his own studio in 2000, where he works with a small team to create beautiful new plasterwork for architects, interior designers and private clients. geoffreypreston.co.uk



Seasonal Enchantment

Christmas charm from artist Madeleine Floyd

As an artist himself, an endorsement from His Majesty King Charles is among the ultimate accolades for any illustrator. Talented artist Madeleine Floyd was hand-picked for an ongoing collaborative relationship with Highgrove, producing successful ranges illustrating the King's Cotswold gardens including on Christmas cards, Advent calendars, textiles, gift ceramics and embroidered tree decorations.

Madeleine is particularly well known for her charming and characterful depictions of birds – including for Christmas the robin, two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree – and her style is both instantly recognisable and wonderfully warm.

She studied at the Courtauld Institute of Art, Camberwell College of Art and The Prince Of Wales Drawing School. Based in London, she paints, illustrates, prints, writes, designs and exhibits her work around the world, working mainly in oils, watercolours and ink but adapting to whatever medium feels appropriate for a particular project.

As well as producing cards, gift tags, art prints and illustrated books, she has also licensed her designs, which appear on myriad homeware, stationery and gifts.

Her enviable client list includes English Heritage, National Trust, Harvey Nichols, Cliveden, Waitrose, John Lewis & Partners – and, of course – the King himself. madeleinefloyd.com ▶

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Timeless Magical Tale

The Nutcracker is just the ticket

Revel in the magic of Christmas by watching timeless festive favourite *The Nutcracker*. First performed in 1892, Tchaikovsky's masterpiece is the most frequently performed ballet of all time.

Standing wooden nutcracker – or *nussknacker* – figurines resembling soldiers and kings date back to 1800 in Germany, with a lever or screw to crack a nut placed in its mouth. Symbols of good luck and protection from malevolent spirits, and often exchanged as gifts, their association with Christmas simply stems from the widespread consumption of nuts during the festive season.

The ballet depicts young Clara receiving an

enchanted nutcracker as a gift on Christmas Eve before they embark on a magical adventure together, battling the Mouse King, visiting the Sugar Plum Fairy in the Kingdom of Sweets and meeting a handsome stranger.

The Nutcracker will be staged across England this winter, with notable performances by the Royal Ballet at the Royal Opera House (from 6 December to 14 January), by English National Ballet at London Coliseum (15 December to 7 January), and by Birmingham Royal Ballet at Birmingham Hippodrome (19 November to 10 December) and at Royal Albert Hall (28 to 31 December).

roh.org.uk; ballet.org.uk; brb.org.uk; royalalberthall.com



A Capital Festive Idea

London's first riverside ice rink opens

Ice skating in the open air at winter time, feeling the tingling whoosh of chilly air mid-glide, is for many a much-loved pre-Christmas pastime during winter days or at night under a canopy of stars.

London's brand new and only riverside ice rink – Glide at Battersea Power Station – will offer spectacular views of the Thames as skaters spin around three interconnecting rinks surrounded by twinkling lights, with a colossal 30ft Christmas tree as the glittering centrepiece.

Opening on 11 November and running until 8 January, this new ice rink is set against a backdrop of one of the capital's most iconic buildings, Grade II* listed Battersea Power Station, whose £9 billion regeneration has been eagerly anticipated.

There will be plenty to entertain post-skate, from bars and restaurants to shops, vintage-style fairground rides and live entertainment. batterseapowerstation.co.uk

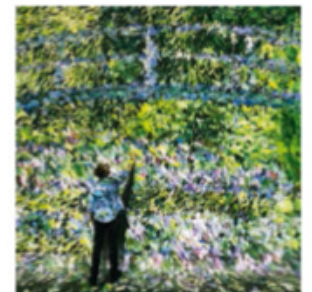
Diary



Shop amid a winter wonderland at The Twinkle Of Christmas Fair from 1–3 December at Design Centre Chelsea Harbour, bringing together artisan makers and luxury brands. dcch.co.uk



Festive craft workshops at National Trust locations across the UK offer the chance to handmade wreaths, Christmas cards, decorations and unique gifts. nationaltrust.org.uk



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DESIGN DISCOVERIES

Smart details and thoughtful ideas enrich the run-up to Christmas with warm-hearted elegance



AN INVITING SPREAD

Unexpected guests can often drop in at this time of year. A generous selection of classic festive cakes can be valuable to have on standby (and are sure to be enjoyed if leftover after the main event).

Sweet Organic Christmas pudding, £25; Organic brandy butter, £4.99; Organic Christmas cake, £25, all Daylesford



INDULGENT AFTERNOONS

What can be more cosy than fireside drinks? Make the most of the run-up to Christmas with an afternoon treat. Add lanterns on the hearth and bring out festive tableware to give coffee and mince pies a celebratory twist. *Natural woodland cushion, £19.99; tableware from £8.99 for a Robin mug, all Dobbies*

SEASONAL TABLESCAPE

Blending rustic and polished textures such as brass accessories with table linen in natural tones results in a cosy yet elegant wintertime colour scheme. Green and brown foliage adds an enchanting finishing touch.

Mbata brass candelabra, £50; Jahi brass candlestick, from £25; Saneer table linen, from £20 for a set of two napkins; Ela tableware, Sage Green, from £18, all Nkuku



CHARMINGLY PRESENTED

An exquisitely wrapped gift imparts a joyous sense of care to the recipient. This Nepalese Lokta wrapping paper is handmade by artisans using the bark of rare mulberry bushes. Tie with velvet ribbon for an indulgent final flourish.

Nepalese Lokta wrapping paper, three sheets for £9; velvet ribbon, £9 (2.2cm x 500cm), all Rowen & Wren



SHOPPING



WAITING IN THE WINGS

A sideboard can be instrumental for efficiently hosting family feasts. This design has three cupboards to store tableware and glassware, alongside decorative pieces for the table in a dining room. The drawers are ideal for special napkins and table mats that are kept separately from everyday sets.

Camille sideboard, Black, £1,495, Cox & Cox



CHRISTMAS RETREAT

Decorating a guest or main bedroom for Christmas need not be an overblown affair. A warm rug underfoot and a bed dressed in inviting layers create a blissfully welcoming scene. Incorporate a subtle festive feel with candles, stockings and a faux garland, all placed in eye-catching positions.

Savoy bed linen, from £28; Super-soft faux-fur throw, from £170; Vintage Etienne bedspread, from £120; Flokati rug, £495; Ultimate garland, £135, all The White Company

SUMPTUOUS SNOWFLAKES

From whipping up treats for a party to making afternoon tea for friends and family, festive-shaped bakes are a fun way to encourage the Christmas spirit. For those less confident in creating original designs, heavy cast aluminium bakeware helps cakes cook evenly without sticking to the sides of the mould.

Nordic Ware Frosty Flakes Pan, £58, Divertimenti ▶





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SMARTLY DISPLAYED

Even the most impressive wreath can look unsightly if it is awkwardly fixed to the front door. This brass hanger keeps wreaths neatly in place and at the right height. As here, the characterful hare design is particularly fetching on a cottage door. *Hare Christmas wreath hanger, brass, £19.99, Ivyline*



'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE...

Bring the magic of Christmas Eve to life with a special plate to present Father Christmas with his favourite nibbles – and Rudolf's, of course. After all their hard work, an accompanying glass of milk or something stronger will no doubt be appreciated too.

Christmas plates, from £4; Fairy/Nutcracker tumbler, £4; Dinosaur mug, £4; Santa extra-wide wrapping paper, £5.50; Felt Dinosaur tree decoration, £6, all John Lewis & Partners



BEAUTIFULLY RECOVERED

Refresh well-worn furniture and furnishings before guests arrive for the festive season by reupholstering them with smart new fabric. This armchair and cushion are in a fresh green and crisp blue cushion fabric design by Sophia Francis, a British textile studio producing timeless styles. Every pattern is created by Sophia in watercolour and ink and developed through various reproduction techniques before being digitally printed on linen.

Chair in Aubrey Olive Green linen, £130 a metre; Frilly cushion in Aubrey Blue, £115, Sophia Frances Studio ■

FEATURE SUZANNA LE GROVE PHOTOGRAPH P26 (SOPHIA FRANCIS) © RACHAEL SMITH



BEFORE & AFTER



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BEFORE & AFTER

SHOPPING



Gold metal mistletoe bunch, £42, Cox & Cox

Bespoke family bauble, from £95, Winterhart

Personalised table bows, £130 for a set of four, Hand & Lock + Fiona Leahy

Sir/Madam Rialto coupe glass in dark red, £82 for a set of two, Amara



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Gold Toast & Marmalade medium oval platter, £95, Emma Bridgewater



Spode Christmas Tree goblets, £39.95 for a set of four, Fortnum & Mason

16-piece set of cutlery in brass, £75, Garden Trading



ELEVATING THE FESTIVITIES

Heighten the anticipation of Christmas and make the celebrations feel extra special with personalised touches and luxurious details



Nutcracker Party Scene Cinnamon & Orange lidded candle, £120, Halcyon Days



Decadent metal trolley, £309, Cuckooland



Pinecone garland, £15; baubles, from £6; Boucle throw, £40, all John Lewis & Partners



Macklin decanter, £682 for a set of three, Arteriors



Hand-quilted velvet throw, £250, Toast



Robins bedding set super king, £90, Sophie Allport



Pursuits Piccadilly canvas tote, £405, Ettinger



Pure cashmere bed socks, can be personalised, £45, Johnstons of Elgin



12 Days of Christmas Tana Lawn Cotton pyjama set, £225, Liberty



FEATURE SUZANNA LE GROVE BACKGROUND JESSICA HYDE / SHUTTERSTOCK PHOTOGRAPHS (HALCYON DAYS) PAOLO LORASO; (JOHNSTONS OF ELGIN) ANGUS BREMNER

EST. 1952

HAMBLEDON

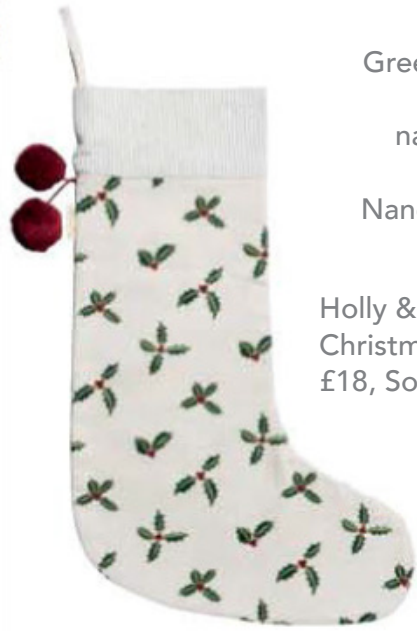
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SHOPPING



Green Holly crackers, £36 for six, and napkins, placemats and coasters, all Nancy & Betty Studio

Holly & Berry Christmas stocking, £18, Sophie Allport



Porcelain Christmas candle holder, £42, Made By Hand Online



Mini Christmas stocking decorations £33 for a set of three, Felt So Good



Winter Fayre Gold Leaf garland, £40, John Lewis & Partners

THE HOLLY & THE IVY

Enhance the impact of decking the halls in winter greenery with charming and jolly holly and ivy motifs on decorations and tableware



Christmas Robins & Holly apron, £33, Chez Beccy



Embroidered Holly Berry runner, £21, Walton & Co

Christmas Pudding tea towel, £11.95, Annabel James



Wheelbarrow & Holly bauble, £10, Sass & Belle



Leaves with Gold Glitter (left), £2.49; Toadstool Fairy fabric decoration (above), £8.99, both Gisela Graham London

Holly serving plate, £75, Anta



Christmas Holly dinner plate, £35, Susie Watson Designs



Border (above & below): Holly beaded runner, £116, MacKenzie-Childs Farmhouse at Amara

Festive Forest Green Christmas oven glove, £3.99, Homescapes Online

FEATURE KATY MCLEAN PHOTOGRAPHS (MADE BY HAND ONLINE) KATIE ALMOND, (WALTON & CO) HYLTON PHOTOGRAPHY

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THE EDIT

Editor-at-Large Kate Freud shares the new products and brand discoveries that have caught her eye this month

BOLD DESIGN



Kerry Jackson, the brains behind the homeware brand MM Linen, has never been afraid to use colour and print, as seen in her latest bedding collection, Tui Blossom. Combining flora and fauna against a restful backdrop of soothing blues and lilac, it is a surefire way to make an impact. Also new is the bold Flowerbed range, inspired by pressed flowers and printed on 220 thread count cotton sateen for an indulgent touch. What better way to add autumn hues to the home?
mmlinen.com

PRINT PERFECTION

When Debby Tenquist started Botanica Trading in 2014, it was not only with the design of beautiful textiles in mind but also a commitment to sustainable design. From the stunning ikat stripes to the tribal and zig-zag collections and the botanically inspired Garden range, all of the designs are digitally printed on either an Oyster or Oatmeal linen base cloth, giving them a beautifully muted palette that works with any scheme. This winter sees the launch of the new Primavera collection of wallpaper in all its beautiful watercolour shades of lilac and burgundy. botanicatrading.com



SWITCHED ON...

Ever since Forbes & Lomax was established back in 1987, it has set itself apart from the crowd with its aesthetic approach to the electrical accessory market, and now it can boast of its green credentials too. The brand's very clever Invisible Lightswitch, which sits alongside its range of beautiful nickel and brass switches, are now made from Greencast sheets of 100 per cent recycled Perspex. These sheets are created from manufacturers' and fabricators' waste and scrap material that would usually end up in landfills – a very switched-on idea.
forbesandlomax.com ▶



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MADE TO ORDER

Indoor and outdoor furniture specialists Bridgman are launching a sophisticated collection of armchairs, footstools, sofas and sofa beds just in time for Christmas. The company, which has been making furniture for more than 45 years, handmake each piece to order, allowing you to choose the best design for your style. Choose from the extensive Sofa Collections, upholstered in your choice of 52 luxurious fabrics, with sustainable and stain-resistant material options on offer. Or the Ludlow Collection is a brilliant space-saving sofa bed, guaranteed to give your guests a good night's sleep. bridgman.co.uk

PICTURE THIS



For more than 40 years Trowbridge Gallery has been the go-to picture gallery for interior designers and customers alike, establishing itself a reputation across the world for its framed fine art and photography. The company offers exclusive images – many of them artist-signed limited editions – in quality handmade frames – from giclée fine art and antique prints to handmade bespoke pieces and black-and-white and colour photography. Not only that, it has a library of more than 40,000 images, and introduces works daily with more than 3,000 new images added to its collections every year. This year sees the launch of the company's new Folio Collection, a timeless selection of traditional images that have been cleverly reimagined to suit today's interiors. trowbridgegallery.com ■

6 OF THE BEST OTTOMANS



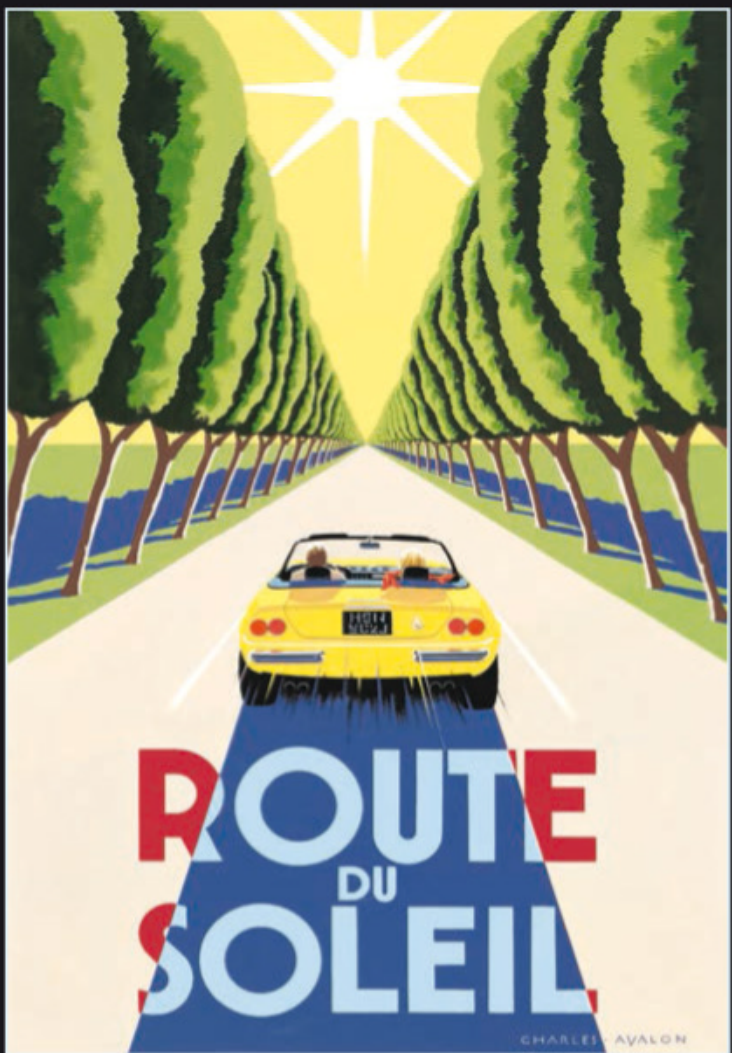
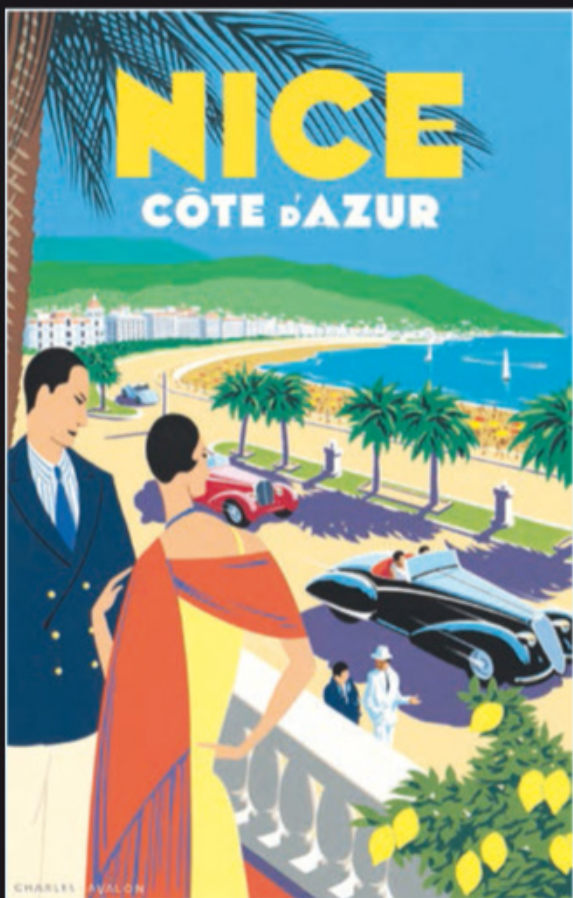
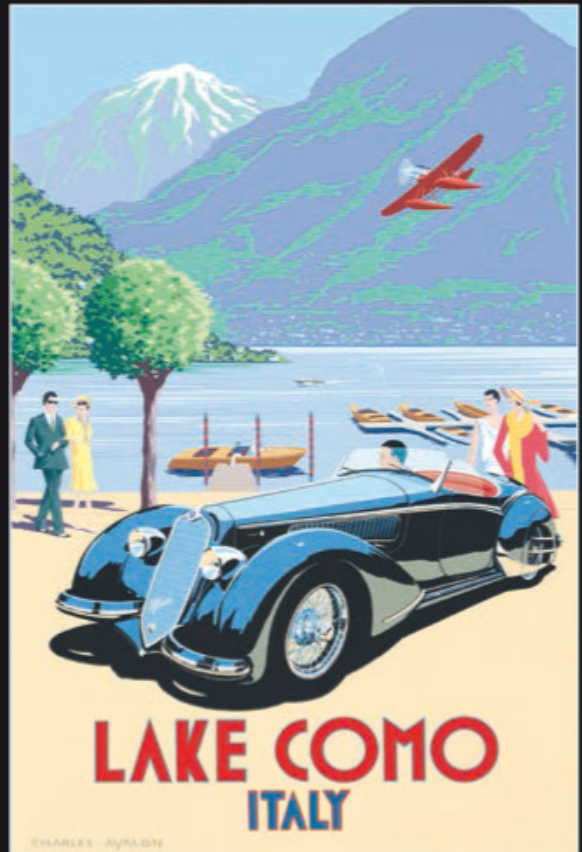
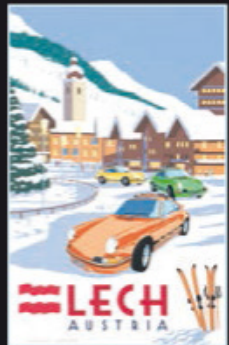
1. Saray Ottoman in Zold Linen, £914, Mind The Gap at amara.com
2. Bedham footstool in V&A Brompton Collection Ikat Chilli, £1,102, sofasandstuff.com
3. Woven Marija Kori Modular Ottoman, £398, anthropologie.com
4. Scott Ottoman Bench in Burnt Orange Cotton Velvet, £575, made.com
5. Sheki Upholstered Ottoman in Charcoal and Venetian Red, £1,750, oka.com
6. Loha Green Velvet & Rattan Ottoman, £595, oliverbonas.com



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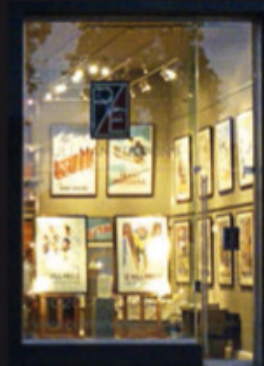
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Ensure the gifts beneath the tree are a success with our curated guide to suit all tastes and styles.

Costellini velvet ottoman in Midnight Green, £275; faux shagreen oval plateau in Taupe, £250; feather bauble tree decorations, £35 and mixed honeycomb bauble decorations, £45, both for a set of six, all Oka

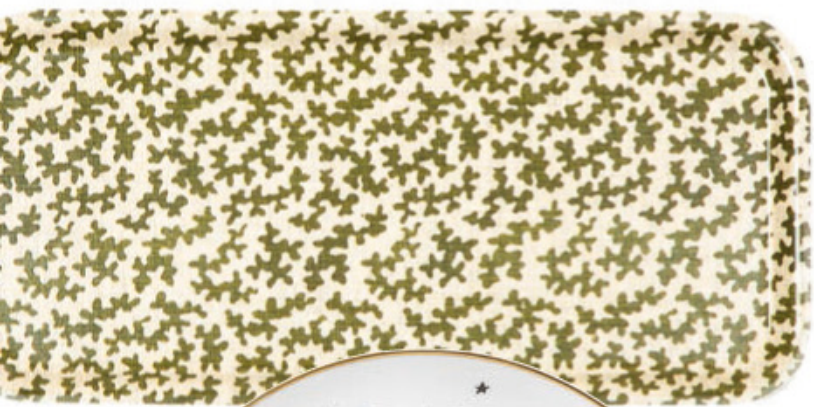




Colour Addict

- 1 Ortigia assorted glycerine soap box, £60, Woods Fine Linens
- 2 Hand-painted swirl glass bauble, £35, Paul Smith
- 3 Scala rectangle tray, £85, Jonathan Adler
- 4 Monserrate cushions in Ocean Velvet and Ochre, £70 each, Designers Guild
- 5 Scallop Trim napkins in Raspberry or Lilac, £65 for a set of four, Matilda Goad & Co
- 6 Acqua Di Parma Barbiere shaving brush and razor set, £475, Selfridges
- 7 Alphabet scarf, £70, Hades
- 8 Playing card box in pink faux shagreen, £65, Forwood Design
- 9 Red glass moulded candlestick, £8.99, Gisela Graham
- 10 Bicos red wine glass, £18, Micucci Interiors
- 11 Five-pearl candlesticks, £150 each, Margit Wittig
- 12 Ilaria side table in Mustard, £490, Ceraudo
- 13 Olivia Silk Ikat cushion in Goldenrod, £125, Jennifer Manners
- 14 Large check lambswool throw in Turquoise, £380, Johnstons of Elgin x Ben Pentreath
- 15 Small matchstriker in Orchid, £430, Nina Campbell
- 16 Luxury Tiddlywinks set, £235, Noble Macmillan
- 17 Colour dip mugs, £55 for a set of four, Fenella Smith





1



2



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6



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Classic Taste

1 Narrow Seaweed tray, £36, Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler

2 Profumi Luchino designer plate Palazzo Centauro, £150, Ginori 1735

3 Delft Ivory hot water bottle, £30, The Newt

4 Marla Decanters, set of two, £527, Arteriors

5 Green Swirl glass bauble, £22 or £120 for a box of six, Issy Granger

6 Wave Edge letter sorter, Malachite, £185, Pentreath & Hall

7 Silver-plated Pheasant bottle stopper, £27, Joanna Wood

8 Feather Quill Bronze letter opener, £480, Cox London

9 Tole Painted Tulipiere, £1,980, Sybil Colefax & John Fowler

10 Monogrammed Silk Velvet Pom Pom Christmas stocking, Burgundy, £83, Rebecca Udall

11 Wherwell Linen Cushion Blush Fringe, £220, Inchyra

12 Hera cotton sateen super king duvet cover set, £395, Liberty

13 Misse and Turlu bookends, £80, Oka

14 Baroque Harvest tablecloth, from £88, Mrs Alice

15 The Little Luxuries Hamper, £110, Fortnum & Mason



8



9



13



14



10



11



12



15



Luxe Lover

- 1 Sparkling Wine gift box, £80, Highgrove
- 2 Cafetiere, 24 Carat Gold, £190, Feldspar
- 3 Glitz Celebrate Copa Gin glass, Gold, £49 for a pair, Dartington Crystal
- 4 The Tuscan Sunset ceramic scented candle, £58, Chase and Wonder
- 5 Luxury dominoes set, £725, Katharine Pooley
- 6 Agate Stone and Gold bottle opener and stopper set, £25, Honey Bee Home
- 7 Bone bowl, brass, small, £160, Tom Dixon
- 8 Kurt S Adler Gold Embellished tree topper, £79, Amara
- 9 Pierre soap dispenser with brass pump £492, Waterworks
- 10 Large Gold Striped jug, £120, Matilda Goad & Co
- 11 Women's Ivory silk pyjamas in, £267, Gingerlily
- 12 The Most Fancy Italian Wool Blanket, Bandana Print, Sand/Cream, £400, Desmond & Dempsey
- 13 Midnight Musk and Amber Cologne, £115, Jo Malone London
- 14 Fletcher Lamp, £894, with Bongo shade, £221, Porta Romana
- 15 Catherine Lansfield Studio Glamour Sequin Gold 16-piece set, £88, Portmeirion
- 16 Malachite & Shagreen frame, from £695, Katharine Pooley ▶



Pattern Seeker

- 1** Kashmiri folk floral papier mache baubles, £7.50 each, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
- 2** Katrin Moyer Green Garland bulb bowl, £320, The Shop Floor Project
- 3** Over The Rainbow tote bag, £30, Wanderlost and Found
- 4** Bloomin Marvellous Blush Green placemat, £15, Divine Savages x Beija Flor
- 5** William Morris gloves and handcream, £24.99, Dobbies
- 6** The Night Rose and The Winter Rose velvet stockings, £250 each, Velvet Linen
- 7** Cotton Indian hand block print dressing gown in Green, £49, Helen Loveday
- 8** Sibella antique brass table lamp, £245 with Tyrolean print lampshade, £280, Mind The Gap
- 9** Morris Bourne silk tie, £35, Fox & Chave
- 10** 12 Days of Christmas suitcase hamper, £110, Liberty
- 11** Dessert plate, £16, House of Hackney x Anthropologie
- 12** Teal bouquet velvet pouch, £60, Susi Bellamy
- 13** Box of 12 paper-covered patterned pencils, £42, Cambridge Imprint
- 14** Hand block-printed journals, £70 each, Molly Mahon
- 15** Hyacinth cushion, £125; Golden Lily cushion, £160, Archive by Sanderson Design



Natural Soul

- 1** Alpaca Striped throw in Green, £190.50, ND On The Green
- 2** Mini hand-painted bauble set of six, £23, Toast
- 3** The Backward Vendor olive box III, £1,200, The New Craftsmen
- 4** Seaspray slouchy organic jute basket, £79, The Braided Rug Company
- 5** Giannini lace brown leather notebook, £75, Artemest
- 6** Sockins sofa sock in Natural Stripe, £19, Loaf
- 7** Reusable colourful glass straws, £10, John Lewis & Partners
- 8** Limited edition British wildflowers art print, £45, Wildflower Illustration Co.
- 9** Arya reversible silk cushion, £130, Daughters of Gaea
- 10** Botanical Accents painted metal planter, £29.99, Ivyline
- 11** Small Gava acacia wood trio server, £38, Soho Home
- 12** Pine garden tags packed in a bamboo bag, £10, Garden Trading
- 13** Fig Leaf Scented Home hamper, £150, Daylesford
- 14** Framed tray in polished English oak, £648, Rose Uniacke
- 15** Green organic glass vase with tassels, £27, Heavenly Homes and Gardens,
- 16** Thyme farmhouse water jug in green, £60, Bertoli



Little Ones

- 1 Embroidered snowglobe decoration, £6.50, FatFace
- 2 DIY Gingerbread House Kit, £35, Biscuiteers
- 3 Safari felt garland, £19.99, Lights4fun
- 4 Wooden rabbit clock, £35, Sundays Daughter
- 5 Merry Mouse with Present plush toy, £24, Jellycat
- 6 Resuable quilted advent calender in Radish, £245, Tori Murphy
- 7 Classic Winter Solstice pyjamas, from £30, The White Company
- 8 Gianni Bankuan grass giraffe bookshelf, £325, Ella James
- 9 A Home-Made House craft box, £32, Lots of Lovely Art
- 10 Little Dutch wooden toy xylophone, £15, Cuckooland
- 11 Children's bamboo toothbrush Wild Wonders, £3.95, Rex London
- 12 Peter Rabbit children's garden tool bag gift set, £31.95, Annabel James
- 13 Forest School Adventure book, £16.99, Natural History Museum
- 14 Polar Bear cushion in duck egg blue; Penguin cushion and Saturn & Stars cushion, both cream velvet, £125 each, Jan Constantine
- 15 The British Woodland Den kit, £50, The Den Kit Company



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stockwellceramics.com



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creamcornwall.co.uk



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Enchanting HIDEAWAY

After being warmly welcomed into village life, Charlotte Clifford has enjoyed learning all about her husband Peter's rich family history

FEATURE CLAIR WAYMAN STYLING CHAMIL LIYANAARACHCHI & CLAIR WAYMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH

The fireplace in the panelled drawing room is flanked by Corinthian-style pilasters and has a painting depicting Bristol Docks above it. The writing desk houses exquisite collections of china including a Chamberlain Worcester tea service. The rug from Chorley's auction house and Palau red cushion from Oka add warmth. The mirror tray on the ottoman is from The Danes.



ABOVE A glorious 1965 portrait of Peter's grandmother Henriette, by John Teasdale, hangs in the dining room. Linen tablecloths from Neptune and Toast are layered with rattan underplates by Oka and antique china.

LEFT The portrait depicts Henriette's father, Major Henry Clifford, who was killed in action in 1917. Tealight glasses from The Danes create a cosy glow.

Tucked away in a quiet pocket of Gloucestershire, majestic Frampton Court, built from Bath stone in the early 18th century, is situated in the heart of the charming village of Frampton on Severn. At the front, steps lead up to the perfectly symmetrical facade with a central pediment and four iconic pilasters flanking a giant oak door. A footpath at the back of the property meanders through vast, grazed parkland, along a lake teeming with birdlife, and looking up at the house from this angle is an equally breathtaking sight.

Grade I listed Frampton Court is part of a complex working estate covering around 1,500 acres and has been in the Clifford family since the 11th century. Land in Frampton was given to a Norman nobleman, Drogo Fitz Pons, in 1086 for his services to William The Conqueror. It was Drogo's grandson, Walter, from Clifford in Herefordshire, who brought the family name to Gloucestershire. The fortunes of the Cliffords ebbed and flowed through the centuries, but they have shown a resolute determination to survive. Along with his wife Charlotte, the newest generation, Peter Clifford, recently took over the running of the estate from his parents, Janie and Rollo. ▶

The Georgian pewter plates in the grand entrance hall were part of Richard Clutterbuck's first dinner service and made in Bristol. A faux berry wreath from Lights4Fun adds a festive touch. The Zacke Loganberry cushion is from Oka.



The morning room is an intimate space with armchairs covered in the Frampton Flora fabric (now discontinued). Portraits depict Peter's grandmother Henriette and her father Major Henry Clifford. The pre-lit garland from Lights4Fun has been embellished with glass candlesticks and ribbon from The Danes. The rug is from Chorley's auction house.





ABOVE A selection of the 19th-century Frampton Flora watercolours painted by female members of the Clifford family between 1828 and 1851 hang in the morning room. Cushions in Frampton Flora fabric (now discontinued) have been paired with Liliash cushions in Sage from Oka.

Frampton Court is the ‘jewel in the crown’ of the estate and was built by Richard Clutterbuck in 1731, replacing a previous house built by his father, William, who was the grandson of John Clifford. Richard made his fortune as Head of the Custom House in Bristol and seafaring motifs can be seen throughout the house, including shell carvings on mantelpieces. He was a flamboyant bachelor and loved to host extravagant parties at the Court. The house was built to impress in a bold Palladian and Baroque style with intricately carved panelling, Greek-style Corinthian pilasters and blue Bristol Delft tiled fireplaces.

When Charlotte and Peter took over the running of the estate, they gave the Court a much-needed refresh, which started just after lockdown in April 2020 and continued for eight months. The pair did a lot of the work themselves, repainting, removing old carpet, sanding floorboards, updating bedrooms, and general repairs.

BELOW Tempting mince pies from Bettys await on the kitchen table made by carpenter Richard Knight using wood from the estate. The

Castille soft tumbled marble limestone floor tiles are from Beswick Stone and the pendant is from John Lewis & Partners.



‘There is so much history here – everything in the house has a story to tell; it’s like being in a museum, but in a good way’

They also enlisted the help of skilled tradespeople that live on the estate, who repaired floorboards and installed more up-to-date heating. “The house was very tired in places – we replaced the ancient Aga with an Everhot oven in the kitchen and added limestone floors with underfloor heating. It was so cold before – I remember we could see our breath. We’d dress our daughter, Mabel, in layers of clothes, a dressing gown and hat, just to eat breakfast,” laughs Charlotte.

Beautiful 18th-century antiques and paintings have been passed down through the generations. “There is so much history here – everything in the house has a story to tell; it’s like being in a museum, but in a good way,” says Charlotte. The attic is a treasure trove, full of archives dating back to the 11th century, and in the 1980s, around 300 exquisite Victorian botanical watercolours were discovered up there. Painted by four unmarried Clifford sisters and their aunts between 1828 and 1851, the paintings depict flora ▶

BELOW A faux red berry wreath from Lights4Fun has been embellished with eucalyptus and fir.

BOTTOM To find out more about short-term holiday stays at Frampton Court visit framptoncourtestate.co.uk

RIGHT Charlotte sits on the oak entrance hall stairs with a Jamaican mahogany balustrade. Inlaid holly bands around each step reflected candlelight for a safer climb. Embellished Pre-lit garlands are from Lights4Fun.



the ladies would have found in the local area. In 1985, nature writer Richard Mabey published *The Frampton Flora*, an illustrated book documenting the collection, and a textile company produced fabric that was inspired by the paintings. Now some of these artworks have been framed and proudly hang around the house.

Charlotte initially thought that becoming part of a big family with such a rich history might be a little intimidating, but thanks to the Cliffords' down-to-earth, easy-going nature, she felt at home from the start and loves living in such a close-knit community. "Peter's family have done so much for the village over the years, and naturally, our lives are all intertwined - I really enjoy being part of such a thriving village community."

Christmas is the family's favourite time of year, when everyone comes together to celebrate. "We take part in some much-loved village traditions, including decorating the church with the children. One of the highlights is a traditional craft fair at the Wool Barn



‘The Court is a great winter house – the dark panelling creates such a moody, romantic atmosphere. I love wrapping up and reading books here’

where villagers sell their handmade wares, including wreaths, Christmas stockings, pottery and jewellery, and farmers bring walnuts and chestnuts. It’s always cold, but there’s a fire pit where we all gather to drink mulled wine,” says Charlotte.

Charlotte’s mother-in-law, Janie, hosts lunches and dinners every day from Christmas Eve until New Year’s Day. “Janie is an amazing hostess and takes Christmas preparations very seriously. She has a recipe book that is also a schedule of what to prepare in the months leading up to the big day. On Christmas Eve, everyone congregates at the Court or Janie and Rollo’s house across the road. Someone’s on the piano, the little ones hand out mince pies and we sing Christmas carols.” Charlotte admits everyone has busy lives and it

is hard to get all the family in one place at the same time, “but with Christmas, you don’t have an excuse because it’s your time to rest, relax and recover, which is normally when Pete gets ill because it’s the only time that he stops,” laughs Charlotte.

“I especially love Boxing Day because it’s so relaxed, and Janie provides the most incredible Victorian-style banquet. She’ll serve ham from her pigs, left-over Turkey and vegetables from her garden; everything is homemade. It’s a really long, slow lunch that’ll last for five hours. The kids get bored after about 40 minutes and go off and play while the grown-ups eat, drink and chat for hours and hours,” says Charlotte. “I think the Court is a great winter house – the dark wood panelling creates such a moody, romantic atmosphere ▶

ABOVE The tapestry in the principal bedroom was woven by Huguenot refugees for the house in 1731. The 18th-century Hepplewhite bed has hangings dating from the 17th century. Cushions from Oka and a Pooky lampshade complete the look. The rattan tray is from Neptune.



– the spaces come to life at night in the glowing candlelight. I love wrapping up, being cosy and reading books here,” says Charlotte.

A lot of responsibility comes with running the estate, and Charlotte and Peter have taken on the challenge with gusto. “There’s always a lot going on – we have the lakes and the fishing syndicate, the sailing club, and all the tenants that live in houses on the estate,” says Charlotte. They also have wedding venues, plus Frampton Court and other properties on the estate are available for short-term holiday rentals. The family grow milled wheat and rye on their arable land, but also leave many acres untouched as a natural habitat for wildlife.

“Frampton is the epitome of the English countryside because it has all the elements – the lakes are beautifully tranquil and the woodland attracts so much wildlife. I don’t think many people are even aware that we’re here. It’s as beautiful as the Cotswolds, but we’re so hidden away,” muses Charlotte. ■

ABOVE Charlotte chose Lewis & Wood’s Adam’s Eden wallpaper in soft pastels for the Rosamund bedroom. The Stripe Frilly cushions are by Alice Palmer while the Rattle lamp bases and scalloped empire shades in Marshmallow linen are by Pooky.

LEFT The original fireplace in the Flora bedroom features pretty blue Bristol Delft tiles. Charlotte found the antique marble table lamps in the attic.

Ehrman

TAPESTRY



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Puffin £60

These wonderful needlepoint kits were designed by Magie Hollingworth during the pandemic last year. "Stitching was my salvation" she said as it was for thousands of others. It was a lifesaver giving people a sense of normality, an oasis of calm and an escape from the news.

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Time to CELEBRATE

With a background in design, Henrietta Balmain has created a delightfully whimsical retreat that feels especially cosy and inviting during the festive season

FEATURE BELLA MEZGER PHOTOGRAPHY ASTRID TEMPLIER
STYLING CLAIR WAYMAN & CHAMIL LIYANAARACHCHI

The Dart armchair, in Warwick's Wolseley fabric, sits next to an ottoman covered in Fermoie's Aylsham, both from Balmain & Balmain. A Lights4fun red berry wreath and pre-lit garland have been embellished with foraged foliage. The Alberg Fir 6ft Christmas tree is also from Lights for Fun. The presents are in wrapping paper from The Danes and Molly Mahon.





An old school bench in the entrance hall is covered in Ian Sanderson's Hexa, with the blinds above in fabric by Manuel Canovas.

TOP LEFT Henrietta Balmain outside her cottage in Wiltshire, with lurcher, Puffin. **ABOVE** The cosy thatched cottage dates back to the 17th century. **RIGHT** The walls of the snug are painted in Jonquil by Edward Bulmer Natural Paint. Balmain & Balmain's Stour sofa is in Linwood's Luna, and the Lambourne chair is in Pyjama Stripe by Ian Sanderson. **FAR RIGHT** The family's Jack Russell, Gentoo waits patiently for a treat.





‘I love bringing in wild berries and having cyclamen around the house, and the children and I always make a wreath for the front door’

Built in the 17th century, Henrietta Balmain’s thatched cottage stands in the chalk downlands of North Wessex, in a village whose windmill still produces wholemeal stone-ground flour. At Christmas, the house is aglow with candlelight, and achieves the perfect balance between artful layering and festive cheer. “We decorate together and bring out favourite decorations made years ago by the children,” Henrietta says. “Lights are put up outside along the thatch, which is so pretty, and I love bringing in wild berries and having cyclamen around the house, and the children and I always make a wreath for the front door. We pop on our winter gear and head out. Everything comes from the hedgerows. We have our favourite places to go.”

Henrietta, her husband Simon Gillespie, their children, George, 17 and Isabelle, 15, and their dogs

Gentoo and Puffin, were renting in the village after moving out of London a few years previously when they bought the cottage in 2010. “When we originally looked at the house, the agent told us not to bother because we were too tall for it,” laughs Henrietta. “There was lots to do, but it wasn’t unrealistic and we knew what we were in for as we’d done it before in London.”

In the original layout, the front door opened straight into a facing wall and a left turn to the drawing room with a kite-winder staircase on one side of a large hearth, and a cavernous cupboard that stretches up through the ceiling on the other. This ‘coffin-drop’, necessitated by the narrow and precarious nature of the staircase, is still there in the guise of an airing cupboard. The obstructive wall, however, has been demolished and allows you to enter what is now a ▶

TOP LEFT The kitchen units, by St Cross Kitchens, are painted in Crimson by Zoffany Paints while the island is painted in Beetlenut by Paint & Paper Library. The blinds, in the same GP & J Baker Magnolia as the dining room, tie the rooms together. The ceiling and wall lights are from Original BTC. A cake from Bettys adds to the festive feel.



The house has offered Henrietta the chance to put what she loves most about her business into practice – playing with colour and pattern

snug with the kitchen and dining room beyond. The staircase has been relocated to the dining room, and upstairs has been reconfigured to create four bedrooms. “We changed the kitchen dramatically and extended it into the utility room, meaning we gained windows and some much-needed height.”

Henrietta and Simon undertook further work 10 years after moving in to create more space and improve the flow. The couple reconfigured the kitchen, and created a back door, downstairs loo, dog room, laundry and pantry. “We wanted somewhere for muddy dogs and boots and we were crying out for a bigger kitchen,” Henrietta says. “It’s the best thing we’ve done, and we’ve created a wonderful family home, even though George still bumps his head in some rooms!”

For the past eight years, Henrietta has run Balmain & Balmain, a bespoke furniture business that was founded by her parents in 1987. “My parents had renovated an old rectory in Dorset and a friend suggested that they sell furniture as they had these amazing rooms to show it in,” she explains. “They collaborated with some brilliant makers and started

designing.” To this day, the furniture continues to be made in the same workshop in Dorset.

It was not the intention that Henrietta would take over but having spent ten years at Sibyl Colefax and John Fowler, it made sense. “One day Dad rang up and said, ‘I’ve been talking to your mother and we think you should take over,’” she says. “I asked when and he said ‘now’. And that was pretty much when he downed tools. It was extraordinary. It was quite quiet at the time and since then I have started to build it back up again.”

The drawing room is a happy amalgam of the Balmain & Balmain range, as well as inherited art and treasures from various travels, and is where customers can come to view the furniture for themselves. “It helps people envisage what it’s going to look like in a room,” Henrietta says, “and rather than going to a showroom, they’re seeing it in a realistic space.”

Unsurprisingly Henrietta has a focus on quality: “I try to make everything in the house timeless and the things that we buy tend to be things that will last. I always say that with furniture, you should buy the ►

ABOVE By enlarging the space between the dining room and kitchen the two feel more united. The glass candlesticks are from The Danes, while the Cherry Cake paper used to wrap presents on the chest is from Molly Mahon. The Deep Coral napkins are from Cologne & Cotton.



Colefax and Fowler's Squiggle wallpaper and GP & J Baker's Magnolia curtain fabric make for a cosy winter dining room. The Balmain & Balmain Kennet dining chairs are covered in Jet Collection's Honeycomb weave in Blossom Pink and Fermoie's Wicker. The rug is by Tate & Darby and the Fali wine glasses in teal are from Nkuku.



ABOVE A Balmain & Balmain Arun chair covered in Batik in Old Rose by Susan Deliss sits in a corner of the drawing room which leads into Henrietta's office. The round brass trays and tea light glasses are from The Danes. **RIGHT & FAR RIGHT** The principal bedroom, which was originally the hay barn, is painted in Tallow by Farrow & Ball. The quilt and cushions are from Projekityyny while the Rufus lamp base and straight empire shade in rose dupion silk are from Pooky.





‘On Christmas morning we all pile into bed to open stockings and then we spend the rest of the day with family’

ABOVE LEFT The Roman blind in the bathroom is in a Zoffany fabric. A Salvesen Graham Great Check cushion in Rose sits on an antique chair.

ABOVE RIGHT The Lolita lamp and scalloped empire shade are from Pooky and the blue cushion fabric is from Mahala Textiles. The wreath on the door is from Lights4fun.

most expensive thing you can afford as it’s going to be with you for a long time.” She is a proponent of repurposing and many of the window dressings have taken up residence in new settings over the years – for example, the raspberry drawing room curtains that were once in Henrietta’s childhood bedroom have been refreshed with a floral Pierre Frey border.

The lead-up to Christmas is all-consuming for Henrietta with customers wanting furniture in time for December. When the final delivery has been made, it is all hands on deck to prepare the house. Christmas Eve involves collecting the turkey from Sumbler’s in Marlborough. “It’s one of those queues you don’t mind as there’s a plate of sausage rolls at the end,” Henrietta laughs.

The kitchen comes into its own at Christmas, the glorious tones of red setting off the foliage and

providing the warmth and cosiness Henrietta chose them for. When it comes to the main event, George and Isabelle are on brandy butter and bread sauce duty, while Henrietta oversees the preparation of the Brussels sprouts with chestnuts and sage butter, cranberry sauce, stuffing and roast potatoes. “On Christmas morning we all pile into bed to open stockings and then spend the rest of the day with family. I love it and by the end of the day we collapse in a heap,” she says.

The house has offered Henrietta the chance to put what she loves most about her business into practice – playing with colour and pattern. “Working with fabrics is the best bit. I would happily do that all the time,” she says. Her delight in this is evident in a home that stands the test of time and provides a joyful backdrop to Christmas festivities. ■



Candlelit CHRISTMAS

The meticulous restoration of a 19th-century country house has given Victoria Edwards the perfect backdrop for Christmas, surrounded by family and friends

FEATURE AMANDA HARLING PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL

Ceiling lanterns from Eichholtz support the welcoming ambience provided by the multitude of candles in the dining hall. The panelling is in Little Greene's Limestone while the dining chairs and convex mirror are by Oka.





ABOVE A candelabra from One World forms the centrepiece of the arrangement of winter foliage and candles by floral designer Dora Kovacs.

There can be few houses in South East England that have a view to match the one Victoria Edwards wakes up to every morning. “On fine, clear days, I can see for miles, but on wintry mornings when the snow is falling, the effect is magical – I feel as if I’m in the clouds,” she says, putting the finishing touch to the dining table laid ready for the Christmas Eve family party.

“We spend Christmas at home every year with the entire family and usually a few friends too. My parents live in the separate wing next door, so they go home to bed, but my brother, his wife, and their children will be staying; my husband’s parents will also be here,

along with my great uncle. With ages ranging from four to 94, it’s guaranteed fun, games and laughter,” Victoria explains. “My great uncle is a pianist, so the celebrations start with a glass or two of champagne and everyone singing Christmas carols around the piano in the drawing room. A cold seafood supper follows that – a tradition started by my grandfather.

“On Christmas morning, I’m up early to pop the turkey in the oven and then once everyone is up, we tuck into a brunch of Buck’s Fizz, croissants and sausage rolls before the excitement of stockings and the children’s present opening. Then it’s time for some fresh air and a brisk country walk with the dogs to work up an appetite for our candlelit Christmas ▶



RIGHT The kitchen is in the newly built extension. Painted in Little Greene’s Mortar, the bespoke cabinetry was made by Forest Designs.

‘The combination of amazing views, the baronial proportions and the style of the building made it irresistible’



LEFT Benefiting from an enviable location with panoramic views across the southern counties, Manor View, which dates from the late 1800s, was built in an Arts and Crafts style using local stone.



ABOVE With French windows opening onto the terrace, the informal dining area in the spacious kitchen extension takes full advantage of the sensational views. Decorative paper snowflakes from The Danes and cosy sheepskins from Wildash London add to the cosy festive mood.

dinner with all the traditional trimmings, such as the chestnut stuffing for the turkey. A choice of puddings including trifle and chocolate mousse made to my great-grandmother's delicious recipes follow."

Victoria and her husband David bought the house seven years ago but spent two years renovating it. "I'm a chartered surveyor, and when a friend who was looking to move to the area asked me to advise her,

I stumbled upon details of this house," Victoria explains. "It was in a terrible state, having been neglected for decades, but I fell in love with it on sight. Built in an Arts and Crafts style during the 1880s and later extended in various directions, I could see it required a complete overhaul. However, the combination of amazing views over Kent and Sussex, the baronial proportions and the style of the building made it irresistible as far as I was concerned. David wasn't quite as enthusiastic, knowing what an upheaval it would be, but he recognised that,

ultimately, it would be worth the effort. His major concern was that its size wouldn't feel welcoming, so when it came to the overall look, I was mindful of creating a warm, cosy ambience."

With her professional background, Victoria could plan every aspect of the project herself. "I know every inch of the house, having done detailed drawings for all the trades," she says. "With a property of this age and size, inevitably, there were unforeseen problems, such as finding a series of forgotten underground rooms and a passage leading to a long-since demolished ballroom. We turned that into a very useful wine cellar."

On the ground floor, the decision to reinstate the original layout of the beamed entrance hall made a dramatic difference. "Previous owners had built a wall across the room, which ruined the proportions, but now it's been opened up, it's a perfect party space," Victoria explains. "A section of panelling had to be



RIGHT Lit by a trio of ceiling lanterns from Jim Lawrence, the island unit has a work surface of Himalayan white granite from Vitruvius. At the far end of the room is the family sitting area, where L-shaped modular seating by Made.com faces a log burner set within an After The Antique fire surround.



‘With ages ranging from four to 94, it’s guaranteed fun, games and laughter’

made to match the original, but now it’s painted, you can’t tell the difference.” Choosing the paint colours for the house required a long process of trial and error. “The hall is painted in a mix of Little Greene’s Limestone and Mortar. I had around 40 tester pots and would spend hours mixing them to get the correct shade for each room.”

As soon as work was underway, Victoria began sourcing furniture and accessories: “I was fortunate in that there were two vintage specialist dealers nearby – Judie Sheriff of Meldon House & Home and The Vintage Home Company in Westerham. The Oka outlet store is also close by, so I would drive over every week to see what was available. Some pieces, such as ▶

LEFT To live in a house with such an expansive view was an irresistible prospect for Victoria, seen here with Tibetan terrier Baxter. The house is available for location shoots at locationcreation.co.uk/locations/manor-view



‘The celebrations start with everyone singing Christmas carols around the piano’

ABOVE Victoria’s decision to leave the windows free of curtains gives the drawing room a light, contemporary touch. The grand piano left in the house by the former owners comes into its own on Christmas morning.

RIGHT Framed by a Christmas garland of yew and pine cones, Molly, the family’s Goldendoodle, welcomes guests at the front door.

the mirror and the mercury glass candlesticks above the drawing room fireplace, were given to us by David’s mother, who used to have an antique shop in Dorking. The grand piano was here in the house when we bought it, along with the large mirror in our bedroom – they’re a link with the past, as are the tub chairs in the drawing room that belonged to my grandparents, now reupholstered in ivory linen.”

The spacious kitchen, dining and living area, incorporating a large marble-topped island unit, was designed down to the last detail by Victoria. “That whole area is newly built, and whilst the kitchen layout is based on my obsession with symmetry, windows along the two exterior walls maximise the view and the sense of light,” she says. “A friend suggested that the house and pool area would make a great location for film and photography shoots, so it’s now earning its keep. I’m told that it’s the light, spacious aspect of ▶



During the festive season, the focal point of the drawing room is undoubtedly the Christmas tree. The elegant fireplace was sourced from After The Antique while the walls are in a mixture of Little Greene's Limestone and Mortar paints.





ABOVE Christmas gifts await guests in this attic bedroom. The stool and bedside cabinets are from Oka. The buttoned headboard and plenty of cushions on the Sealy ottoman bed add to the sense of comfort.

RIGHT A classic combination of marble and mirror establishes a 1930s look for the double aspect bathroom

where twin Charterhouse basins by Lefroy Brooks and an Aurelius bath from CP Hart continue the theme.

BELOW An Edwardian overmantel mirror painted to match the walls hangs above daughter Isabella's dressing table, where paper trees and snowflakes join ornamental reindeer, all by The Danes.





‘I get all the Christmas decorating done by the first of December. It’s a magical time and I want to make the most of it’

the rooms and the understated colour scheme that make it appealing. It’s gratifying to know that all my hard work has been appreciated.”

Explaining how her passion for Christmas comes from her mother, who often lends a hand ‘decking the halls’, Victoria says: “When we were children, there was a Christmas tree in every room, and one year, we had one that touched the ceiling, which I thought was absolutely amazing.”

Victoria ensures the festive spirit permeates every corner of her house, with Christmas trees and decorations adding sparkle upstairs and downstairs. “It takes about three weeks to get the whole house prepared; to date, I have around 40 boxes of Christmas decorations, and when I get them all out of the store room, it looks as though we are about to move house. I like to get all the Christmas decorating done by the first of December so the house looks festive for the month leading up to Christmas and New Year. It’s a magical time, and I want to make the most of it.” ■

ABOVE & RIGHT
The principal bedroom suite includes a dressing area and adjacent bathroom. Victoria reconfigured the bedroom layout to make space for a dressing table and a double row of built-in wardrobes by Forest Design. A television with a lift mechanism is neatly concealed in the chest at the foot of the bed.





THIS PAGE & OPPOSITE
Claude the wire-haired
dachshund is very at
home on a vintage sofa
in the entrance hall.
Charlotte raids the
garden to create the
natural decorations
inside and outside the
house. The bespoke stair
runner by Tim Page
Carpets has a different
pattern on every tread
and dictated the colours
used throughout
the interiors.



LIVING HISTORY

Foraged greenery and homemade decorations form the backbone of Christmas for Bracon Hall in Norfolk's new generation of guardians

FEATURE & STYLING KERRY HARPER-CUSS PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH

Many wish lists for idyllic Christmas settings would include a sweeping staircase to garland, a convivial kitchen, wood fires, a huge table to seat all the family for a lively festive meal and a location that could only get more magical if it snowed. With Georgian proportions and elegantly informal interiors, Bracon Hall certainly lives up to that dream.

Home to Humphrey and Charlotte Berney, their daughters Otilie, six, and Cecilia, four, and two family dogs, the property sits within its own 400-acre-estate. Open skies above flat Norfolk countryside mean that as darkness falls, there is no light pollution to compete with the twinkle of fairy lights twined around the stone portico.

Inside, the house retains a sense of grandeur but – like the lovely family that lives in it – without a jot of pretension. Festive decorations are foraged from the garden or deliberately homemade, and almost every piece of art, furniture or accessory has been chosen to echo a memory or build on the story of this happy, bustling household. Yet just six years ago, the house was in a state of disrepair.

Humphrey – part of Classic Brit Award-winning vocal trio Blake – inherited Bracon Hall in 2016 from his great-uncle Richard and great-aunt Peg. The Berney family has an unbroken line in Norfolk dating back some 900 years, and at least five generations have lived on this estate. When news of the inheritance came, he and Charlotte were living in London with ►



ABOVE Humphrey and Charlotte are avid collectors of art, books, trinkets and intriguing *objets* such as the papier mâché head, all of which bring informality and warmth to the drawing room. The rug is from La Redoute, and the vibrant cushions and throw on the sofa are from Neptune.

their firstborn Otilie. “Great-uncle Richard and his wife never had children, and it was always sort of assumed that – in the traditional sense – the house would go to the next Berney boy, but, of course, there was no guarantee in that,” explains Humphrey. “They absolutely adored this place, but in their latter years they weren’t in a position to really look after it, so it had fallen into a bad state. Because of the family history, I definitely felt a responsibility of being a guardian for the next generation. Charlotte and I knew that if we were lucky enough to inherit, there was no question about not taking on the challenge and trying to create the best family environment for our girls.”

Charlotte continues, “When we became the new owners in August 2016, there was no central heating, mould in lots of rooms, and the ceilings needed complete renovation. Some ceilings had been lowered to make it warmer, but most of the house was not

really liveable in. The barns at the back had no roofs, they had trees growing out of them, the walls were bowing by about a metre, and they were months away from falling down completely.”

The initial renovations took almost two years. At first, the couple oversaw these from London but moved to Norfolk to a nearby cottage in May 2018. Once the house was structurally sound and ceiling heights had been restored, they knocked the kitchen into the dining room, unbricked a former arch to install French windows, added new bathrooms, a new kitchen and wood-burning stoves, created a dressing room and en-suite bathroom within the principal bedroom and decorated throughout. Charlotte also gave birth to their second child before they moved in, in October 2018.

“I forget sometimes – until I look back at the old pictures – how much we have actually done,” says ▶



‘We wanted to create an eclectic and lived-in home, that acts as a map of our history and lives together, without it feeling like we had tried too hard’



LEFT Fox red Labrador Roland keeps on eye on proceedings at the entrance to Bracon Hall, which dates to 1830 and was built to be the stable block to a much larger property that was never built. The couple hire the property out as a location for filming, photography and events. For more information, visit braconhallestate.com

ABOVE LEFT The antique footstool provides the perfect place to play board games in front of the wood-burning stove. The walls are painted in a warm straw hue. Try Hay from Farrow & Ball for similar.

ABOVE RIGHT The new pink Aga, blue cabinetry and herringbone flooring are sympathetic to the house’s heritage but feel fitting for a new generation.

In the dining room, a Georgian dining table is teamed with mid-century chairs from a reclamation yard in Norfolk. The glass pendant lights from Rothschild & Bickers add subtle colour. The scallop edge tablecloth and napkins are from Birdie Fortescuece.



RIGHT The couple removed the wall between the kitchen and dining room and replaced the original Aga with the wood-burning stove that adds warmth and ambience at the centre of the open-plan room.

BELOW The expansive landing leads to all four of the bedrooms and three bathrooms. The vintage rocking horse came from Humphrey's mother. For a similar pink on the walls try Setting Plaster from Farrow & Ball.



Charlotte. "Lots of people said to us, 'That's so daunting!', but we never felt that. In fact, we'll be really sad when we've finally finished because we enjoy it so much... but there is still a great deal more renovation to do. Obviously, it costs a lot to do it all properly, so we hire out the house as a shoot location. It's been dressed for Christmas before in summer! We also let The Garden Cottage as a holiday home so we can keep reinvesting in renovations which will have to be much slower from now on."

Charlotte's creative background in fashion and homeware and her flair for colour and pattern is evident. Her experience running her former fashion label and working for brands such as Preen and Ted Baker - where she was head of homeware - have been invaluable.

The couple's tastes are a lovely combination. "Humph is traditional; I'm not quite so much. We are big collectors of anything and everything: artwork, trinkets, bits of random furniture. We've been collecting throughout our lives and a lot of those pieces gave starting points for the rooms," explains Charlotte. "We wanted to create an eclectic and lived-in home that acts as a little map of our history and our lives together. We wanted it to feel ►





‘It’s about personal objects, homemade decorations and making memories. We feel lucky to have such an amazing house to celebrate Christmas in’

warm and a little quirky without feeling like we had tried too hard.”

Their home is an enticing gathering space for family, friends and Humphrey’s musical colleagues. “Historically, it wasn’t a very sociable house, but we’ve filled it with a very noisy family and lots of friends. Humph’s family live just down the road, my mother comes for Christmas every year, and my brother often does, too. It’s a wonderful house for parties, and Christmas is no exception,” says Charlotte.

“When the house has been booked for a festive fashion shoot, stylists often position a huge tree under the stairwell. We sometimes do that, too, but this year it’s been lovely to experiment with having trees in two rooms instead. I especially love having the tree in the corner of the kitchen because it’s the room we use the most,” she continues. “I guess our Christmas style is like our approach to the art we collect. It’s a little eclectic and based on things we love rather than necessarily shiny, new and beautiful pieces. Each year we let the girls make or pick a new bauble, so everything on the tree has a bit of a story. For me, it’s about personal objects, homemade decorations and making memories. We feel very lucky to have such an amazing house to celebrate Christmas in.” ■

ABOVE Otilie, six and Cecilia, four, currently share a bedroom. Their beds are from an online auction site and the walls are painted in a bespoke-mixed pink (consider Rose Theatre by Mylands for similar).

RIGHT The French bed in the principal bedroom was an antique find and had already been restored by a dealer in Bristol.



charles church



A Gaggle of Geese Oil on canvas 22 x 28 inches

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A five-arm chandelier with lit candles hangs in a dark wood-paneled room. The chandelier has a central arm and four side arms, each holding a lit candle. The room features dark wood paneling with decorative carvings and a window with a grid pattern in the background.

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STYLE INSPIRATION

Our special section dedicated to interior design and decorating begins here ►

GILDED GLAMOUR

If hanging indoor wreaths in a central position above the fireplace, these metallic designs are sure to make a showstopping display. For a country Christmas scheme, position vases of foraged foliage and dried flowers sprayed in gold paint on the mantelpiece below the wreath. Alternatively, for a more contemporary look or a smart townhouse, use three different sizes – or several different styles – of wreath positioned diagonally across the wall. For full impact, hang this spray of gold mistletoe and pearl berries on a nearby light fitting. *Golden wreaths and decorations all from Curated Living*







CHRISTMAS: *Expertly Done*

We asked interior designers, florists, bakers and homeware stylists for the personal ideas, professional tips and family rituals that make their Christmas perfect



KATHARINE POOLEY

Interior designer

At our home in Oxfordshire (opposite, top left), there is no such thing in my mind as too much foliage at Christmas;

holly, pine and ivy all work beautifully well and have a classically elegant English feel.

Nothing beats the classic colour accent choice of dark red; add it with silk velvet ribbon, pomegranates scattered on tables and berries mixed into foliage. The scent of pine at Christmas is wonderfully evocative, and all the greenery will add to the classic Christmas tree arrangement to create a really 'wow' final effect.

My top tip is to festoon chandeliers, mantelpieces and doorways with foliage. It creates a magical effect and is more impactful than a simple

solitary tree – the more greenery, the better.

When we spend Christmas at Weatherstone House (opposite far left, left and above) in Devon, I like to create a comforting Christmas interior that reflects a simpler time – candles, natural garlands of ivy, pine and festive greenery, along with stones and shells from the surrounding beaches, inspire a relaxing informal tone. From the mantelpiece festooned with candles to the roaring fire and twinkling lights, there is a timeless festive feel. Early Paper White daffodils, with their fresh white blooms, add a

delicate scent and lightness to the room. The tree has old and new decorations with presents wrapped in marbled paper and tied with velvet ribbon to create a whimsical touch.

Spreading the Christmas vibe into multiple rooms is a wonderful way to make the festive season feel extra special. The boys' bunk room at Weatherstone has a grotto effect created with foliage and the miniature tree on the windowsill decorated with tiny glass baubles and surrounded by presents. Toy soldiers, paper stars and hand-knitted stockings add to the fun. ▶

‘When decorating generally, we vary the materials we use because it gives off a sense of grandeur, but for high-traffic areas, like stairs, opt for resin decorations, bows and non-breakable baubles’



DANI TAYLOR
Product and creative director, Cox & Cox

STYLING A GARLAND

Pre-lit garlands are the best investment for the festive decorator because they're battery-powered, and sockets can be a real challenge when trying to meet the top or

bottom of the stairs. You don't want cables snaking around the hallway. When attaching a garland to the stair, a swag will offer clear points to secure the garland, which works on the mantelpiece too.

Place your garland on the floor beneath your banister before you begin to see if you need more than one; if you need one and a half, double up in the centre. We always fix the ends (top and bottom of the stair) first, then meet in the middle. To secure the garland, use cable ties (remember to trim them and resist the temptation to over-tighten – it makes them hard to snip away when you want to take it down) and Command hooks for the mantelpiece.



Spend time zhuzhing your garland before you begin because it makes all the difference to the final look. This will allow you to go to town without being precious and to put your stamp on it.

Make an impact easily with space fillers like bows and flowers; these are not fragile and can be tied securely above a mantel or on a stair with a wire attachment or, for additional security, garden wire. If the bow itself is also wired, it can be styled beautifully to fill gaps in the length of the garland to achieve a more opulent look.

Once you have your main accessory, use it to decorate your tree and indoor wreath and better communicate that personal style in your festive home.

LIGHTING A TREE

The lights need to run around the front and back of the tree and have to be well-spaced before you begin the fun part of decorating. There's no easy shortcut – unless you go for a pre-lit tree. Pre-lit varieties avoid the scrabble to untangle wires as excited little decorators wait, and offer you the perfect finish because the spacing of lights per branch is just right.

I double up our lights to enjoy two looks from our tree. Team tree lights with an additional layer of lit decoration – either in the form of a battery-powered lit bauble or, new to the collection this year, a few remote-controlled candle lights. They don't require additional wires, so they're an easy way to get more from your tree. You can turn the brighter lights off for a rich atmosphere in the evening and top up the layer of low lights with a lit tree topper.



BIRDIE FORTESCUE
Homeware designer and founder, Birdie Fortescue

I used a garland of eucalyptus interspersed with berries as the bluish-green of the leaf

worked perfectly with the tablecloth. As the table is fairly narrow, this arrangement works so much better than squeezing in large vases. I love using groups of candlesticks and arranging them asymmetrically down a table in tonal colours and varying heights. It gives an interesting, quirky look and brings a table to life.

A tablecloth will always elevate a dining table. I have balanced a rich, floral tablecloth with muted red

embroidered linen placemats and napkins for contrast and impact. The colours are echoed in the hand-painted dinnerware and candlesticks for a layered and sumptuous effect.

When choosing a Christmas table colour palette, red and green are the much-loved favourite combination. However, try layering different shades and tones such as sage greens with soft corals and accents of teal for a modern twist on this classic pairing. ▶



JUSTIN VAN BREDA
Interior designer

I like to bring the winter inside with masses of holly and yew, as much green as possible, and I like to keep that organic feel in the garland, so it's not too pristine, keeping it asymmetrical and a bit mad. It really sets the stage and smells wonderful. I accent it with ribbon, fruit, or berries – whatever is in season.

On the table, I generally will have a cloth from one of my new fabrics and masses of ribbon. Then it is laid out



with my monogrammed mirror chargers and loads of candles. I like to have different sorts of candles – long dinner tapers, small votives flickering in coloured glass, church candles standing squat in silver bowls. Sometimes we will hang

a mobile – some sort of branch perhaps – over the table with glass globes with candles suspended from a fishing line like they're floating in the air. I like the table to be the focal point. It's all about entertaining and bringing everyone together, welcoming everyone to sit down, share a meal and celebrate.

I usually pick the misshapen ugly tree that no one wants – I give her a name every year – and I fill the gaps with gold-sprayed holly and hydrangea to make her look fabulous. I always have a tree in a corner, so it doesn't matter if there is an ugly side. And I hate the idea of an ugly tree going to waste having been cut down. Putting her in front of the mirror is a great trick as it means that you get double impact, giving depth to the room.

I like to fill the house with candles – pillars in every silver dish or salver I can lay my hands on and votives in cut glass tumblers on every surface. It gives such a lovely atmosphere on the cold dark days and calls everyone in.



EMMA DODI
Emma Dodi Cakes

When baking during the festive season, I think it's always important to use flavours that remind people of Christmas and bring back childhood memories. I always like to include a lot of chocolate. Some of our favourite flavours for Christmas are chocolate orange, chocolate cherry and chocolate hazelnut. This year I'm going to introduce warming cinnamon and decadent eggnog, too.

Macarons are great for Christmas and New Year as they can be served in so many settings, perhaps on beautiful antique trays or macaron towers at parties. They are the perfect treat as they are bite-size and can be easily had while holding a drink! Alternatively, they are frequently used for place settings in our boxes with bows to match.

Macarons are also great at times of celebration because they are the most perfect accompaniment to a glass of champagne. On Christmas Eve, our family and friends all get together and share some festive fizz with a couple of plates stacked with macarons decorated with hand-painted fir, holly and berries finished with a light touch of gold leaf.





'Fill the house with delicious scent with huge baskets, bowls or wooden crates of 'Ziva' paperwhites and forced hyacinth bulbs. Add twigs or branches to support them and bring a little height and drama to the party'



WILLOW CROSSLEY
Florist and author

I love using huge, dried allium heads as Christmas baubles. Save them when

they go over in the garden and dry them out by storing them somewhere dry and warm. Dot them all over the Christmas tree as you would a bauble - you want at least 10 for impact.

Christmas isn't Christmas without some sort of garland on the mantelpiece. I make my base up with box, yew, spruce and eucalyptus and then fill it in with dried whole limes, feather birds, dried peppercorns, wispy dried grasses, dried alliums and huge velvet bows. ▶



JOANNA WOOD

Interior designer

I love to forage for decorations – gather greenery and fir cones from the garden, park or forest – and display them with carefully placed candles. You would be amazed how much holly you can find, and it's very easy to refresh.

I often trim the branches on my Christmas tree and use some as a table garland; it makes a great base for styling. I wind ivy or holly up the stairs too. It's such a great sight when you walk in the door.



'One of the most effective things I ever did was spray some ivy leaves gold. Chop the head off a plant, and you've got a miniature Christmas tree'





CHRISSIE RUCKER
Founder, The White Company

It's become a bit of an annual competition between my girls and me to see who can create

the best combination of which gift wrap with which ribbon and which topper. I always feel a ribbon and a topper really make every gift feel more special. Once wrapped, tie presents with a complementary ribbon in a similar shade.

Opt for a contrasting texture or place thin ribbons on top of thicker ones for a layered look. A slightly opaque ribbon as a base always looks beautiful. Toppers are a lovely addition to any gift, or use small Christmas decorations to embellish packages and add a festive flourish. ▶



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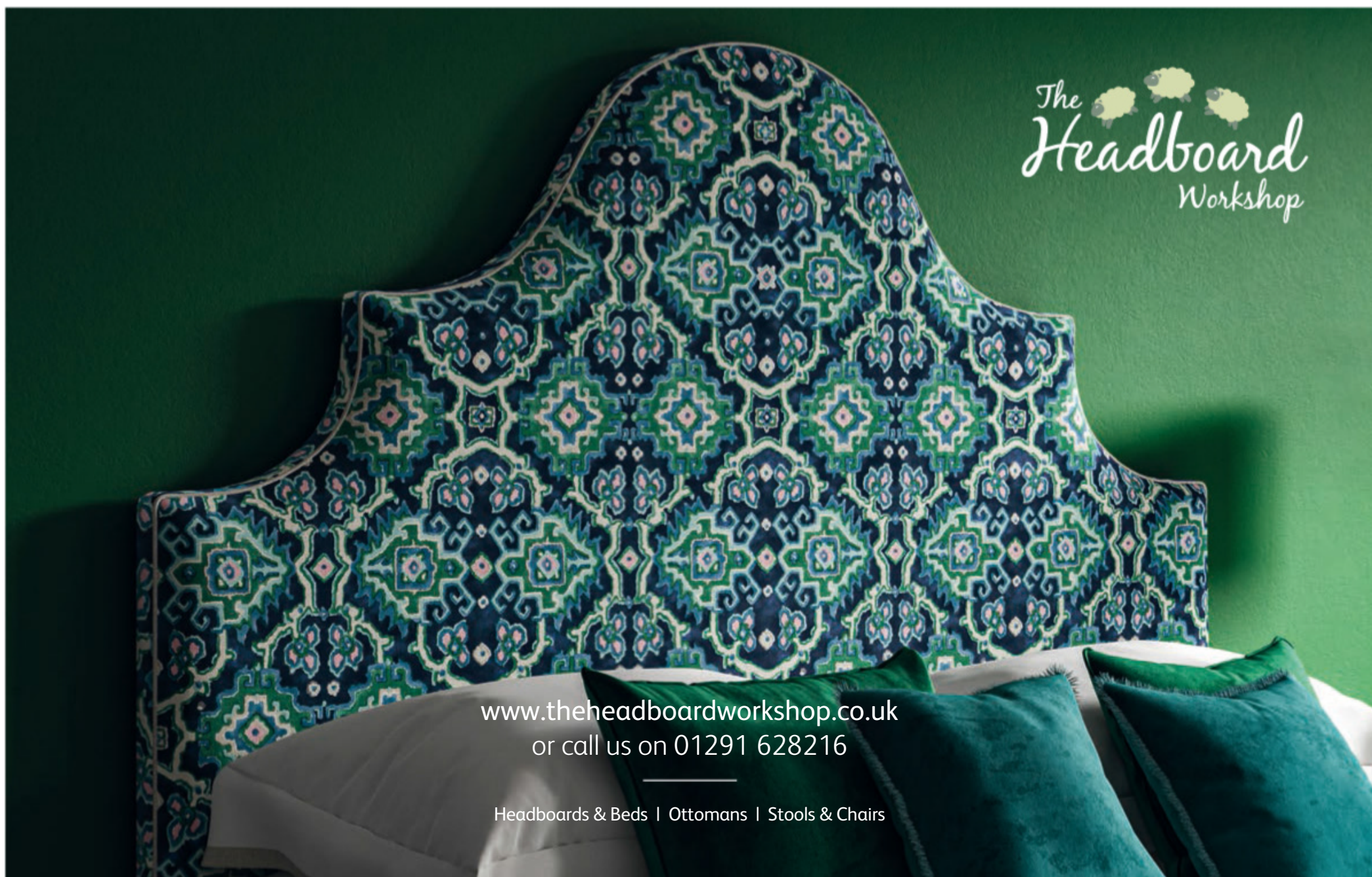


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‘Create an oversized foliage-dense wreath and place it on your front door at the start of the season to welcome guests’



**PHILIPPA
CRADDOCK**

*Florist, founder and
creative director,
Philippa Craddock*

Use fresh, seasonal ingredients – foraged greenery and hardy winter blooms will last and last at this time of year, even within the warmth of indoors. Buxus and Nordman fir

branches are particularly beautiful and hardy.

Keep your Christmas tree effortlessly elegant with a mass of reusable small, warm-glow lights. These will highlight the rich green of the tree’s branches and create a beautiful backdrop to your festivities.

Beyond decorating your Christmas tree and creating a wreath add simple branches of greenery to your mantelpiece and also place them in long troughs down your kitchen and/or dining table.

Focus on a combination of delicate greens, earthy pinks and deep aubergine tones this season, with hellebores, skimmia, nigella seed pods and limonium for elegant, seasonal designs with depth and beautiful texture. ▶



NINA CAMPBEL

Interior designer

For Christmas Day, I adore a mix of red Murano wine glasses and amethyst water glasses or a tablecloth created from vintage saris in deep burgundy. For festive dinner parties, I recommend a white tablecloth that can be dressed with gold, more white, and polished silver.

If your house is fairly small, it's essential to have a play with furniture to make your entertaining spaces freer – the last thing you want is people tripping over things, but, equally, it's important to retain atmosphere. Seating arrangements are important; two people sitting next to one another rarely end up chatting, so I like to use occasional chairs positioned at diagonals to encourage conversations between three or more people.

I believe every room needs a centrepiece of some description to create a focal point for the rest of the Christmas decorating. I must admit I like to go slightly over the top and have two statement decorations – one over a fireplace and one at the heart of a dining table. ■



'Every room needs a centrepiece to create a focal point for the rest of Christmas decorating'



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Deck THE HALLS

From locally grown spruces to luxurious faux trees, there is a multitude of options when it comes to choosing a Christmas tree. Before branching out, consider these expert tips

A Christmas tree will more often than not form the centrepiece of a scheme during the festive season and may even set the decorative tone for the rest of the home. Choosing the perfect tree can therefore be a quandary. Should it be real or faux? Large or small? Bought or rented? Here experts share their advice on combining practicality with decorative appeal. ▶

This real Nordmann Fir tree is cut to suit compact or narrow spaces but still look round and full. Nordmann Fir slim-cut tree, from £44.99, Dobbies



Large Maddox Star, £12, Garden Trading

The real

At this time of year, there is no shortage of freshly cut Christmas trees, and paying attention to a tree's ethical and sustainable production is key to a successful purchase.

The first step is to ensure that a tree's growing journey is traceable from start to finish. Sourcing locally ensures a low carbon footprint because trees will be home-grown rather than imported. The British Christmas Tree Growers' Association (bctga.co.uk) offers a list of growers, searchable by region or postcode, who raise the best quality spruces in sustainable plantations. "Buying in this way will help reduce transportation impact while ensuring that you source a tree grown with a high level of skill, expertise and attention," says Jenny Letts of Stoke Goldington Christmas Trees. "It's also a great way of supporting local business."

When it comes to ecological credentials, it is worth bearing in mind that trees capture carbon throughout their growth and can be an environmentally-friendly choice as long as they are disposed of correctly, via the green waste scheme of a local county council or through a charity collection service, for example. British farm growers are also obliged to offset a cut tree by planting at least one tree for each that is felled. "Throughout their life (six years for a six-foot Norway Spruce, up to 12 years for a six-foot Nordmann Fir), trees create a habitat for a variety of birds and mammals," says Letts. "When small, they are a great nesting site for golden plovers. As they grow taller, they provide a valuable home for songbirds."

Container trees with roots can be successfully planted afterwards, either within their pot for a few seasons or directly into the earth. These spruces tend



ABOVE The rustic charm of this fir is elevated with colourful and clear baubles. *British-grown Nordman Fir, from £20, Petersham Nurseries*

RIGHT Trinity Street Christmas Trees supplies trees throughout Dorset.



LEFT For period interiors, simple tree decorations and a rustic tree skirt strike a timeless mood. *Baubles and tree skirt, Rowen & Wren*

ABOVE LEFT Keep the magic of Christmas alive with a classic motifs. *Winter Fayre Santa glass bauble, £10, John Lewis*

deal

to be shorter, however, reaching a maximum of three feet in height. “Many people like to buy a potted tree with roots in an effort to minimise environmental impact,” says grower Peter Hyde of Trinity Street Christmas Trees. “That can be a good option if the tree remains in its pot. It is worth bearing in mind that trees don’t like being repeatedly planted out.”

Another sustainable option is to rent a Christmas tree. ‘Rent, water, return’ is the philosophy behind services such as London Christmas Tree Rental, which offers living, pot-grown Norway Spruces that can be collected from a series of hubs and returned after use to be grown for another year. The same tree is often welcomed back into the same household over successive annual seasons, providing an alternative to buying a cut tree and helping to reduce the number of Christmas trees that need to be recycled each January.

The biggest concern around real trees is the issue of needle drop. “The Nordmann Fir is a good choice, as it tends to retain its needles very well,” says Letts. “Its dark green foliage is attractive, and its round, dense needles and spaced-out branches allow for good presentation of tree decorations. Norway Spruces are also fine options. This variety can drop its needles, but if it’s freshly cut, retention improves, plus it offers a lovely scent.”

Regardless of the variety, there are several tips that will help extend the life of a tree. Avoid buying a tree that has been stored inside; ask the supplier to slice the bottom off the tree so it can drink more efficiently; keep it topped up daily with water in its stand and away from heat sources. The result should be a statement spruce that looks its very best for the duration of the festive season. ▶

RIGHT A bay window is the perfect spot for a Christmas tree. *Bayberry Spruce with Dual LEDs, from £195, National Tree Company*

ABOVE RIGHT Make sure the tree stands perfectly straight with a smart stand. *Libra Christmas Tree Stand, £129, Rowen & Wren*



ABOVE If fitting a tree into a narrow corner, select a bushy tree that can be trimmed to fit so that it still seems generously sized. *Starsky chandelier, £455, Pooky*

RIGHT This classic 7ft Nordmann Fir, from £56, is farm-grown in Buckinghamshire at Stoke Goldington Christmas Trees, which has pick-your-own tree weekends.



LEFT Real trees should be trimmed to fit to avoid marking walls and ceilings. *Betty armchair in Olive cotton matt velvet, £685, Sofa.com*





Perfectly

Faux Christmas trees are investment pieces whose size, shape and colour all need to be carefully considered. Longevity is the key to offsetting environmental concerns with this option, as the longer a faux tree is kept, the less it impacts the environment. One survey showed that artificial Christmas trees are a green choice if reused for a minimum of five years. “Undertake research before buying an artificial tree,” suggests Jill Osaka of faux Christmas tree specialist Balsam Hill. “Ask yourself what type of tree you want. Are you hoping for the most realistic? What size works best in your space? Do you have a certain species or tree shape in mind?”

In terms of height, a good rule of thumb is to have at least six inches between the top of a tree and the ceiling. This accounts for a topper and any decorative stand that adds height to the tree. So, for a standard ceiling of nine feet high and a 12-inch-tall angel or star topper, the Christmas tree should be seven-and-a-half feet tall. Regarding what shape to choose, a wide, full-size tree is best for spacious rooms or halls, and a narrow or slim design is for limited spaces. Calculate the available floor space and check it against the dimensions of an intended tree.

Finally, look at the colour and how realistic a tree looks. Most high-end suppliers offer options for different types of species, including fir, spruce and pine, and varying levels of needle density, with polyethylene (PE) needles offering more dimension for greater realism. A good quality, realistic-looking tree will contain more than 50 per cent PE moulded tips. “It’s not the case that all artificial Christmas trees look fake,” continues Osaka. “Recent technical advances mean that faux tree tips can be cast from moulds ▶



TOP LEFT Cotswold Snowy tree, £579, and decorations from John Lewis’ Winter Fayre range

Gabrielle three-seater sofa in Powder Ebony mix, £1,149, Sofology
LEFT Hand-blown glass bauble, £18, KD Loves; Brass Bow decoration, £35, Matilda Goad

poised



ABOVE In grand-scale rooms, keep trees proportional. Patrick three-seater sofa £2,995 in Claret, Sofa.com

ABOVE RIGHT Frosted Symons Tree, 6ft, £495, The White Company

RIGHT Remote Control Candle Tree Lights, £40 for 10, Cox & Cox



ABOVE Large hand-blown glass Amour bauble, £55, Summerill & Bishop

RIGHT Link nearby decorations with those on the tree. Stocking, garland and decorations all Garden Trading

LEFT Look for a tree with hinged branches, designed to look real. Newberry Spruce, from £250, National Tree Company



BUYER'S GUIDE

'I'm a great believer in less is more when it comes to decorating a tree. I like to choose two or three of the same decorations, including a glittered bauble, and mix them with fairy lights for a simple-but-striking scheme'

Chrissie Rucker, founder, The White Company

of real branch clippings and replicate their texture, structure and colour variations to create very lifelike trees."

Hinged or attached branches will ensure a simple setting up process. "One of the main reasons for replacing a faux tree is branches falling off or breaking," says National Tree Company's Hannah Allan. "So, look for crush-resistant tips whose flexible structure negates breakages or 'moulting' needles, therefore encouraging the longevity of your tree." Storage is key to preservation. Once the tree has had its use for the holiday season, ensure all decorations are removed from the branches. "Go along each branch and smooth down, de-fluffing until they are reduced in size," advises Allan. "Fold down each section starting from the top, ensuring that the lights are unplugged if you have a pre-lit tree. Place the tree in a dedicated storage bag or original box, taping it up securely. Store in a dry area, away from damp and pests."

Bear in mind that good-quality faux trees are more expensive than real trees, but they offer a greater return over the years. For this reason, opting for a classic tree rather than a coloured or flocked (snow-laden) design can often be a better choice. Ring the changes instead with a rotating selection of decorations each year. "A well-made artificial tree shows off your decorations to their greatest advantage," says Lyndan Orvis of Hayes Garden World. "Whether you opt for nostalgic inherited pieces, trend-led designs or a mixture of the two, a densely branched, hinged faux tree in a quality base will act as the perfect foil for years to come." ■

RIGHT From grand firs to thin spruce, there is a faux tree fit for every home. Trees starting from £269, Balsam Hill.

ABOVE RIGHT A pre-lit faux tree has well-spaced lights. Newington pre-lit Christmas tree, £199, John Lewis & Partners



TOP Vermont White Spruce, 6.5ft (with clear LED lights), £749, Balsam Hill
ABOVE LEFT Striped bows give this year's tree a modern feel.

Candy-striped bows, £14.50 for 12, Cox & Cox
ABOVE Framed Robin decoration, £3.50 each, Gisela Graham





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If space allows, a versatile sideboard close to the table can be used as a serving area.
Elkston large sideboard, from £899, The Cotswold Company



THE *Entertainers*

Host elegant and effortless Christmas and Boxing Day gatherings with a well-organised kitchen and dining room

Inviting family and friends to join in the celebrations over the festive period is a wonderful way to embrace this convivial time of the year. To ensure everything runs smoothly, take time to plan ahead and organise everything from serveware to seating,

making the most of the space available and utilising the kitchen and dining room in the most ergonomic and effective way. We have consulted those in the know to offer some expert advice for four different gatherings, guaranteed to fill the home with joy. ▶



Christmas lunch

ABOVE Choose a dining table theme in keeping with the surrounding decor. *Bilbao extending dining table, £699; Woven dining chairs, £350 for two; Estate bench, £359; Shaped gold band plates, from £5; Merry Christmas napkins, £20 for four; Gold cutlery set, £20; Sheepskin rug, £80, all John Lewis & Partners*

For many, this is the most important meal of the festive period. Whether the dining table is part of a large open-plan kitchen or in a separate dining room, make it the centrepiece with an elegant table setting complete with plates, side plates, cutlery, glasses, candlesticks, place cards and simple-yet-sophisticated Christmas table decorations.

Consider how many are coming for lunch and whether there is enough suitable seating. “Many of us don’t have the space in our homes to store spare seats for once-in-a-while guests. Designs that serve multiple purposes, like a small but sturdy stool, are often the best answer,” says Claire Birkbeck, kitchen designer at Neptune. She advises looking for styles that can double up as side tables or footrests when not in use around the dining table. “Or,” she adds, “for an option that capitalises on comfort, look to folding dining chairs that share all the same ergonomic design features as a standard chair but can be easily collapsed and stowed away.”

To maximise comfort for a long lunch, seek out seat pads designed for wooden kitchen chairs. “Make sure you’re selecting size and shape-appropriate pads, as this will maximise both the comfort and stability of the cushion. Look for designs with removable, washable

covers to help extend the life of the seat pad and choose those with ties to ensure the cushion stays comfortably and neatly in place,” says Birkbeck.

Preparing a week ahead can also help the day run smoothly. “In a kitchen where cooking, dining and entertaining all happen, clever design can make a huge difference,” explains Melissa Klink, creative director at Harvey Jones. “Functional storage such as open shelving built into an island is essential to hold extra plates and glasses, as well as to display decorations. Try using cooler rooms away from the busy activity to store desserts, such as a trifle or cheese platter, for the evening.”

In a small space, use clever tricks for ease – such as arranging cutlery drawers and serveware close to the table. Keeping key pieces to hand will ensure that lunch runs smoothly. “For those who love to entertain, we recommend a portable cutlery tray with a handle at the centre,” says Simon Taylor, managing director at Simon Taylor Furniture. “Ideal for Christmas dining, it can be placed on a table or island for buffet-style entertaining while at all other times it fits perfectly inside a dovetail drawer box.” For maximum seating in a small kitchen, Birkbeck advises having a round table with a pedestal base.



ABOVE Creating a peninsula breakfast bar area by the dining table is useful for preparation or guests to gather. *Shaker kitchen, from £10,000, The White Kitchen Company*
RIGHT Folding chairs provide extra seating and can then be stored away. *Wycombe folding chair, £490, Neptune*

BELOW Choose a sculptural extending dining table for an elegant and practical statement piece that works year round. *Harper extendable walnut dining table, £9,465, Pinch*
BOTTOM Cookware in seasonal hues adds to the anticipation. *Graduated red cast iron casserole 28cm, £99, ProCook*



EXPERT ADVICE

Jayne Everett, co-founder and creative director of Naked Kitchens, offers her top tips for utilising all areas of the kitchen when hosting.

CHRISTMAS LUNCH:

"Using an island to give you extra space, along with your kitchen table, is always helpful when friends and family come for Christmas lunch. Use counter space to either prep your food or, once everything is ready, as a perfect place to display all the food and keep your dining table for the essentials."

COCKTAIL SOIRÉES:

"Convert an existing storage space under an island into your very own cocktail bar – this makes it easy for all your guests to help themselves. Built-in tray storage in an island or cabinets saves time; once the canapes are finished, just pop the trays away to save space. Bi-fold doors for counter standing units are a fabulous way to quickly hide away or, indeed, open up the space for a fabulous cocktail-producing area."

FESTIVE SUPPER:

"Keep your plates warm with a built-in plate warmer to keep those pigs-in-blankets nice and hot. Use lighting to change the mood of the room from a cooking space to a more festive feel. Clear a couple of your shelves and add a festive look with your favourite decorations."

BOXING DAY BREAKFAST:

"An oak chopping board on your island will give you the perfect prep space to whip up boxing day breakfast – whilst your guests can sit at the other end and even help you with food prep. Using a hot water tap or pot filler above your cooker makes food prep much quicker, giving you more time to spend with your guests. ▶

Cocktail soirée

When it comes to festive drinks, it is all about creating a space where guests can help themselves to cocktails, wine, champagne and soft drinks. If the kitchen does not already have one, consider investing in a wine cabinet, or alternatively fill the sink with ice and keep bottles chilled and easily accessible.

“The kitchen is a place for cooking and socialising, so we need appliances that do the hard work for us while making sure we do not miss out on our creature comforts,” says Jo Jackson, market product manager for Fisher & Paykel in the UK and Ireland. “White wine, such as Pinot Gris and Sauvignon Blanc, should be served at 8° to 10°C. Pinot Noir around 14°C and sparkling wine around 6°C. By having dedicated wine storage, you can set the required temperatures with ease. Furthermore, people like to present their wine beautifully, and a wine cabinet can really add to the aesthetic of a kitchen, as well as protect the wine from UV light, which can create hydrogen sulphide compounds in wine that affect the tannins and the colour.”

As most soirées take place in the kitchen, most people are happy to stand chatting, though it is useful to have a bench or stools on hand to provide some seating. Make use of sideboards and dressers for nibbles and utilise an island as a drinks station.

ABOVE RIGHT An island unit, dresser, console table or sideboard is the perfect place for drinks and glassware, allowing guests to help themselves. *Arbor kitchen, from £25,000, Harvey Jones*

RIGHT When planning a new kitchen, the addition of a cocktail cabinet – complete with wine storage – will create an instant party atmosphere. *Oxford kitchen in Indigo Blue, from £2,000, Moores*



TOP Toast the New Year with a set of rose-tinted glasses. *Lyza cocktail glasses, £45 for four, Sweetpea & Willow*

ABOVE Bench seating is so useful for extra guests. *Gastro bench in elm wood, £179, Cult Furniture*



ABOVE Make the dining table work for any occasion with an extending design. *Parquet Pie table*, £1,195, *Loaf*
ABOVE CENTRE Candles bring instant ambience to the table.

Talking Tables Boho glass candle sticks, £14 each, *The Wisteria Tree*
ABOVE RIGHT Screen-printed stag napkins will add a seasonal flavour. *Stag linen napkins*,

£29.95 for four, *Annabel James*
BELOW Find everything easily with well-organised drawers. *Intersection Kitchen*, £POA, *Vincent Van Duysen* for *Dada* *Molteni & C*



Festive supper

Hosting a festive supper is a way to catch up with friends and relatives, especially if keeping Christmas Day for immediate family. To ensure everyone is comfortable, invest in good quality seating. “I always think one of the worst things at a dinner party is being stuck on an uncomfortable chair,” reveals Louisa Eggleston, creative director at Humphrey Munson. “So, for the dining area, think comfort first and invest in chairs that are well upholstered and support the back. And choose fabrics that are easy to clean.”

When it comes to cabinetry, it is important to consider storage as well as seating. “For those who enjoy hosting and entertaining, bespoke cabinetry is the best option,” says Kim Whinnett, director at Barnes of Ashburton, “as it allows a designer to create made-to-order furniture to suit their client’s needs. This can include everything from oversized cabinets for extra storage, floor-to-ceiling cupboards to make the most of a high ceiling, plenty of dedicated drawers for cutlery, knives, utensils and spices, as well as small drawers and pull-outs for a more compact space, especially useful in cottage kitchens and period properties. For those who like large gatherings and celebrations, consider adding a refectory table for dining, integrated chopping boards on an island and a cook’s bench for serving and food preparation.”

For homeware designer Sophie Allport it is all about the table runner. “A table runner is a pretty and practical way to give your tablescape some festive cheer,” she explains. “Stretching down the length of the table, it will anchor your cutlery, crockery and decorations together and is a great way to introduce seasonal colours and patterns to the table while protecting it from spills, hot dishes and stains. Pair with a centrepiece of winter berries and clusters of twinkling fairy lights for a magical feel.” ▶



BUYER'S GUIDE

RIGHT Invest in a good kettle to make sure breakfast goes without a hitch.

KLF04CRUK variable temperature kettle, £179.95, Smeg

BELOW To make hosting effortless, a Quooker tap will provide boiling, hot, cold, filtered, chilled and now sparkling water all from one place. The island seen here is from Life Kitchens.



Boxing Day breakfast

For the morning after the main event, a table laden with freshly brewed coffee and tea and a generous breakfast spread encourages a relaxing morning for hosts and guests alike.

An extendable dining table is the ultimate all-rounder for the festive period and can be dressed up or down for the occasion. "Whether hosting a Christmas lunch or piling around the kitchen table for breakfast, you want your dining area to work its hardest over the festive season," notes Charlie Marshall, founder of Loaf. "Extendable tables are great if you are tight on space or want the option of hosting a big group. Benches work wonders if you need additional seating and can be easily pushed to the side or slid under a kitchen table to create extra floor space."

To make benches comfortable, look for padded cushions or invest in made-to-measure upholstery for a bespoke touch to match decor. If the bench is to sit against a wall, one with a back offers better support, while benches with integrated storage are ideal for a small cottage kitchen or dining area. ■

ABOVE RIGHT Make breakfast a casual affair with bench seating and plenty of throws for added comfort.

Inglesham Whitewash Oak six-seater trestle dining table, £649; for a similar bench try the Chester bench, from £235; Lenny chunky knitted throw, £55, all The Cotswold Company

RIGHT A freestanding kitchen with open space is particularly convivial for hosting large gatherings. *The Haberdasher's Kitchen, from £30,000, deVOL*





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INSPIRED BY NATURE

How British wildlife artist Ben Waddams finds inspiration for his work everywhere from the Shropshire countryside to the African plains



Vincent van Gogh once said “art is but imitation of nature”, and this is certainly the case in the works of the British wildlife artist Ben Waddams, whose pieces are so meticulously detailed, they have an almost photographic character.

Achieving this level of detail does not come without a great deal of time and

effort, and when he paints, Waddams has a strict process to ensure each painting is of the best quality he can produce, not just in artistic form but in the habitat and environment of each subject he paints. The great passion he has for his chosen subject is clear to see. “I feel I have to know my subject intimately,” he explains. “I try my very best to study the species in the wild.

ABOVE LEFT *Contemplating*, oil on panel, 51cm x 33cm, signed

ABOVE RIGHT *Resplendent*, oil on panel, 84cm x 53cm, signed

OPPOSITE ABOVE *The Invention of Flight*, oil on panel, 39cm x 94cm, signed

OPPOSITE BELOW *Warrior*, oil on panel, 51cm x 96.5cm, signed



I research its habitat, speak to experts, read books, study maps, try to understand its natural history, visit its environment, sketch it and photograph it.” All of which happens before he has even picked up his paintbrush to begin painting.

Waddams grew up in the beautiful county of Buckinghamshire in South East England, before gaining his First Class

degree in Fine Art in 2006. He now lives in Shropshire, but before moving there, he spent several years living and working in the United States, as well as travelling extensively across Central America and Africa in search of exotic wildlife to paint. These days, he and his wife run a charity in Tanzania, and he likes to travel to the Great Rift Valley each time they visit, to

allow himself time to sketch and paint the animals there.

“Ben’s paintings aim to be windows into the natural world,” explains art expert Daniel Callaghan of the gallery Callaghans of Shrewsbury. “They focus primarily on animal behaviour and energy – that moment of suspense, caught in time before life resumes.” Daniel, along with his wife Stella, knows a thing or two about Waddams’s work, having sold many of his pieces across the world in recent years. The couple have garnered an international reputation for their extensive knowledge of 19th, 20th and 21st-century European artists, with Waddams leading the charge in the wildlife painting stakes.

Waddams’s chosen medium is oil paint, which makes the painstaking detail of his works all the more extraordinary. As well as painting British wildlife subjects, his enthusiasm for exotic larger species native to Africa and Central America has seen him paint everything from elephants, lions and tigers to hippopotamuses, giraffes and chimpanzees. So, it will come as no surprise that Waddams has built himself a reputation over the years as an ambassador ▶



ABOVE *The Challenge*, oil on panel, 76cm x 112cm, signed

for conservation and has always been keen to raise awareness through his work. “My aim is that my paintings invoke a stirring in the minds of the audience, and in turn, I hope they will be inspired to seek out and help protect the species depicted in my paintings,” Waddams explains. “I get great pleasure from looking at and studying the natural world, whether with a pair of binoculars, a pen or a paintbrush, and if I can help communicate that pleasure to others through my paintings, then that is a tremendous honour for me.”

The pieces themselves are arrestingly beautiful. Take, for example, *The Challenge*, so named not only because of the subject matter but also because it is his largest

piece to date. Inspired by a visit to Tanzania’s Lake Manyara, it is a delightfully detailed work where Waddams has captured the expression of the elephant perfectly. Look, too, at the fine brushwork in *Resplendent*, which depicts a flamingo with all its elegance and poise and a burst of colour that makes a powerful impact on the wall. The *Invention of Flight* portrays a gutsy puffin launching from the water and every drop of the ocean is so meticulously painted that it is possible to imagine the cold, wet sea from which the bird is taking off. *Warrior* is another impactful piece depicting an African buffalo, full of drama as if the creature is looking directly to the camera. The animal’s engaging stare draws in the viewer while also imparting the feel and heat of the harsh and dusty environment in which it lives. And closer to home, *Contemplating* finds inspiration in

the British countryside, with Waddams using broad brushstrokes to allow for incredible detail in the piece. The glistening of the hare’s eyes pulls the viewer into the composition.

Studying Waddams’s work, it is easy to see how he became a finalist in the BBC Wildlife Artist of the Year competition in 2010 and is considered an expert on natural history and wildlife art. As Stella says, “It is a privilege to work with an artist as talented as Ben. His works bring a piece of nature to one’s surroundings and make one contemplate the animal world, the planet and all its wonders.” Perhaps it is because of this that his works have such a universal appeal. “Whether in a home or office setting, they add a wonderful element of natural beauty and atmosphere,” Stella concludes. callaghan-finepaintings.com ■

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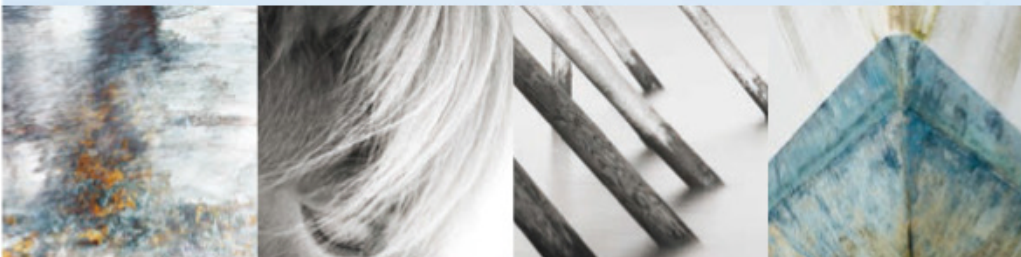
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QUINTESSENTIALLY

Inspiration for seasonal pastimes and making the most of life at home starts here ►



SWEET TREATS

Baking festive delights is something the whole family can enjoy. From stirring the Christmas cake mix to decorating biscuits to hang on the tree or give as gifts, children love to be involved in making sweet treats. For Christmas Eve, create a little gift set with a cookie cutter, tubes of icing, sprinkles, and that must-have of the season, a net of gold coins as a reward for completing their tasks. Some of the finished biscuits could be left for Father Christmas, along with a crunchy carrot for Rudolph of course!

Community Garden Robins crackers, £15 for 12; Robin decal tumbler, £5; Stoneware Reactive Glaze dinner plate, £9.50, all John Lewis & Partners

What to do in DECEMBER

Savour the run up to the festive season by indulging in creative endeavours to enhance the experience for all concerned

Longworth bench, £420;
Longworth chair, £220;
Ablington lanterns, from
£25; Berkeley wine
glasses, £35 for four;
Alnwick vases, from £10;
baubles, from £12;
Holwell tableware, from
£12, all Garden Trading



GATHER... *festive foliage*

Branches of pine, yew, ivy and even eucalyptus and olive are ideal for decorating the house at Christmas. As well as using them to adorn mantelpieces and staircases, why not suspend them from the ceiling above a dining table to create a dash of modern rustic festive drama? Circular arrangements work particularly well, and branches of foliage can easily be attached to a wire or willow wreath using florist's wire and hung from a wooden beam or ceiling joist. Add rich colours, dark neutrals and opulent metallics, with plenty of rustic textures and candlelight, to create a magical, convivial setting. ▶

EAT... *Christmas pudding*

There are few things more flavoursome than a fabulously fruity Christmas pudding. Plump raisins, sultanas, citrus peel and plenty of spice all combine to create this classic festive treat. Stir-up Sunday, traditionally on the last weekend before Advent, is when friends and family gather to each stir the pudding mixture and make a wish, so mark 20 November clearly on the calendar for this year and round everyone up. If the making is a couple of weeks overdue, fear not, the flavours should still have plenty of time to mature and intensify.

Of course, ready-made options are also perfectly acceptable. Bettys is one of our favourite festive food suppliers and has kindly shared its Traditional Christmas Pudding recipe for those who do want to make their own. Remember to wrap a sterilised silver sixpence in a piece of greaseproof paper before adding it to the mix, and warn pudding eaters of its existence to avoid anyone swallowing it by accident.



BETTYS TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS PUDDING

(Makes one pudding, serving 6-8 people)

INGREDIENTS	50g vegetable suet
100ml brandy	30g wholemeal breadcrumbs
225g raisins	50g plain white flour
50g currants	85g light brown sugar
50g glacé cherries	½ tsp mixed spice
85g sultanas	¼ tsp ground nutmeg
15g flaked almonds	¼ tsp ground cinnamon
Zest of 1 orange and juice of ½	Pinch of ground cloves
Zest of 1 lemon and juice of ½	2 medium eggs, beaten
	½ tsp salt

METHOD:

- The day before making the pudding, place all the dried fruits and nuts in a bowl and pour the brandy, fruit juices and fruit zest over them. Toss together lightly, cover with clingfilm and leave to soak overnight.
- The following day, place all the ingredients, including the soaked fruit and nuts, in a large mixing bowl. Lightly mix by hand to prevent breaking up the fruit.
- Place a small disc of baking parchment in the base of an 850ml pudding basin, fill it with the mixture and smooth the top down evenly. The mixture should come to about half an inch from the top of the basin.
- Place another larger disc of silicone paper on top of the mixture, then cover the top of the basin with foil and seal around it tightly.
- Put the filled pudding basin in a saucepan, with a long triple-folded strip of foil under it that comes up both sides. This is to help you lift the boiling hot basin out of the saucepan once it has steamed. Pour boiling water into the pan, so that it comes halfway up the pudding basin.
- Place a lid on the saucepan and bring it back to the boil, then lower the heat and keep the water at a steady simmer, so the pudding steams for five hours. Check on a regular basis and keep the water level topped up with boiling water.
- When the time is up, remove the pudding from the pan and allow it to cool completely before wrapping it, still in its basin, in a piece of greaseproof paper, plus a layer of foil.
- Store in a cool, dark place and leave for at least one month to mature. Six weeks is better.
- On Christmas Day, steam the pudding for two hours in a pan with water, as before. Then decorate with a sprig of holly. Warm some brandy in a ladle over a candle, tipping it so it flames. Pour over the pudding and rush it to the table, remembering to ask someone to turn out the lights.



DISPLAY... *beautiful baubles*

Baubles are not only for hanging on the tree. They can be used to add a touch of sparkle to even the plainest of spaces. Why not create a 'tree' of baubles to display in an entrance hall, or as a statement piece above a fireplace in a room without a conventional tree? Select several baubles of a similar size and lay them out on a flat surface to ensure a pleasing final aesthetic before attaching them anything. Measure the distance between each bauble and mark it with a pencil. Attach the baubles to a wall using nails or glue them to a painted piece of plywood that can be attached to the wall as a piece of art. A small log, sprayed or painted gold, will make a convincing tree trunk. Baubles can also be used to add a festive touch to napkins or wrapped gifts, or even suspended from a window frame. Consider, too, filling a large glass vase with baubles and a string of battery-operated fairy lights. When lit, the baubles will sparkle beautifully.

Baubles from £5.99, Gisela Graham ▶

UPDATE... *plain boxes and paper for presents*

There is nothing nicer than a pile of presents under the tree, beautifully wrapped and adorned with ribbon, all waiting to be given to family and friends. Stylish presentation does not have to be complicated or costly. A simple white or kraft paper box, or indeed a plain roll of brown or white paper, can be easily transformed into gift wrap that will add an extra special personal touch in the process, or made to match a seasonal decorative colour scheme with plain baubles for the tree that can be painted the same. In the run up to Christmas collect any boxes that are clean and in good condition. Either wrap in paper or add decoration on the existing surface. Experiment with left-over paints to create spots, stripes and other simple patterns to add individual charm and character. Finish with a length of luxurious velvet or satin ribbon tied into a bow and pop under the tree.



Rodmell Chalk Paint, from £6.95 for 120ml, Annie Sloan. Plain ceramic baubles £6 for six, Hobbycraft

Stocking, Wild & Free, Kale/Charcoal, £64 a metre, and all other fabrics, Vanessa Arbuthnott

MAKE...

Fabric stockings

Remnants of fabric left over from home furnishing projects throughout the year can easily be transformed into Christmas stockings. Plains, tweeds and tartans will work particularly well. Alternatively invest in a metre or two of fabrics showcasing flora and fauna associated with the festive season. Different sizes can be used for different purposes – tiny versions with a small ribbon loop attached can be used to hang on the tree as decorations, or embroidered with guest's names and used as place settings, perhaps with a tiny chocolate or two tucked inside. Larger ones can be made to hang on the end of a bed, or to adorn a mantelpiece, and given to family members, filled with gifts and kept as mementoes for many years to come. Draw a boot/stocking shape on a piece of paper or look online for a free downloadable template and use as the pattern to cut out a back and front in co-ordinating fabrics. A fabric lining is optional but would add an extra finishing touch, as will a turnover at the top in a matching pattern or plain colour. ■

BELOW The Royal Albert Hall's *Storytime with Father Christmas at the Hall* includes a gift for every child and takes place 2–21 December. royalalberthall.com

RIGHT From strolls in the grounds to afternoon tea in stylish surroundings, there are plenty of ways to enjoy festive stays at Swinton Country Club and Spa. swintonestate.com



Making Memories

Whether taking a different approach to celebrating this year or simply looking for ideas to enjoy alongside annual traditions, new experiences bring a sense of excitement. Here are some of our favourite options to try this festive season

From a convivial Christmas with friends to celebrating with new members of the family or simply taking time to relax individually or as a couple, there can be many reasons to seek out new ways to enjoy this time of year. Even if family traditions are at the heart of the festivities, fresh ideas can enliven the run-up to Christmas, heighten the anticipation of the main event and provide inspiration for post-Christmas days out and trips further afield. ▶

RIGHT Discover around 180 fallow deer in the parkland at Attingham Park, Shrewsbury. nationaltrust.org.uk/attingham-park

ABOVE RIGHT Try ice skating at the Eden Project, Cornwall, from 15 October 2022 to 19 February 2023. edenproject.com





ABOVE Join Lottie Mayland's festive embroidery workshops on 14 November at Daylesford's Notting Hill shop or 1 December at Daylesford's Cotswold shop. daylesford.com

ABOVE RIGHT Take a moment to relax in festive cosy corners at The Pig Near Bath hotel. thepighotel.com/near-bath/

RIGHT In North Norfolk, The Harper hotel's spa includes an inviting pool and luxurious bedrooms to retreat to afterwards. theharper.co.uk





Seasonal spirit

TOP Learn how to make canapés to impress Christmas guests on courses on 11 and 21 December at Daylesford's cookery school. daylesford.com

ABOVE Visit Cotehele in Cornwall between 7–18 November to help make a 60-foot floral garland. Return a few weeks later to see it on show. nationaltrust.org.uk/cotehele

As we approach the festivities, seasonal courses are a perfect way to embrace the Christmas mood. If attending as an individual or as a couple, one-day courses are a welcoming and friendly environment to meet those who are like-minded. Group sessions are also ideal for taking part with several friends or grown-up children who love creative activities.

Something a little different yet still festive, Christmas food courses provide ideas to elevate this year's cuisine. Renowned for its year-round cookery school, Daylesford Organic's festive offerings include Christmas canapés courses. A fine opportunity for those hosting parties to whip up showstopping nibbles.

Alternatively, artistic homeware, embroidery and textiles courses allow the chance to create unique pieces

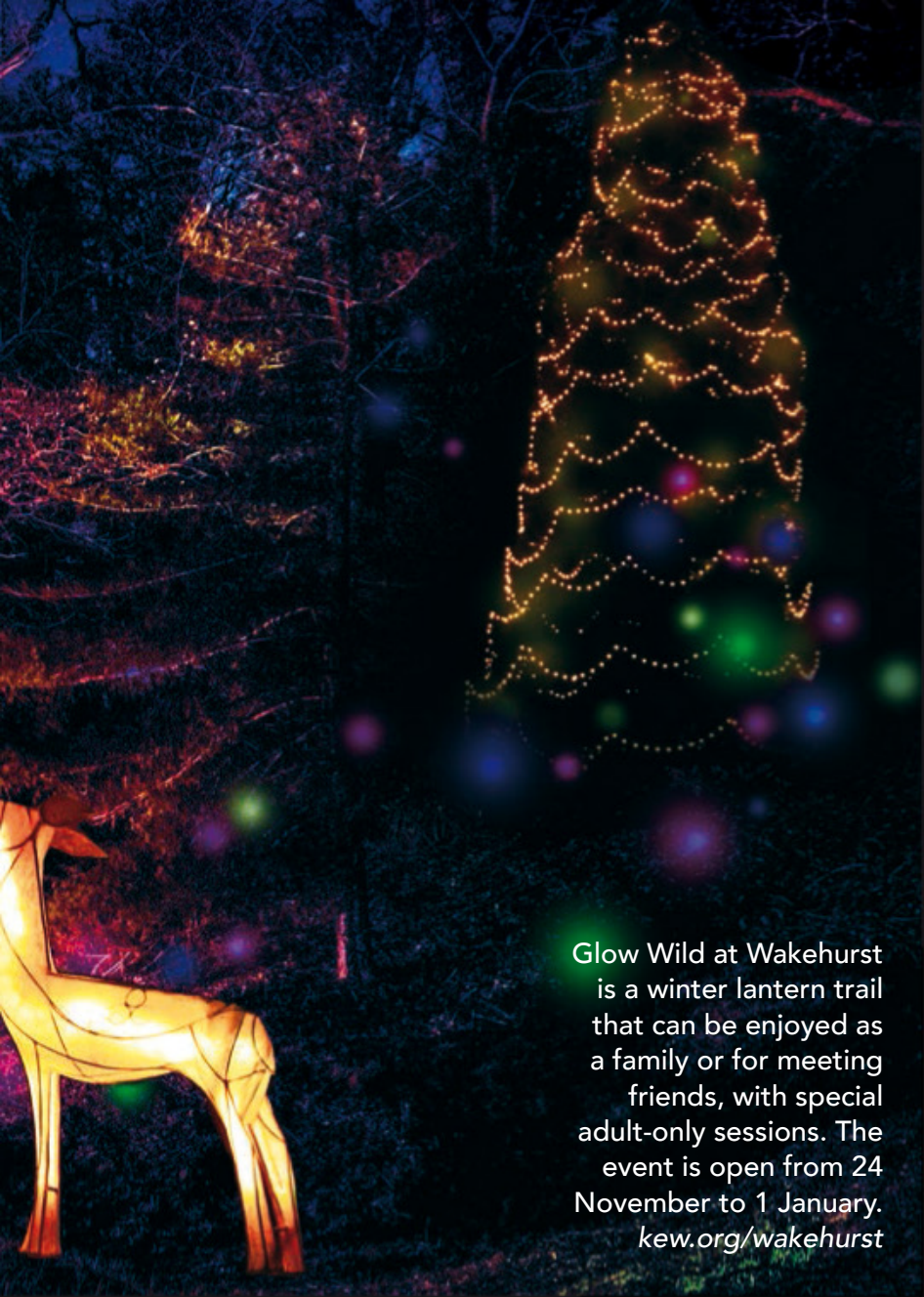
of craftwork. Under the expert guidance of craft aficionado Lottie Mayland, learn or improve hand-embroidery with a seasonal crafting session at her festive workshops.

Another creative option is a calligraphy course, teaching the skills to add a personal touch to this year's missives. Taking a modern approach, Mellor & Rose's calligraphy classes teach the art of writing cards, tags and many other letter skills, such as writing beautiful place setting cards for an elegant Christmas tablescape.

If searching for special day trips to surprise children, delight them with something out of the ordinary this year. For young children, Father Christmas is visiting locations countrywide to read enchanting fairy stories. Little ones will be enthralled by the Royal Albert Hall's charming grotto, where Father Christmas will be visiting to read the *Tiny Reindeer* with the help of his merry head elf.

For an evening adventure, many light trails include engaging elements. For a unique experience, Glow Wild at Wakehurst Kew Gardens is hosting a winter lantern trail showcasing lanterns handcrafted by artisans to celebrate the colours of nature. The UK's tallest Christmas tree is amongst other surprises along the way.

Older children might like the National Trust's various memorable events, including late-night openings to see historic houses such as Petworth, Nunnington Hall, Ormesby Hal, Arlington Court and Hughenden dressed in festive finery and with some imaginative surprises. There are also interactive activities at venues such as Cotehele, where visitors can help prepare flowers, grown and dried at the property, for a showstopping 60-foot Christmas garland. ▶



Glow Wild at Wakehurst is a winter lantern trail that can be enjoyed as a family or for meeting friends, with special adult-only sessions. The event is open from 24 November to 1 January. kew.org/wakehurst



Mellor & Rose's calligraphy workshops are taking place on 10 December at Thyme and include a personalised kit. thyme.co.uk



Christmas Eve drinks

Once the presents are all wrapped and any little ones are in bed, make Christmas Eve feel out of the ordinary with a delicious Christmas drink bursting with the evocative flavours of the festive season, such as orange zest and warm spices. This grown-up hot chocolate (recipe taken from *Comfort: A Winter Cookbook*) is a wonderful treat for any extra house guests this year. For a large crowd, simply double or triple the ingredients as required.

WHITE CHRISTMAS DRINK

Serves 6

INGREDIENTS

1 litre milk
200g white chocolate, grated
2 unwaxed orange slices
4 cloves, lightly crushed
2 cinnamon sticks, lightly crushed
A pinch of freshly grated nutmeg
75ml Grand Marnier, Cointreau or other orange-flavoured liqueur
125ml double cream, whipped
Candied orange and grated white chocolate, to serve

METHOD

- Put the milk, chocolate, orange and spices in a saucepan and heat gently, stirring, until it just reaches boiling point.
- Froth the milk with a milk frother or whisk vigorously with a flat or

small round whisk until the mixture is foamy.

- Divide between 6 small cups or heatproof glasses and pour in the Grand Marnier.
- Spoon a little whipped cream on top of each drink
- Sprinkle with candied orange and grated white chocolate to serve.

FURTHER READING



Comfort: A Winter Cookbook published by Ryland Peters & Small (£20) Photography by William Lingwood © Ryland Peters & Small



TOP RIGHT
Characterful yet refined, The Pig Near Bath's bedrooms are designed to capture a homely charm.

LEFT Cocktails and canapes are served to guests arriving for a post-Christmas stay at The Harper hotel in Norfolk.

'Twixtmas' outings

TOP This year, The Ritz Club at The Ritz London will be transformed into an Edwardian winter wonderland where Christmas afternoon tea is available to book from 19 November to 1 January. Please note, the pastries change every year, and the above shot is not representative of this year's designs. theritzlondon.com

The days between Christmas and New Year are an opportunity to stretch out the festivities and meet up with additional friends and family. For young and old keen to try something new, ice skating may have a whimsical allure. To enhance the experience, visit the Eden Project's ice rink, where lessons are available for beginners to gain confidence on the ice, or, for those with more experience, to learn to spin and jump on ice.

If looking to meet friends for a gentler activity, or perhaps entice children into the fresh air, put a festive twist on an afternoon's walk by taking a deer trail to spot these beloved Christmas helpers in their natural habitat. The National Trust has many locations with roaming deer herds. Alternatively, the New Forest National Park's deer trail even includes a deer viewing platform.

Stepping away from active days outs, a themed afternoon tea in a historic setting sets the mood for a special festive occasion. A special treat to enjoy with

friends or family, old and young, is The Ritz London's iconic afternoon tea, with seasonal flavours and impressive pastry designs served throughout December for a truly memorable experience.

After days of seeing extended family and close friends, a short break at a luxurious spa hotel is a rejuvenating way to prepare for the new year. If keen to unwind in picturesque grounds, The Pig hotel near Bath has extensive gardens and private potting sheds for spa treatments. To feel refreshed by long walks in the bracing coastal air, head to The Harper, a contemporary hotel and spa in Norfolk that proudly serves local specialities and welcomes well-behaved dogs (for a small extra fee), so all members of the family can enjoy the trip. Or, for couples with different interests, combine the great outdoors with little luxuries at Swindon Country Club and Spa estate in Harrogate, where wild swimming can be enjoyed in the morning and Bamford spa treatments indulged in come the afternoon. ■

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ONE FINAL THING...

Consider period features when decking the halls, making them wonderful festive focal points

Original decorative features such as ornate cornicing, mantelpieces and panelling can provide a beautiful frame or structure for creating a Christmas display. If, however, these are lacking in a period home, use antique frames to create a detailed surround for a festive vignette. A wreath works well in such a setting, suspended by a luxurious wide silk ribbon. Add some contemporary flair with lights – these various sizes of twinkling stars can be hung or propped against the wall for added sparkle and magic. *Osby Star lights, from £13.99; Pre-lit Eucalyptus, Pine & Gold Berry Christmas Wreath, £64.99, both Lights4Fun*

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