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December 2024 | Issue 238 | £5.99 | UK Edition

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A letter from home

There is something particularly exciting about decorating and preparing our homes in the lead up to Christmas. It's the freedom to adopt a 'more is more' approach, the anticipation of hosting guests and making sure they will be comfortable, the chance to get the family involved in decorating the tree and embracing the imperfectly hung or homemade baubles from the littlest members' fingers alongside all that we've perfectly planned.

In this issue, we've focused on simple, creative, stress-free ways to enjoy decking the halls. You'll find a comprehensive guide to styling your best ever Christmas tree (pg 88), learn how to use fresh seasonal flowers and foliage in handcrafted wreaths, table decorations and festive displays (pg 122) and gain advice for decorating the dining room for entertaining and year-round celebrations (pg 98).

We wholeheartedly embrace a maximalist approach to layering at this time of year, but we're keen to ensure this is mindful and sustainable too. One of the ways is to suggest timeless new finds, decorations and well-chosen additions that will sit with all you already own and love, which you'll see in buys and styling throughout our pages. Another is to embrace specifically thoughtful ideas that minimise environmental impact but deliver on style, which we explore on page 107.

Finally, we always learn so much from how other homeowners get ready for the festive season and we hope you'll be inspired by the beautiful homes we've been so lucky to photograph, write about and share with you.

Whatever your plans this December, we hope you'll discover ideas in this issue to help make it a very Merry Christmas.

Samantha

Samantha Scott-Jeffries, Editor

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TIME TO CELEBRATE

- Discover beautifully simple ideas for festive entertaining
- Enjoy the best interiors collections, brands and must-have buys of 2024 in our New Year Honours list
 - Explore timeless lighting designs and new innovations
 - Take a tour of exquisite homes dressed for the festivities
 - PLUS Christmas inspiration, recipes, ideas for savouring the new year, seasonal living and much more...

JANUARY ISSUE ON SALE
27 NOVEMBER 2024

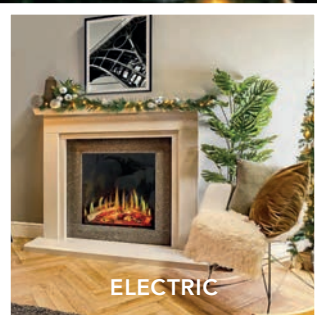
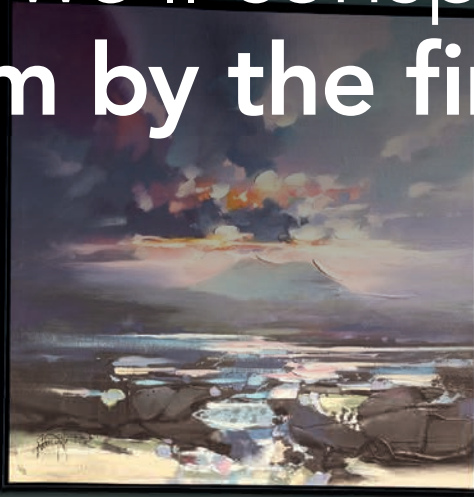
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SPOTLIGHT ON...

A sprinkling of sparkle

Ceramic artist Deborah Brett is known for her bubble glaze technique, which she refined over three years. Disappointed by the contents typically found in Christmas crackers, she decided to make her own and wrap them in paper printed with her signature bubble design.

“Each cracker is handmade in the UK and contains a unique handmade ceramic ornament made by me,” she says. “Some are bubbled, some are striped, but all have touches of gold lustre. Of course, there’s a paper crown and a joke too, must-haves in any cracker. Made from recycled and recyclable materials, each cracker – with artwork inspired by my bubble glaze finish – is completed with biodegradable ribbon. They are so striking with their teal cascading bubbles and will make any festive table look fantastic, while the gifts can be reused on the Christmas tree every year.” dbc ceramic.co.uk



Handcrafted Christmas

Devon duo's festive London pop-up

Feldspar founders Cath and Jeremy Brown will bring their handcrafted homewares to luxury hotel Corinthia London for a festive pop-up from 15 November to 5 January – their first-ever physical space.

Seeking a slower pace of life and fresh air, school designer Cath and United Nations worker Jeremy moved from London to the wilds of Dartmoor. They bought a potter's wheel and made a 20-piece dinner set in time for Christmas. Realising how rewarding it was to design and make everything they needed, they set about turning their new-found hobby into a design brand, founding Feldspar in 2016. Inspired by items their grandparents used daily that were old yet still perfectly served their purpose, their ethos was to create 'objects for life' – beautiful things made to last with a simple, elegant aesthetic.

They began by designing a fine bone china coffee mug with, in their words, "a wonky profile" to sit perfectly in the hand, made by a family pottery in Stoke-on-Trent.

Cath and Jeremy set up their own ceramics studio in Devon in 2018 to supplement the production in Stoke. Today, Feldspar's handmade ceramic collections are sold worldwide. The Devon team handpaints everything and makes half of Feldspar's ceramics using the method of 'slip casting' – pouring liquid clay into plaster moulds. "Mould-making, slip-casting and industrial bone china production are all listed as critically endangered crafts by the Heritage Crafts Association in the UK," say Cath and Jeremy. "We were anxious to preserve the skills and crafts required to keep bone china production going in England and to show that it is perfectly possible to make things from start to finish in the UK."

The Christmas pop-up will showcase new products including a hand-turned walnut-and-brass nutcracker (pictured left), their first foray into woodwork. feldspar.studio

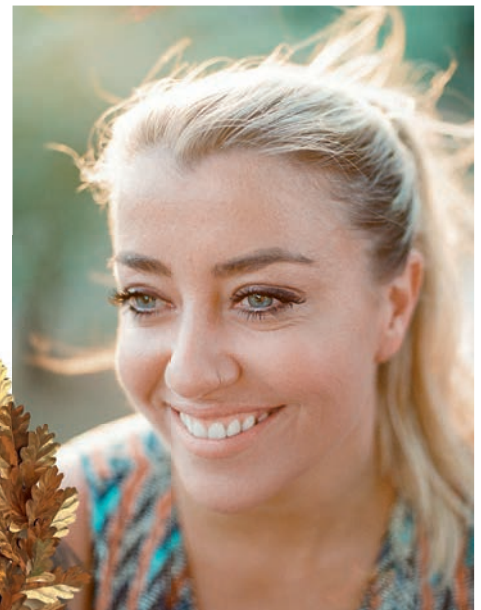
Everlasting Wonders

Ornamental art by Debbie Fairbrass

Artist Debbie Fairbrass handcrafts wreaths and boughs of mistletoe using copper, brass and steel with the aim of them becoming treasured family heirlooms. Being Irish and living by the sea in England, Debbie is inspired by both countries when creating her sustainable art pieces.

"I've been creating my copper artwork and wreaths for a couple of years now, stemming from my love of the country and the natural world," she says. "Copper is my favourite medium to work with. I adore the way it changes over time, getting richer in patina and deepening in colour, like a long-lost treasure aged for 100 years."

"I also love working with natural hand-dyed silk ribbon, finishing each wreath with a little bit of luxury. Each piece I create is thoughtfully designed and painstakingly cut, veined and soldered from copper, sometimes taking days to complete. A complete labour of love." debbiefairbrass.com ▶







Countdown To Christmas

Set anticipation alight with an Advent calendar

Build festive excitement until the big day in December with a luxury Advent calendar. For gourmet goodies, Fortnum’s Feasting Advent Calendar from Fortnum & Mason boasts biscuits, classic teas, chocolate and confectionery, preserves, condiments and festive tipples. Daylesford’s Farmshop Christmas Advent Calendar is handmade in the shape of the iconic Cotswolds emporium, with each drawer containing a treat from the farmshop shelves, from food to home fragrance and more. Newby Teas, the world’s most awarded luxury tea brand, has a Tea Advent Calendar featuring premium teabags boasting blends from China, India, Kenya and Sri Lanka. And Harrods’ The Food Hall Favourites Advent Calendar contains sweet and savoury treats as well as Harrods keepsakes.

For fine fragrance, English perfumery Penhaligon’s has a Baker’s Box of Delights Advent Calendar featuring 24 scented treats including candles, beauty products and miniature perfumes. French fragrance house Diptyque’s 25 Scented Treasures Advent Calendar has festive and personal fragrances in a sewing box-style container. The doors of Cornish candlemaker St Eval’s Tealight Advent Calendar open to reveal 24 scented tealights and a gold lustre tealight holder to envelop the home in fragrant warmth.

To delight little ones, Paris children’s brand Atelier Choux has the Château Choux Advent Calendar, sold at Harrods, beautifully made in the shape of a French mansion which opens like a doll’s house to reveal drawers made especially for little hands, filled with gifts such as a swaddle blanket, plush toy, reversible bib, cake toppers, keychain and pop-up cards and envelopes. And the Cox & Cox Advent Train can be brought out annually to delight the family for years to come, with 24 doors spread through its seasonally decorated carriages.

For the stationery obsessed, Martha Brook’s 24 Days of Stationery Advent Calendar – which can be personalised – has foil-embossed boxes designed to look like a row of books, with a new item to discover each day such as a notebook, calendar, correspondence cards, luxury pens, gold accessories and beautiful paper items. ▶



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Fortnum’s Feasting Advent Calendar by Fortnum & Mason; Tea Advent Calendar by Newby Teas; Farmshop

Christmas Advent Calendar by Daylesford; Chateau Choux Advent Calendar by Atelier Choux; Baker’s Box of Delights by Penhaligon’s





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Merry Gentlemen

Madcap Cottage takeover at Nina Campbell

American anglophiles John Loecke and Jason Oliver Nixon of joyfully exuberant lifestyle brand Madcap Cottage will stage a colourful Christmas shop-in-shop at Nina Campbell on Pimlico Road in London. From 1 November until Christmas, visitors can revel in a treasure trove of festive gifts, signature print products and made-in-America furniture.

Nina's son Max Konig and daughter Alice Deen say: "We are absolutely thrilled and so excited for our Madcap Cottage takeover. We met John and Jason a few years ago and it was love at first sight. We were bowled over by their sense of fun, vibrant



use of pattern and colour, wit, humour and pure joyfulness. Having more space in our Pimlico Road shop has given us the arena to do exactly this, which is host and champion other brands we love to shout about and the ability to bring some newness to our customers here in London."

Jason from the North Carolina-based duo says: "We create interiors and products that are timeless, fresh and fun and all based upon our original sketches. Celebrate prints and patterns – after all, no one remembers a beige room." shop.ninacampbell.com; madcapcottage.com



Manor From Heaven

Bettys pop-up at Castle Howard

Majestic Castle Howard near York is the grand setting for the first ever pop-up shop by Bettys, Yorkshire maker of delicious delights. Open in the historic Stable Courtyard from 14 November to 5 January (excluding Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day), it will sell much-loved Bettys treats, hampers and Christmas gifts.

Castle Howard has been home to the Howard family for more than 300 years. Vicky Howard says: "We are thrilled to welcome Bettys this Christmas. It's a perfect combination of two much-loved Yorkshire brands. We know our visitors and local communities already use our Stable Courtyard as a place to shop for gifts and essentials, and we are excited to offer even more options this festive season."

Bettys MD Simon Eyles says: "Bettys is all about creating deliciously magical experiences, and Castle Howard is a truly unique setting. The shop will offer Bettys Christmas favourites alongside our best-loved treats, from Yorkshire Fat Rascals to a new Fondant Fancy to honour the occasion." castlehoward.co.uk

Diary



The historic streets of Bath will become even more magical with twinkling lights and wooden chalets laden with festive goodies for its annual Christmas market from 28 November to 15 December. bathchristmasmarket.co.uk



From singalong carols to opera highlights, visit Glyndebourne's Christmas Concerts on 8, 12, 14 and 15 December. The East Sussex opera house's gardens are still striking in winter and its gift shop festively delightful. glyndebourne.com



Haddon Hall, a 900-year-old fortified manor house in Derbyshire, will host its Mercatum Christmas Artisan Markets, bringing together some of the finest artisans in the country, every Wednesday to Sunday from 13 November to 15 December. haddonhall.co.uk ■



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DESIGN DISCOVERIES

Celebrate this enchanting season with effortless details and indulgent touches to create an inviting backdrop for the run-up to Christmas and its special week of festivities



SET THE SCENE

Assemble a charming tableau with a few dainty decorations around Father Christmas and Rudolph's midnight snacks. Here, a miniature tree, a candle and a ceramic tealight house bring the magic to life. *Clover large coffee table, £349; Slate Blue Illusion throw, £65; Tealight House, from £8 (small), Cotswold Company*

WINNING EVENING

Elevate a festive games night playing a classic favourite that all ages will enjoy with a beautifully crafted traditional design. This luxurious backgammon set comes with a roll-up velvet and wool embroidered board, elm wood dice and olive wood checkers. *Velvet backgammon roll, £420; Cut-glass goblet, £250, Rose Uniacke*



FESTIVE TIPPLES

Toasting Christmas with a special set of glasses will make celebrations feel out of the ordinary throughout the season. This glassware is hand-finished in Emma Britton's English studio, with its ornate motifs inspired by wildflowers and foliage. Other glasses in this range include tumblers, wine glasses and champagne flutes.

Silver Birch champagne coupes, £21 each or £37 for a set of two, Emma Britton





TABLEWARE TO TREASURE

Collecting china to use each Christmas can become a beloved part of festive traditions. The Doodles range, inspired by hand-printed sketches created by designer Willow Kemp and made in collaboration with Spode, captures nostalgic Christmas scenes with humorous captions to suit them.

Doodles Christmas range: set of four tea plates, £40; mugs, £15 each; cake stand, £50, all Willow Kemp for Kit Kemp Design Studio. Acrylic tray, £250, Kit Kemp. Button Multi rug, from £90, Annie Selkie x Kit Kemp ▶

SHOPPING

SUPPER BY CANDLELIGHT

Ease into the festive spirit with a softly lit tablescape decorated with sprigs of greenery to add a Christmas mood to relaxed dining with family and friends (right). Ellery round dining table, £1,198; Cotton Lace tablecloth, £98; Turner oak dining chair, £388; Elise wine glass, £34 for a set of two; Elise champagne flute, £34 for a set of two; Bingley candlesticks, from £19 each, Rowen & Wren



FINISHING TOUCHES

Elegantly co-ordinate festive place settings with three main colours. To keep the style contemporary, two colourful shades on a neutral background work well. For fresh inspiration, amber and old gold add a warming glow to a pared-back scheme with hand-crafted elements. Manipur bauble (on plate), £20 for a set of three; Tharad recycled glass candle holder, £22.50; Saneer tablecloth, £80; Saneer napkins, £20 for a set of two, and all tableware, Nkuku

SOCIABLE CENTREPIECE

From a Christmas Eve cheese course to a relaxed Boxing Day smorgasbord of leftovers for family and friends to pick at, a Lazy Susan can easily serve all kinds of feasts, allowing hosts to spend extra time at the table. Sintra Matt Champagne cheese knife set, £55; Green Marble Lazy Susan, £125; Putty tablelinen, from £25, Layered Lounge ▶


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PAPER TRAIL

Offcuts of wallpaper collected over the years can be 'upcycled' into wrapping paper with little effort. Add a matching or contrasting ribbon to ensure it looks smart and intentional. See our feature on page 107 for more mindful festive ideas.

Poles & Roses, Longchamp, Mrs Platt, Ladybird, Leopard & Roses and Confetti wallpaper, all £148 a roll, Petra Palumbo

PRETTY STOCKINGS

For a sophisticated take on a Christmas stocking, opt for a patterned design in a colourful hue that co-ordinates with the decor in a reception room.

Stockings, console and lampshade: Union Damson plain linen, £66 a metre; Little Fern, £69 a metre; and Simple Ticking, £69 a metre. Footstool: Lattice Leaf, £69 a metre; Simple Ticking, £69 a metre, Vanessa Arbuthnott



MY TRUE LOVE GAVE TO ME...

A set of a dozen baubles illustrating the iconic *The Twelve Days of Christmas* song will add variety to this year's tree and be a talking point as young guests try to spot them all. Alternatively, children may love to hang them on their own small tree while heartily singing the song.

12 Days of Christmas bauble set, £30; Scalloped-edge tray, £25; wrapping paper, from £4, all John Lewis & Partners



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Fireside Christmas matches, £7.95, Annabel James

Frankie bar cabinet, Michelangelo marble, £4,995, Soho Home



Gin liqueurs, £18 each, V&A Shop



Clear glass tall candle holder, £24.90 for two, Solavia Glassware



7ft tree, £450, Cox & Cox



Block-print robe, £79, Bohemia Design



Rattan hessian-lined storage baskets, from £45, Marquis & Dawe

'T WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE

Festive treats and cosy details enhance the anticipation and magic of Christmas Eve



Organic mulled wine spice bag, £6.95, Highgrove

Star stoneware dish, £7, John Lewis & partners



Christmas House sack, £24.50, Sophie Allport



Pure Cashmere throw, £365; Trio of 5m ribbons, £15; Glitter Stem decorations, £15 for a set of six, all The White Company



Le Creuset Noël cast-iron 24cm round casserole, £339, John Lewis & Partners



Traykins rectangle tray from £49, Loaf

Snowflake 10-piece cookie cutter set, £5, ProCook



Large Bowen black garden lantern with TruGlow candle, £44.99, Lights4fun

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Gold Glitter Berry garland, £25.99, Homescapes Online



Gold Stars card candle shade, Ivory, £17, Nicholas Engert Interiors



Gold Faux Wheat wreath, £55, Fauxquet



Wide Metallic Gold ribbon, £19.50, Cox & Cox



Shiny Gold Bauble spray, £6.95, Rockett St George

Four Calling Birds tray, £9.95, Annabel James



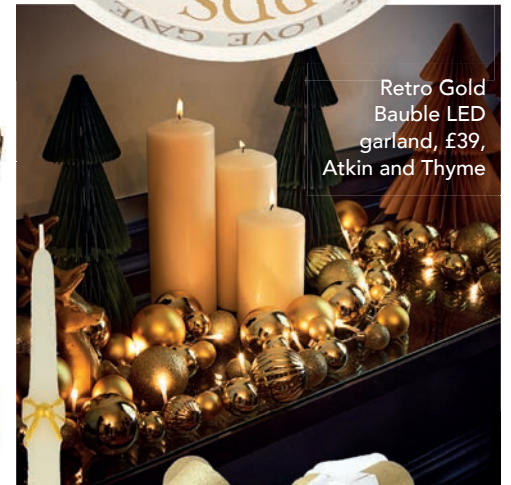
Gold Resin Artichoke, £29.99, Gisela Graham London

ALL THAT GLITTERS

Whether used on its own or in combination with red and green, gold adds a luxurious glimmer to decorating



Antique Gold Poinsettia Christmas napkin rings, £17.99 for a set of four, Walton & Co



Retro Gold Bauble LED garland, £39, Atkin and Thyme



Christmas Antique Gold Star wreath hanger, £12.99, Ivyline

Flying Dove, £6.99, Gisela Graham London

Gold Crown, £11.95, Westminster Abbey Shop



Christmas gift tags, £7.50, Cambridge Imprint



Selection of gift wrap, Wisdom & Wonder collection, John Lewis & Partners



Gold Bow candles, £18 for two, Meri Meri

Gold Glitter & White Velvet Bow crackers, £50 for six, Mrs Alice

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THE EDIT

Make sure interiors are comfortable, draught-free and filled with a welcoming glow this Christmas

SILENT NIGHTS

Well-slept guests are happy guests, so this Christmas, make up the spare room with the Sandringham wool collection from Wrought Iron & Brass Bed Company.

British bedding with a prestigious provenance, it is made from 100 per cent traceable organic wool fleece sourced directly from the Sandringham Estate – where the Royal Family spend Christmas every year.

It is also 100 per cent chemical-free and is a luxuriously comforting, completely British-made – from start to finish – wool bedding collection, so not only will guests sleep well, but so will the host. wroughtironandbrassbed.co.uk

KEEPING SAFE AND SNUG

Christmas is a time to snuggle down, cocooned against stormy weather with draught-free windows. Should windows need replacing before the big day, it is now possible to do so knowing that they are more environmentally friendly than ever before, thanks to the world's first Environmental Product Declaration (EPD)-verified low-carbon glass, the ORAÉ® system.

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stormwindows.co.uk ▶





A CHRISTMAS LIGHT SHOW

Making the home ready for the festive season is all about the little details and Atkin and Thyme's charming lighting range imparts a warm glow, much-needed at this time of year, and an element of nostalgia for Christmases gone by.

Inject more character into the home this year with a twinkling black wire stag, a pre-lit Christmas tree, or even an illuminated wooden village advent calendar, for a heartwarming focal point.

Meanwhile, a glowing wreath on the front door creates the perfect first impression for arriving guests, offering some hint as to the festive delights that await beyond.

atkinandthyme.co.uk



FEEL-GOOD TEXTILES

Founded in 1984, Titley and Marr fabrics capture the essence of British design and heritage skills. Co-founder Kate Marr has spent the past four decades producing collections of timeless printed and woven designs that she combines with natural colours to create the company's global-inspired fabrics.

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titleyandmarr.co.uk



TAKE A SEAT

These handmade chairs from The Odd Chair Company, carved by a skilled team of artisans, are anything but ordinary. Adding an elegant English atmosphere to the home, they will provide a level of comfort that will make guests feel thoroughly spoiled.

The embodiment of timeless British craftsmanship, the company's classic

Gainsborough design (left) has been expertly modified to be even more comfortable than its 19th-century design originally intended. Meanwhile, the wingback-style Queen Anne Chair is where we can imagine ourselves curled up by the fire on Boxing Day with one of our Christmas Day books.
theoddchaircompany.com ■

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Something SPECIAL

Ensure smiles all round with gifts that deliver joy, from luxuries they want to essentials that are far from ordinary, as well as little treats and thoughtful ideas



Something THEY WANT

Indulgent, beautiful and desirable gifts for the home that are sure to be on a wish list, so make their dreams come true

- 1 Le Gris-Gris de Monsieur Dior Star dinner plate, £160, by Dior Maison 2 Pollination Bloom recycled cotton blanket, £245, Arcana 3 Ernest White Middlemore linen women's pyjama shorts set, £119, Morris & Co x Piglet in Bed 4 Margareta Velours Noir cushion, £135, Designers Guild 5 Feuillage candlestick, £1,490, Goossens Paris 6 La Fornasotta Murano Gold & Pink water and wine glasses, £1,055 for a set of six of each, Artemest 7 Red Marble lamp and Scallop Cream shade, £245, Matilda Goad & Co 8 Faux Blue Croc Silver silent alarm clock, £52, Addison Ross 9 Bugle Blue & Teal glass candlestick, £42, Issy Granger 10 Willa photo frame, from £54, Rebecca Uddall 11 Menagerie Squirrel ring box, £115, Jonathan Adler 12 Marquetry Alphabet box, £250, Linley 13 Alotablots Teal & Putty table cloth and napkins, from £75 for 4-seat set, Kelling Home 14 Italian leather Navy coaster set of six, £225, Katharine Pooley ▶



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Something THEY NEED

If giving a useful and practical gift, ensure it is beautiful too with these appealing pieces that combine form and function

- 1 Collapsible umbrella with whangee handle, Pumpkin, £350, Swaine 2 Pure kitchen utensils, £62, Pascale Naessens for Serax 3 Twister salt and pepper grinder, Pale Blue, £58, Nina Campbell 4 Golden Feather napkin rings, £32 for a set of four, Curious Egg 5 Evergreen Design Series 4.7l tilt-head stand mixer with Walnut Wood bowl, £899, KitchenAid 6 Sophia Raspberry tea cosy, £75, Cathy Nordström 7 Fabric and archive print-covered handmade notebooks, £28.80 each, Sibyl Colefax & John Fowler 8 Victorian copper jelly mould, £200, Max Rollitt 9 Type 75 desk lamp, Margaret Howell Edition, Saxon Blue, £219, Anglepoise 10 Personalised leather flask, £50, Not Another Bill 11 Cloche glass dome and oak base, £95, LSA International 12 Digital kitchen scales, £129.95, Smeg 13 Admiral's decanter, £125, Dartington Crystal 14 Five-piece stoneware nesting bowl set, £330, Monoware 15 Marbled hexagonal pen pot, £20, Choosing Keeping 16 Willow garden trug, £34.50, A Place For Everything 17 Toeware letter holder, £75, Sarah K ▶



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Something TO TREAT

Perfect for that difficult-to-buy for friend or family member, these considered and thoughtful little luxuries will delight and impress

1 Peacock Bouquet velvet pouch with waterproof liner, £65, Susi Bellamy 2 Botanist glass diffuser, £110, Paul Smith 3 Traveller Collection St Tropez taper candle gift box, £20, Wild Posies 4 Rosé Frizzante, £17, Daylesford Organic 5 Kew Gardens Jasmine Peach hand cream, £9.95, The English Soap Company 6 Chocolate Stick four-drawer box, £145, Birley Chocolate 7 Heart keyring, £50, plus £20 for initials personalisation, Aspinall of London 8 Sweet Dreams cashmere women's bed socks gift set, Camel, £145, Johnstons of Elgin 9 Soleia Leopard quilted hot water bottle cover, £50, Desmond & Dempsey 10 Navy & Gold ceramic luxury marbled bauble, £40, Webb & Gray 11 Big Mama porcelain cup and saucer, Eden, £160, La DoubleJ 12 Leh Sapphire mulberry silk eye mask, £35, The Ethical Silk Company 13 Shea butter soap, £8.95, Life of Riley 14 Oval hand care tray, £75; softening and comforting wash for the hands, £54; velvet lotion for the hands, £54, all Diptyque 15 Wool felt slippers, Moss, £50, The British Blanket Company ▶



Something TO DO

Show how much someone special means with thoughtful gifts that indulge a passion, favourite hobby or pastime

- 1 Christmas Tree of Life 500-piece puzzle, £21.99, Liberty 2 Organic cotton pencil case, Heritage Cottage, £10, Vicky Yorke Designs 3 Emerald Enigma fountain pen, £36.95, Ellington Pens 4 Bees Seeds wildflower seed shaker, £5.99, Sue Ryder 5 Gift voucher for a wine tasting tour and B&B overnight stay, from £290, Three Choirs Vineyard 6 RHS Asteraceae Trowel & Fork gift set, £29.99, Dobbies 7 Artists & Illustrators subscription, £44.99 every 13 issues, with a Caran d'Ache Swisscolor water-soluble colour pencil set worth £26.49 (quote code CGGXM24), The Chelsea Magazine Company 8 Floral 'Just A Note To Say' postcard and envelopes, £8 for a pack of 10, Making Meadows 9 Mughal small sewing kit, £45, Molly Mahon 10 Wooden bird box with copper roof, £20.99, Homescapes 11 Robin & Mistletoe Apron, £19, Walton & Co 12 Eco cork yoga mat, £69, Yoga Matters 13 Hector Saxe leather Shut The Box set, £650, Abask 14 Set of two Colour Swatches playing cards, £22.50, Joanna Wood ■



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PERFECT PRESENTS

Discover unique and considered Christmas gifts that will delight friends and family, using our edit of little luxuries as a guide



ACQUERELLO

Vintage serving platter
Just in time for the festive season, customers can discover Acquerello's beautifully curated, internationally inspired collection of tableware and home accessories, such as this St.Moritz Vintage Skier Large Oval Serving Platter.
£86, acquerellohome.com



LIBERTY

Ianthe bath robe
Cosy up in style with Liberty's Ianthe towelling robe this winter. In a sumptuously soft cotton that will effortlessly infuse your bathroom set-up with a touch of print. Available in Teal, White and Navy.
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LIBERTY
Silk cushion

Crafted in England, the Persian Verdure square silk cushion by Liberty is a versatile interiors staple. Perfect for elevating your home, the design features an archival artwork which is printed on an elegant silk twill.
£245, libertylondon.com



MUST-HAVE BINS

Sumptuous tissue boxes
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Candleholders and lanterns from The Danes add a magical touch to the Christmas table. The walls are in Farrow & Ball's School House White, which helps to maximise the light, airy atmosphere.



WINTER LAYERS

Considered alterations to the layout of this Cotswolds cottage have transformed it into a light-filled home for modern living and made the most of its bucolic setting

FEATURE CHARLOTTE DUNFORD PHOTOGRAPHY ASTRID TEMPLIER STYLING GILL NICHOLAS AND MIKE BIRCH



Settled amid rolling hills and farmland at the end of a winding single track, there is a sense of utter tranquillity encompassing this traditional Cotswold stone cottage. “It is the most beautiful location and it’s as isolated as you can possibly be in the Cotswolds,” says interior designer Victoria Gray, who lives here with her husband, Tom, and their two children, Jemima, 16, and Lucas, 14. “In the winter there are lots of places to get out and walk, it’s really very pretty.”

Victoria and Tom came across the cottage in 2019 while searching for a weekend country bolthole to escape the bustle of London, where their primary

residence is. “We both grew up in South Africa with lots of space and we wanted somewhere the children could have the same,” recalls Victoria. “We spent a long time looking for somewhere peaceful with a view, and that’s exactly what the cottage came with.”

The building is an old farmhouse dating back to the late 1600s, with an addition on the back of the house which was completed in the 1960s using old stone. “The house is split over two levels, so it’s two floors in the front and then two floors up and at the back,” explains Victoria. Aside from the beautiful surroundings, the main appeal for the couple lay in the cottage’s good bones, which were brimming with



possibilities. “It was a house that we could renovate and really make our own,” she adds.

Having been left alone for a long time, the cottage required a lot of work to be conducive to 21st-century family life. “It wasn’t modern at all and the configuration was all wrong. It was facing the side of the hill rather than into the valley and there was no view whatsoever,” says Victoria. Walls in the sitting room and kitchen were knocked down to create one long, open-plan area and the floors were dropped slightly. “I’ve got a very tall family, and Tom kept bashing his head. The floor had been built up over the years so the ceiling height wasn’t good at ▶

‘With the beams cutting up the rooms, I think it was really important not to make a patchwork of things’

ABOVE LEFT A tall Christmas tree has been decorated with ribbons and decorations from The Danes. Victoria sourced the cream wool for the

curtains at Painswick Fabrics, which specialises in end-of-roll lines. The Fairfax sofa from Kingcome has been covered in Pachinko by

Nina Campbell for Osborne & Little.

ABOVE Victoria at the front door, which is hung with a festive wreath to offer a warm welcome.

‘It’s a lovely house to entertain in because the kitchen is also a living area and then the sitting room is right next to it, so everybody has a space’

all,” she continues. A set of double doors was installed at the end of the house, “so you could sit and look out into the garden and down the valley.” Upstairs, the bedrooms were opened up and extra bathrooms were created. Despite being an old building the work all went rather smoothly. “There were no major issues,” Victoria remembers, “although we were dealing with massive stones in the side of the house so a lot of manpower was required!”

With natural light now flooding in and the layout brought up to date, Victoria aimed to imbue a similarly light and contemporary style through the decoration and furnishings. “We had to be able to arrive and relax, so I kept the design simple using quite muted tones and nothing too splashy,” she explains. “We washed the walls and ceilings with the same colour. With the beams cutting up the rooms, I think it was really important not to make a patchwork of things and not become too complicated.” A soft, nature-inspired palette of greens, warm neutrals and earthy pinks allows the original features and layers of art, furniture and textiles to sing.

“It’s a real mix of old and new. There are some wonderful antique shops in the area, so it was a lot of fun trying to find things locally that would combine with the new upholstered pieces I got from my ▶

RIGHT Kitchen cabinets by Stroud Furniture Makers have been painted in Fired Earth’s Wild Olive to tie in with the picturesque countryside beyond the window. A blind in Fleurs Étranges by Braquenié for Pierre Frey is framed by Zac library wall lights from Hector Finch that provide extra task lighting to aid cooking and baking on dark, winter days. The pair of upholstered slippers chairs are from Robert Langford.







‘We had to be able to arrive and relax, so I kept the design simple, using quite muted tones and nothing too splashy’

favourite suppliers,” says Victoria. “As a designer, I’m exposed to so many fabrics. I collect my favourites and they usually sit in a pile near my desk, so it was a great opportunity to bring out some of the ones that I really liked.” An interesting medley of textiles brings pattern and intrigue to the interiors, effortlessly assembled by Victoria’s expert eye. Indeed, her studio, Olivine Design, which she founded in 2012 with Taline Findlater, has become known for its elegantly layered and inherently comfortable rooms.

The scheme for downstairs evolved gradually, led by a pretty yet practical piece. “I found a really lovely, extra-large – which is why I could never find a place for it in our London house – suzani-covered ottoman

from Penny Morrison, and then it became a matter of trying to find other fabrics which weren’t too overpowering. I think the Nina Campbell for Osborne & Little pattern on the sofa is really lovely, you can throw a lot at it. Often the cushions get changed out depending on what season it is, so it had to work as a backdrop to things being added and taken away.” This use of textiles continues into the kitchen area where a patterned rug and pair of upholstered accent chairs soften the scheme and create an ideal spot beside the fireplace to sit on chillier days.

It is these thoughtful details and clever use of space that makes hosting family such a joy during the festive season. “It’s a lovely house to entertain in because the

ABOVE A sofa Victoria has had for years, a rug she bought in Istanbul and a pair of curtains in Été Moscovite fabric from Décors Barbares help to soften the bathroom scheme. The CP Hart bath has been painted in Farrow & Ball’s Hague Blue.

Fairy lights and festive garlands line the wooden beams in the principal bedroom, creating an enchanting haven. The blind is made from a cream linen (discontinued) by Ian Mankin with braided details from Samuel & Sons. The bench and side tables were found at antique shops in London and Stroud.





kitchen is also a living area and then the sitting room is right next to it, so everybody has a space and you're not on top of each other which is really important over a holiday period," says Victoria. "We always used to go to Norway for Christmas because my mum's family is from there, so Christmas Eve is all Norwegian traditions and the decorations are definitely more Scandinavian with muted colours and plenty of natural foliage. I like to add some lovely South African beaded decorations from a friend of mine too." Christmas Day is then a more relaxed affair, taking in the winter landscape with a peaceful stroll and whiling away the hours together by the fire. ■

ABOVE Beds painted in Hay sing against walls in Bancho Green, both Farrow & Ball, in the children's bedroom. Victoria made the lampshades which sit on Pooky's Rosara table lamp bases. The stools are sourced from an antique shop and the blind is in Forest by Virginia White Collection.

RIGHT The 17th-century traditional stone cottage has a fairytale feel to it, nestled in a verdant valley of the Cotswold hills.





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In the kitchen by deVOL, Sam felt painting the island in Farrow & Ball's Smoked Trout would be the perfect foil for the deep olive green cabinets.



Victorian Treasure

Mindful of honouring the integrity of her serendipitous find, Sam Palmer has gone the extra mile to create a thoughtfully renovated home that lends itself to the festive season

FEATURE JANET MCMEEKIN PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH





‘Everything has a story to tell, from the artwork, furniture and treasures we’ve collected during our travels, to the Christmas decorations inherited from my parents’

As Sam Palmer carefully places the final bauble on her beautifully decorated Christmas tree, she glances around the Victorian home that she has sensitively restored with her husband and reflects on their labour of love journey. “I adore Christmas and feel incredibly grateful to make special memories with our children, Oscar and Ivy, in the home that Adam and I have poured so much love, energy and thought into,” she reveals.

The couple, who grew up in England, spent several years working abroad while climbing their career ladders: Sam is a trends forecaster and Adam an innovation strategist. “After living in Hong Kong and then Italy, we relocated to New York for 12 years, before returning to England for a short time and then heading back to the USA to live in Boston,” Sam explains.

When the pandemic struck, the couple yearned to relocate to the coastal town where Adam grew up. “During our previous stint in West Sussex, we’d enjoyed the freedom of being near to the sea and within easy reach of so many green spaces,” Sam says. “In August 2020, we upped sticks and lived with my mother-in-law, while hunting for a period property.”

As luck would have it, while taking Oscar to nursery one day, Sam spotted a ‘for sale’ sign outside a handsome flint-fronted house that she had been admiring for weeks. “I couldn’t believe my dream home was on the market and, having contacted the estate agent, we all went to view it the next day.” ▶

LEFT A Christmas tree, chosen by the children during a family trip to the Wiston Estate, takes pride of place in the sitting room. The shutters are painted in Sand IV, the ceiling in Sand I, and the walls in Sand V, all Paint & Paper Library. The rug is from Zara Home, while the ottoman was bought from Rowen & Wren. A treasured Swedish herbarium has been thoughtfully positioned above the Oscar sofa, which is from SCP. The throw is from Susie Watson Designs.



The intimate dining room, with glazed doors made by the couple's joiner, is the ideal place for the family to enjoy Christmas dinner. The walls and doors are painted in Farrow & Ball's Templeton Pink, while the rugs are from Soap & Salvation. The Christie pendant light was sourced from Original BTC.

'We were determined to work with the Victorian vernacular and existing period features, which were subtle, not overstated, fussy or flouncy'

she recalls. "From the moment the front door opened and I caught a glimpse of the stained glass window glinting at the top of the staircase, I knew instinctively that the house was going to be amazing."

Although the decor was dated, and the 1950s red and yellow Formica kitchen not to their taste, the couple loved the room proportions, character, and the property's potential. "Even though it was going to be a major renovation project, it instantly felt like somewhere we could, one day, call home," Sam says.

Having thoroughly researched options, the pair liaised with architect Georgina Mann. "We didn't want it to look too designed or hugely modernised. Instead, we were determined to work with the Victorian vernacular and existing period features, which were subtle, not overstated, fussy or flouncy," says Sam.

Plans were formulated to transform the ground floor into a more practical, family-friendly layout. "By knocking the sitting room and old dining room through, we could create a new, smaller dining area and space for cupboards to house our washing machine and tumble-dryer, accessed from the hallway," says Sam. The second entrance to the sitting room was to be blocked off and become a handy coat cupboard, while the area under the stairs was earmarked for a bijou cloakroom. At the rear of the property, the old kitchen, a pantry, outdoor toilet and bathroom were to be replaced with a spacious kitchen, complete with a vaulted roof and skylights. Upstairs, a bedroom would become an elegant bathroom.

With planning permission granted, in the spring of 2021, a recommended local builder was hired and the first phase of the project began. "While stripping the house, we wanted to retain its authenticity and be respectful of its history by keeping or reusing anything that had form or function," Sam explains. "Ironically, despite my job, I didn't want to follow trends or change things just because I could. As custodians of this house, seeing the patina, dents and dings is important to us: they lend a sense of continuity and timelessness."



As the project progressed, Sam spent hours honing every detail, tackling a plethora of DIY tasks and scouring the internet for bargains. "My best find was a £10,000 Devon & Devon bath that I bought for a tenth of the price," she reveals. "It was extremely heavy and remained under a curtain in the sitting room throughout much of the project. I knew the builders were deeply concerned about how they'd bring it upstairs without breaking the stained glass window, but having practised with a wooden mock-up bath, they achieved the mission."

With the new bathroom finished and the downstairs layout reconfigured, the family moved in during November 2021, and rigged up a makeshift kitchen while waiting for their new kitchen to be built. "During that seven-month phase there were many head-scratching moments," Sam explains. "Trying to work out how to panel the low-pitched ceiling and incorporate the Velux windows proved quite the mental arithmetic puzzle."

When it came to selecting colours, Sam wanted to incorporate a rich, earthy palette, referencing the English countryside. "The olive green colour ▶

ABOVE Sam had her heart set on a deconstructed Marcus Spencer armchair for this space. The cushion from Warner House lends a festive touch. The tallboy, bought during a house clearance, has been painted in Benjamin Moore's North Creek Brown.

BelarteSTUDIO created a custom-made mural, echoing the pear tree in the back garden, for daughter Ivy's bedroom.



‘Seeing the patina, dents and dings is important to us: they lewnd a sense of continuity and timelessness’

for the deVOL cabinets in the kitchen was inspired by a Land Rover Defender, while the grey-pink hues were pulled through from the marble,” says Sam. “The flintwork and brick also informed our choices, helping to create a cohesive feel throughout.”

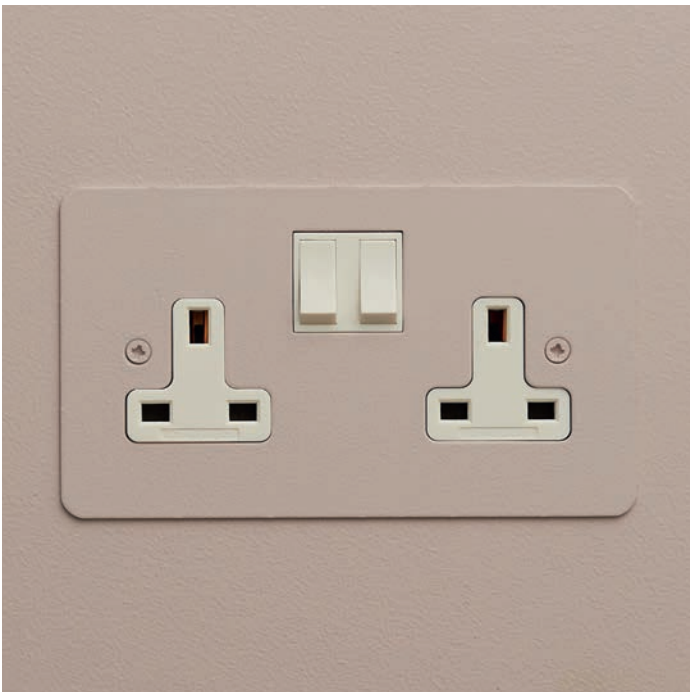
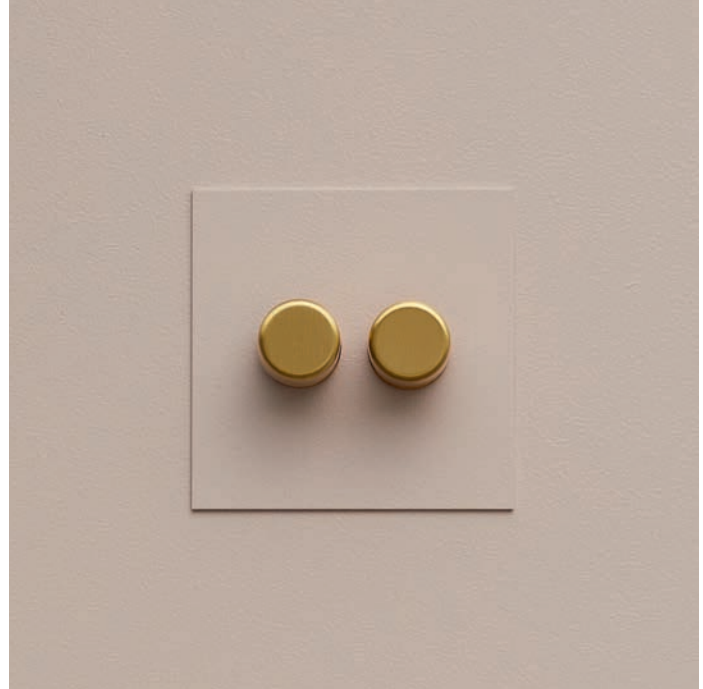
The result of the couple’s painstaking attention to detail is a much-loved home that echoes the past and embraces the future. “Everything has a story to tell, from the artwork, furniture and treasures we’ve collected during our travels, to the nostalgic Christmas decorations I’ve inherited from my parents,” explains Sam. “We’re thrilled that our vision has come to fruition and can’t wait to celebrate this magical time of year together in our home, playing games and enjoying a Christmas dinner, cooked by Adam. If the weather holds up, we may head to the beach for a bracing stroll.” ■

ABOVE RIGHT To keep this space, with Sam’s prized Devon & Devon bath, clutter-free a hidden cupboard was built behind the panelling. The taps are from Barber Wilsons.

RIGHT The rug from Nordic Knots is cosy underfoot, while the walls have been painted in Farrow & Ball’s James White.



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A sensitive yet pragmatic approach to renovating a Tudor farmhouse has resulted in a delightfully characterful home, reflecting classic country style

FEATURE AMANDA HARLING
PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL



PREVIOUS PAGE The natural textures and tones of the original beams, the wooden floor and the walls and ceiling painted in a stone colour create a timeless look in the spacious kitchen. The dining table is by Susie Watson Designs, as are the dining chairs, though now discontinued.

Nestled into the hillside, with uninterrupted views over the High Weald, it is not difficult to understand why Jane Howard and her husband Adrian were determined to buy the East Sussex farmhouse that has been their home for the past 25 years. “We were living and working in London and had two daughters, aged five and three, that we wanted to bring up in the country,” Jane explains. “I knew East Sussex well and felt it was somewhere I could embrace country life. We viewed dozens of rural properties before we came across this one. It was being sold with 100 acres of land and farm buildings and although the house needed a considerable amount of TLC, we realised that it was an opportunity we couldn’t miss. It went to final bids and then we were interviewed by the owner who

approved of our intention to farm rather than rent out the fields.”

Jane had recently sold her PR company and part of the deal was that she had to stay on for a couple of years, so initially she commuted to London three days a week while Adrian, a journalist, worked from home. “I remember that on the days when I was home, I was so happy I’d walk Mattie and Rose to school across the fields, singing all the way. After a while they found the singing rather annoying and pleaded with me to stop,” she laughs.

The couple’s sketchy knowledge of farming was helped along by friends Andy and Brenda who were willing to share their knowledge. “Adrian met Andy when he was at Hadlow College taking an HND course in agriculture and sheep rearing. While Brenda



had previously worked on this farm and was happy to help me buy some Sussex cattle, the local native breed, and teach me everything she knew. We were enormously lucky to have their guidance. Farming is hard work, but it's the life we both wanted."

The farmhouse, which dates from around 1540, has undergone a process of gentle updating. "It had been tenanted for years so the interior was pretty basic," Jane says. "Lino covered all the floors and it badly needed new plumbing, new wiring, new everything, but we could see that it had good bones. The quirky aspects such as low ceilings, sloping walls, uneven floors, we think, are part of its charm."

Jane's approach to her home has always been pragmatic. "Housekeeping has never really been my thing, although it gives me great pleasure ▶

'One can't afford to be precious when living on a farm, where muddy dogs, boots and lambs are a feature of daily life'

ABOVE LEFT Adding to the light effects in the kitchen are mirrored tiles from Topps Tiles, which form the splashback behind the wood-fired, cast-iron Esse range cooker. "Seeing candlelight reflected in

the mirrored tiles always looks attractive, and especially so at Christmas when I have candles on every surface," says Jane.

ABOVE Jane with daughters Rose (left), and Mattie (right).



to be surrounded by lovely furniture and objects. However, one can't afford to be precious when living on a farm where muddy dogs, boots and lambs are a feature of daily life."

Jane embarked on an additional challenge when she and her artist friend Jane McCall established their lampshade business five years ago. "I'd known Jane since both our daughters attended the village school. We met again on a lampshade-painting workshop run by Curious House and it dawned on me that we might create a successful business if we pooled her artistic talents with my background in PR and marketing. The result is Bloomsbury Revisited, which has become far more successful than either of us could have imagined. October to December is our busiest time as we take part in Christmas fairs up and down the country. Our newest range, which includes hand-printed shades and hand-painted lamp bases, continues ▶

LEFT The real thing – a ceiling-height Christmas tree hung with multi-coloured traditional baubles is placed in a corner of the sitting room. Lending an instant feeling of warmth are the rosy floral curtains in a Colefax and Fowler fabric – another of Jane's second-hand bargains.

BELOW Firelight, candlelight and fairy lights threaded through a garland of winter evergreens bathe the sitting room in a cosy glow. Grouped around the Susie Watson ottoman covered in a cut velvet, are a pair of fireside wing armchairs and side tables draped in crewel work.





The sturdy wooden Indian bookcase was bought to display the collection of Staffordshire pottery. "My Aunt Mary left me the figures but I had nowhere to put them until Rose saw the bookcase which is perfect size."



'I find that the muted finishes are more in keeping with a house this age'



A pair of second-hand classic curtains in a Colefax and Fowler design hang in Rose's beamed bedroom with a trio of Oka framed fruit prints on the wall. The quilted bedcover in natural linen is by Tielle and the wall lights are from Jim Lawrence.

ABOVE LEFT Looking appropriately vintage in the beamed family bathroom is a freestanding roll-top slipper bath. The tongue-and-groove panelling is painted in Farrow & Ball's Railings with Ammonite on the walls. The towels are from Rebecca Udall.

LEFT Jane takes advantage of her rural surroundings to decorate the front door at Christmas with a simple wreath and the porch with greenery gathered from woodland around the 16th-century farmhouse. The tile-hung exterior is typical of the area.



to be influenced by the Charleston artists Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, but also showcases Jane's own distinctive style and colour choices. Another feature which makes us very proud is that everything is made in Sussex."

Apart from lampshades, Jane maintains that she is incapable of sourcing anything for her home that is not vintage or second-hand. "The greenhouse belonged to a friend's father; the kitchen cupboard

was an animal feed bin with its original zinc top, the sinks came from a dealer at a vintage fair and the pantry doors were made from the wooden trestle tables from the village hall. The only things that are new are the mirrored splashback tiles and the taps – making do with leaky old taps was not an option."

A photograph of a kitchen featuring natural materials in neutral tones inspired Jane's wish for a 'less is more' scheme. "I find that the textures and ▶



mutated finishes of the zinc, wood and mirrored glass are more in keeping with a house this age. If I feel like a splash of colour I can always find a rug or some flowers from the garden.” Anything white apart from bed linen is another pet hate of Jane’s. “White looks completely wrong in old houses – even a white toaster looks out of place.”

In the run-up to Christmas, once the fairs are over, Jane concentrates on preparing her home. “Mattie and Rose have left home but they’re always back for Christmas. We go off to the woods gathering holly and ivy to decorate the house in the traditional manner.”

A few days before Christmas Jane puts on a live Nativity for friends and family. “It starts with a spotlight on Joseph leading Mary on a donkey across the fields. Then there are shepherds watching their sheep when Angel Gabriel, in a white duvet cover and high up in a tree, appears, and a scene where our summer house becomes the inn. After the outside scenes, we all proceed down to the barn where we create the crib scene. After some hearty carol singing, everyone stays on for a Christmas drink and a chat. It’s a lovely way to start the festivities.” ■

ABOVE Pomegranate Grand wallpaper in Granada Green by Totty Lowther adds a vibrant note in the principal bedroom. The bedside lamps and shades are from Bloomsbury Revisited, while the painting above the bed is by Tim Pryke. Scalloped bedlinen with a green border from Rebecca Udall completes the look.

RIGHT Hanging on the wall above the lower half of a dresser is a painting by Victoria Threlfall. The Sundaer jute scallop rug on the floor is from French Bedroom.



THE ENGLISH HOME

2025
DECORATING GUIDE

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Bright STAR

Celebrating the festive season with stars, bows, and natural foliage, artist Charlotte Partridge has injected joyful sparkle into her family's newly acquired family home

FEATURE MAGGIE COLVIN
PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH

Living in London, once considered to be a city of joined up villages, little did Charlotte Partridge and her husband Jamie Legg expect to find a remaining enclave of friendly community life. Delighted to discover one such place north of Clapham Common, they were inspired to start house hunting there. "Walking around the area, it felt unusually relaxed," Jamie recalls. "We spotted a traditional family butcher, fantastic fishmonger, wine shop, florist, Gail's bakery, a gastro pub, and a children's nursery all within easy walking distance of each other. The location was pretty near perfect."

However, their whirlwind move from rented accommodation to the house they now live in, was far from perfect. After months of disappointments, and with Charlotte being eight months pregnant ▶

RIGHT Walls in Pink Ground by Farrow & Ball create a warm backdrop to Charlotte's paintings. With the sofa and armchair arranged around the open fire, it is a cosy spot in which to open presents, and for the family's Labrador, Bimbo, to snooze. A coffee table from Oka completes the looks.







'I love country house style, with open fireplaces and fenders, a mix of antiques, and super-cool modern classics'

ABOVE Charlotte, seated by the tree, with cushions from Penny Morrison and Trouva. Visit charlottepartridge.com to see her paintings or to commission portraits. Red bows tied to lampshades are a hallmark of the Partridge's Christmas decorating style.

with their first baby, an estate agent briefed them not a moment too soon about a new gem on the market. As they walked through the front door, Charlotte explains how she almost burst into tears of relief and joy. "It was so right for us," she says. "There was very little that we did not like. It was a four-bedroomed Victorian house with solid pine floors in the hall, high ceilings with original ceiling roses and cornices immaculately restored, a state-of-the-art kitchen, with quality bookcases and a marble fireplace in the sitting room."

It was a world away from their very first home – an ex-council house on a housing estate, which Charlotte

had triumphantly turned into a gentrified country cottage. With her innate artist's vision, she altered its drab boxy proportions and faceless facade, moving walls, adding a new porch with an apex roof and New England-style shutters. With this project under her belt, she felt confident to tackle almost anything.

By contrast, their new house was already in great shape. The previous owners had added a side return with roof lights and double-glazed sliding doors to the garden. Other inspirational designer touches included the antique-mirrored splashback in the kitchen and breakfront built-in wardrobes in the master bedroom. ▶



Covered in a Teyssier flamestitch fabric, the Acres Farm club fender makes a smart accompaniment to sitting room scheme. The painting above the fireplace is by Charlotte.



The dining table is encircled by a mix of upholstered chairs with washable covers and Hans Wegner Wishbone chairs by Carl Hansen & Søn bought from The Conran Shop.



“It was only after Nala was born, and living in the house for a few months, that we began to want to implement some changes of our own,” Charlotte says.

Top of the list was the open-plan attic floor, which was reconfigured to create an office for Jamie, plus a guest bedroom and bathroom. Jamie is now happily ensconced, tucked below the roof, far from the pitter-patter of small feet and out of bounds to all.

For Charlotte, as an artist of repute who trained in Florence and Philadelphia, the furnishing of their

new home was an exciting project. “My mother is my inspiration,” she says. “We share the same love of country house style with open fireplaces and fenders, a mix of antiques and super-cool modern classics, and in traditional muted colours. I copied her idea of decorating lampshades with red Christmas bows. They always look so pretty. When I was a child, she used to take me round the interior design exhibitions, which is where my first love for patterns and colours came alive.” ▶

ABOVE A clever foil to hide little sticky fingers, in the hall and stairway, the panels below the dado rail are painted in Elephant’s Breath by Farrow & Ball. The oil painting of the King’s Guards in the snow is by Charlotte.

Stylish and serene, mustard yellow walls wrap the principal bedroom in sunshine. A charcoal portrait of daughter Nala is hung between the windows, which are dressed in Lineco Flint curtain fabric from The Cloth Shop. The headboard is covered in Kanthakat by Lewis & Wood.



'My mother used to take me to interior design exhibitions, which is where my first love for patterns and colours came alive'

The daughter of Frank Partridge, the well-known antique dealer whose family has been central to London's antique trade for over a century, Charlotte has inherited her antecedents' eye for quality. "My grandfather gave me one or two pieces which I treasure – one of his tables is in the girl's bathroom. When I can, I like to make a bathroom feel like a room by adding an armchair or table. There is not always enough space to do it, but if it is possible, it is a good tip," she explains.

Charlotte is full of other inspiring decorating ideas. "We added panelling in the hall, below dado rail height, to give the hall more character and a sense of history. In the drawing room, we removed the top row of shutters to increase light while maintaining privacy by keeping the bottom row in place. Jamie was my sounding board and contributed his own inspired auction finds," Charlotte adds.

Decorating the house for Christmas is a family affair. Charlotte spends most of the time wiring up natural greenery with twinkling lights and candles and directing her team: Jamie sets up the tree and the couple's two little helpers, Nala, five, and Lily, three, make the paper chains to hang from the ceiling. Charlotte, with Nala, sticks cloves into tangerines, which "make everything smell spicy and delicious".

Having her own children has opened a new niche for Charlotte, whose charcoal portraits of children are now in hot demand. One of Lily, aged two at the time, is hung in an oval frame between the windows of the principal bedroom. "They encapsulate a timeline in the child's life which will always be a pleasurable memento to parents and in time the children as well," she says. The house is full of Charlotte's other, more colourful, paintings, enhancing her warm, restful schemes.

With small children and their steady stream of riotous playmates coming and going, there is a constant battle to keep everything shipshape. Jamie, who says Charlotte and he are "the dream team and run a well-oiled ship", does most of the clearing up and has written on his wife's notice board: "I have cleaned the house from top to bottom and now I just need everyone to move out." ■



ABOVE Beatrix Potter curtain fabric by Jane Churchill and decorative balloons on the walls define daughter Lily's room. A lamp from Hill & May is topped with a shade by Etta Priestley.

RIGHT Cole & Son's Acuario wallpaper turns the children's bathroom into a fun theatrical space. Scallop mosaic tiles complete the marine theme. The wall lights and pleated shades are both Pooky.



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ABOVE Take the stress out of travelling with your pet and elevate your adventures with the Tavo Maeve Pet Protection System, designed with safety and comfort in mind.

Our pets are part of our family and yet new research shows that almost 60 per cent of dog owners have driven with their dogs unsecured in the past six months. It is a worrying trend, says Karen McDonnell, Head of Global Relations at the Royal Society of the Prevention of Accidents: "Ensuring pets are safely secured in vehicles not only protects them and passengers, but also reduces the chance of the pet distracting the driver."

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TOP LEFT & BOTTOM RIGHT

The Maeve's carrier easily connects to the included vehicle ISOFIX base.

TOP RIGHT

The latest addition to the Tavro range, the Dupree™ II, is a compact carrier for cats and smaller dog breeds with built-in ISOFIX.

LEFT Your pet will soon learn that the carrier is a safe, snug place to be.

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STYLE INSPIRATION

Tips for creating a beautifully dressed Christmas tree, expert advice on buying dining furniture to host all the family, and 10 ways to be more thoughtful over the festive season ►

GREENER CHOICE

An eye-catching garland of greenery on the mantelpiece sets the perfect Christmas scene. Holly and ivy are the traditional choices, but consider something a bit different with a dried hops garland. Giving a full, abundant display, these aromatic alternatives can actually last for several years, and be used far beyond the festive period, imbuing a classic country feel. Bring a festive touch to proceedings with the candles, twinkly lights, and of course stockings hung with care.

Olive Wall Paint, £55.95 for 2.5l, Annie Sloan.

For a hop garland, try Hukins Hops





The sturdy wooden Indian bookcase was bought to display the collection of Staffordshire pottery. "My Aunt Mary left me the figures but I had nowhere to put them until Rose saw the bookcase which is perfect size."



The Christmas tree has become one of, if not *the*, most important parts of decorating the home over the festive period. It is the focal point and plays a central role in the lead up as well as on the day itself, when presents are lovingly piled beneath its boughs. So important is the tree that many consider its placement when buying a house and furniture can even be arranged for the entire year around where the tree will be positioned for a few weeks in December. It is often given prime position and as such warrants extra care and attention with its adornments. Though lights can be wrapped round, baubles hung with abandon and a star placed at the top, there is an art to dressing the tree, to ensure it looks worthy of adoring looks all through Christmas.

Time & place

The first decision is often 'when' the tree will be put up. Increasingly it seems trees and decorations are up in shops and towns earlier each year, leading to earlier arrivals in homes too. However, it is traditional to wait until at least the 1st of December to put up a tree – especially if opting for a real one. It can be wise to delay this a week or so to ensure it is still at its prime come Christmas Day. It is customary to make this a family tradition with everyone involved in picking out a tree or bringing it down from an attic and lovingly unwrapping treasured ornaments to display. After when, the location and size of tree is the next decision.

Lisa Coppin, chief creative officer of The Cotswold Company, advises, "There are a few important things to consider when choosing a tree, whether it's real or faux. Crucially, think about the tree's location and how much space it will take up. A large tree is beautiful, but if it's squeezed into a small area, you might end up with countless decoration casualties ▶





DECORATING

ABOVE An open-plan living space offers more flexibility in tree location. Selection of lights and LED candles, all Lights4Fun

LEFT A classic palette of gold, green and red is easy to add to year-on-year to build a beautiful collection. Real tree, from £24.99; Assorted Classic Noel baubles, from £2.99, and all decorations, Dobbies Garden Centres

RIGHT Create cohesion between the baubles and gift wrap with a select colour palette. Paper decorations can also help fill the space while awaiting a present delivery. Honeycomb Mint paper decorations, £16.25 for three, and all other decorations and gift boxes, Bungalow Denmark at Curated Living



Use ribbons to unite a colour scheme. Here bows on the tree, candlesticks and presents make a bold style statement.

Walls, Polished Slate (above) and Stonecutter below, from £30 for 0.94l Flat paint, Benjamin Moore



Use an abundance of lights for a twinkly effect, ensuring the tree is positioned so that they can easily be plugged in. *Chadwick three-seat sofa in Rustic Weave Natural, £1,899, The Cotswold Company*
 BELOW Add some nostalgic character by layering in a few clip-on candle lights. *Candle remote-control tree lights, £50 for 10, Cox & Cox*



as people brush past.” She counsels, too, that a real tree might require a cooler spot away from a radiator, and “that while placing the tree in the window is often a favourite choice, remember that it can reduce the amount of natural light, which is precious during the winter months.”

Consider where sockets are for plugging in lights, too, unless the lights are operated remotely. Are they easy to reach? No-one wants to be crawling underneath the tree every night to turn them off!

Finally, the tree should be positioned so it can be enjoyed by all and fulfil its function. Coppin adds, “Make sure your tree becomes a focal point of whichever room it’s in. In the sitting room, which is the most common place for a tree, consider positioning it in a corner or space where it’s visible from all seating areas. After all, there’s little point in having one if it can’t be enjoyed by everyone gathered around to open presents on Christmas morning.”

Illuminating advice

It is sensible to start by adding the lights to the tree, making sure they are well spread out and positioned before baubles and other decorations are added.

For those choosing a faux Christmas tree, many come pre-lit – with lights already in place. Danielle Le Vaillant, head of photography and film at Cox & Cox, says it is prudent to take the time to ensure the shape of the tree is perfected: “With artificial trees, time spent plumping and fluffing out the branches to create maximum volume will completely transform the finished effect.”

Part of the character and charm of a real tree is that it may not be perfect. Look for a good, even shape without big gaps or sparse branches. When it comes to lighting, small led lights are often the primary choice, in a warm white for a soft twinkle and glow. Start from the bottom ▶

A pre-lit faux Christmas tree ensures thousands of twinkling lights are perfectly placed. *Ultimate Lights pre-lit Christmas tree, from £550 (7ft), Cox & Cox*



of the tree and zig-zag the wire in towards the trunk of the tree and back out to the most outer branch. This will create depth, layering lights deep into the tree as well as illuminating baubles. Work round the tree, going up each layer while continuing to zig-zag, and spiral around the top with a final light to shine on the star or angel topper.

Le Valliant also suggests adding in a different light for an extra layer of character: “Just as you would use a combination of wall and table lamps to bring warmth and atmosphere to a room, add extra dimension to your tree with clip-on candle lights for storybook nostalgia, or, for more contemporary styling, layer in string lights in this season’s amber tones.”

Beautiful baubles

Once the scene is set with a well-lit tree it is time for the fun part – hanging the baubles. Often these are a lovingly curated collection that hold memories of many Christmases. If seeking a new look, this can be achieved without a total change of decorations.

Classic golds, greens and red can be mixed together, or omit reds and focus on a more streamlined palette of greens with some favourite golden treasures, perhaps adding in some new clear crystal or glass, or natural wooden or paper pieces. Enrich a red scheme with a palette of burgundy, rose pink and plum, or simply embrace a more eclectic mix.

Le Valliant adds, “Many of us hoard decorations for their sentimental value. ▶



ABOVE RIGHT Ribbons used to hang baubles add a little extra colour and flair. *Twisted Smoke glass baubles, £24 for a set of three, and all other decorations, Layered Lounge*
LEFT Mix sizes, shapes, colours and textures of baubles for a tree full of interest. *Mixed selection of baubles, from £50 for a set of four, all Nkuku*



A real Christmas tree offers a unique character with its natural shape. Adorn with a mixture of different-sized baubles and plenty of lights. Interior design by Stephanie Dunning.



ABOVE & LEFT Disguise the base of a tree with a fetching tree skirt. There are plenty of options in metal, rattan, paper and fabric. *Mistletoe tree skirt (above), £64.99, Ivyline Collapsible tree skirt (left), £20, Habitat*

Adding luxurious bows in a single colour, evenly around your tree will bring a stylish sense of cohesion to even the quirkiest collection of baubles.”

Suzy Humphreys, founder of Layered Lounge, also advocates ribbons for cohesion in a scheme. “This year, I plan to dress the main Christmas tree in the sitting room with five different bauble designs in complementary colours,” she says. “However, to add an element of fun, I will use various coloured ribbons to attach the decorations to the tree, introducing a bow design element to the scheme. This adds a touch of playfulness and allows you to tie in your gift wrap finishes with the tree. It’s a small detail but one that is guaranteed to be noticed.”

It can be hard to know where to start when hanging decorations. Start with

larger baubles, particularly special or cherished ones to ensure they get pride of place as well as space on the sturdier branches. Smaller baubles can then be used to fill in the gaps, remembering to go deeper into the tree for something that catches the eye in all directions.

“It’s generally easier to dress the tree in stages, working with one type of decoration at a time,” says Poppy Munson, product developer at Nkuku. “This allows you to ensure that each design is evenly distributed, especially when working with varying colours and sizes.”

Munson also advises a little restraint: “It’s important to step back and evaluate the tree before adding more decorations as you’ll often find that you don’t need to use the entire box of ornaments to create an impactful scheme. Any remaining

baubles can be placed in artisanal bowls around the room, adding interest and tying the Christmas tree into the overall decor of the space.”

That’s a wrap

After topping the tree with a star, oversized bow or traditional fairy or angel, the final touch will be what is around the bottom of the tree. Use a decorative tree skirt to disguise the legs of an artificial tree or the stand or pot of a real one. If not placing presents under the tree until Christmas Eve, consider using some paper honeycomb decorations as placeholders to avoid a large void under the tree.

Once the tree is fully dressed, dim the lights to allow the fairy lights to twinkle and sit back with a warm mince pie and a favourite drink to enjoy the spectacle. ■

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About the expert

Dr Lucy Worsley is chief curator at Historic Royal Palaces and the author of several books. She has presented TV shows for Channel 4 and the History Channel.

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DESIGNS on DINING

Dining areas must function as comfortably for relaxed brunches as for entertaining on a more elaborate level – the key to success is ensuring they are suitably furnished to provide versatility for all occasions

From hosting an elegant dinner party to serving a relaxed weekend lunch, the dining space becomes the focus of attention as we enter the season of entertaining. With careful planning, decorating the dining table is a joy for the host as well as guests attending the celebrations. “A well-designed tablescape is a visual feast that sets the mood for a memorable gathering,” says Paula Carter of The White Kitchen Company. The challenge is finding one that fulfils the many demands, from daily

use in open-plan kitchens to dressing up for entertaining.

Kit Kemp, founder and creative director of Kit Kemp Design Studio, is credited with transforming entertaining spaces with colour and character. “Whether you’re hosting a dinner party or it’s a small weekday supper, a dining space should always sing and bring joy to any mealtime,” she says. “However big or small, a beautifully designed dining space is an opportunity to have lots of fun and create some real magic.” ▶



Make the most of a long rectangular table with a central display that can be enjoyed from each place setting. *Ultimate Pinecone Centrepiece pre-lit garland, £95, and table linen, tableware, glasses, champagne trug, decorations, candlesticks and table lamp, all The White Company*

DINING TABLES

When it comes to the shape of the table, it should be dictated by the room size, says Susie Watson, founder of Susie Watson Designs. “A square room would lend itself to a round table, while a long room or space would suit a rectangular table.”

A vintage pitch pine kitchen table or a long, slim refectory table provide various styling options and looks, from pared-back and contemporary designs to comfortable and cosy dining nooks. “Rectangular tables seat plenty of people practically and efficiently, and in our experience, finding a gem of a rectangular table is relatively easy,” says Helen Parker, creative director of deVOL. “Square and round tables are rarer but allow more inclusion for everyone sitting around a table, no one feels left out. They also have a soft curviness to them, which is always appealing when looking at the room as a whole.”

Where possible, introduce some flexibility by investing in an extendable table. “Crafted with built-in leaves, they save space when not extended, making them a great option for multi-purpose dining areas,” explains Fred Horlock, design director of Neptune. “Just ensure there is enough space in the room for the added length and chairs.” As a rule, allow about 61cm per person at a rectangular table and a minimum of 70cm space between the table edge and the wall or other furniture.

When it comes to material, solid wood is the most common choice, especially for a table that needs to morph from breakfast through to a dinner party. “It’s durable, ages beautifully, and adds warmth to the room,” says Horlock.

“Those looking for another dimension could consider aged copper as a surface, but it is potentially less practical for prepping food and heavy use,” adds Parker, who also recommends avoiding stone for being too cold and noisy. It is also worth considering where the table legs are positioned. Those with trestle or pedestal bases offer more legroom, making it easier to fit extra chairs. ▶



ABOVE A Christmas tablescape sets the tone for a festive gathering, designed by The White Kitchen Company.

BELOW A tablecloth with a central motif draws the eye. *Les Airelles* tablecloth, from £295, napkins, £27.50, Summerill & Bishop





Consider adding decorations above and around the table. Oslo tableware, 16 settings, £99, Iona goblet glasses, set of four £26, green napkins, set of four £8, Light-up cones also ProCook



Seat cushions add both a design detail and extra comfort to these chairs by Susie Watson Designs.



'Rectangular tables seat plenty of people practically and efficiently, while square and round tables allow more inclusion, so no one feels left out'

Helen Parker, creative director, deVOL

Lighting is another important consideration. When choosing a ceiling pendant to hang above a table, the advice is not to play too safe. "It's much better to go bigger rather than the light being too small," says Claire Pendarves, lighting consultant for The Soho Lighting Company. She recommends a linear pendant over a rectangular table with two or three lights, depending on the length.

For a circular table, choose one pendant or a cluster of three. Consider what it will feel like to sit underneath the light, says Hollie Moreland, creative director of David Hunt Lighting. "A metal pendant light will

cast shadows beyond the rim if set too low, while industrial fittings are fine when dimmed, but they can be glaring when turned up to pick out fish bones." She says frosted, prismatic, and holophane glass shades can help reduce this problem and dimmable lighting is "an absolute must".

DINING CHAIRS

Comfort is key when choosing dining chairs, especially if entertaining often. According to furniture designer Fiona McDonald, it is dependent on seat height, depth and the shape and position of the

backrest. Her chairs are made to order, so chairs can be designed to suit different heights. "I think comfortable chairs are the most important factor," agrees interior designer Penny Morrison. "Often, wicker chairs are really good, and I also like upholstered chairs with loose covers, as this softens the look and the covers can be changed with the seasons. If space allows a chair with an arm, having a wingchair at each end of the table is fun." ▶

ABOVE Curved banquette seating in this kitchen by Studio Vero softens the kitchen and maximises the space.

SIX OF THE BEST SIDEBOARDS



Edison credenza, £12,586, Arteriors



Broadway sideboard, £799, Atkin and Thyme



Midas sideboard, £2,595, Oka



A central rug helps anchor and give a sense of presence to this dining area. Kingsley oak dining table, from £750 (small); Arabella dining chairs in Butterscotch cotton matt velvet, £340 each, all Sofa.com



Florence sideboard, from £7,880, Fiona McDonald



Honour sideboard, £1,295, Loaf



Shaker sideboard, £3,295, Pilgrim House



For a dining room, Henriette von Stockhausen, creative director of VSP Interiors, recommends going for fully upholstered chairs to enhance comfort and create a more refined atmosphere. “You can have fun with the fabrics, opting for a split back with a plain on the main frame of the chair and some pattern on the backs – either one can tie in with the room scheme.” For a kitchen, however, she errs towards non-upholstered chairs. “If you really do want upholstered in a kitchen, use a patterned fabric that can help disguise stains and wear over time.”

Benches can be a practical way to seat more people at a rectangular table than chairs – and are probably more economical. “Two benches either side of a simple wooden refectory table is a look

that visually works really well,” says Parker. A mix of a bench and chairs makes a nice flexible option.

“With lots of hard surfaces and clean lines in kitchens, a banquette can soften the space, bringing some fabric and texture,” says Venetia Rudebeck, co-founder of interior design practice Studio Vero. If space is restricted, then choose stackable chairs that can be stored when not in use. “One final tip is to look at auctions when buying dining chair sets,” she adds. “This can often prove a real treasure trove of style and, often, savings, too.” ■

ABOVE Natural decor suits an oak dining table. *Camille limewash oak extending table, £1,299; Camille limewash oak rattan-back chair, £299; Cherwell plate, £10, all Cotswold Company*



TABLE STYLING TIPS

Seb Bishop, CEO and creative director of Summerill & Bishop, offers his best advice for styling round and rectangular tables

ROUND TABLES

- **CHOOSE A CENTREPIECE**

Use one statement-making vase in the middle of the table to act almost as a sculpture and experiment with candles and candlesticks at varying heights to create something visually spectacular – eyes will instantly be drawn to the table.

- **REMEMBER SYMMETRY**

Ensure that place settings are equally and evenly spread out, just as you would a rectangular or square table.

- **ADD GLASSWARE**

The right glassware can elevate your table in an instant. Consider what the occasion calls for. Choose crystal-clear glasses to showcase the colour and effervescence of your drinks.

RECTANGULAR TABLES

- **CHOOSE A BEAUTIFUL TABLECLOTH**

A tablecloth is a must-have for any table; it is the canvas for the conversation. Pick the one that makes your heart sing – you really cannot go wrong with that. I like to lay our tablecloth the night before if I can, so that it settles. Give it a gentle mist of water to help any creases and folds fall away.

- **BRING IN DETAILS**

Use your best tableware: ceramics and tableware by Astier de Villatte, for example, have an unrivalled way of making the moment feel remarkable. Write the place settings, too, even if it is just the two of you. Paper cards will do or think on your feet and use dried leaves from the garden as these can look beautiful.

- **ADD FLOWERS**

For rectangular tables, I like to use a series of smaller bud vases scattered happily down the middle of the table. This way, your view of the person opposite and vice versa is not obscured.

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The *thought* that counts

10 ways to be a little more mindful when creating the magic and sparkle of Christmas

Whether decking the halls or shopping for gifts, Christmas would not be the same without the festivities and flamboyance and, while we all like to lavish each other and our homes with luxurious treats, all too often this comes at the price of the environment. Be inspired by these simple ideas and create a magical time that can be enjoyed by all while creating a lot less waste. From purchasing items made from recycled paper to counting down the days with an eco-friendly Advent calendar, Christmas can be a time to be more thoughtful to the environment and to others. ▶

Tree of Life Christmas stocking, £45, Print Sisters Archive

STOCKING UP

One of the loveliest sights at Christmas is seeing stockings hanging from the mantelpiece or at the end of children's beds. But stockings are not just for children: when made using glorious print fabrics, they are wonderful for grown-ups too, and a great way of making guests feel that little bit extra special. Source beautifully made stockings in vintage fabrics that truly celebrate craftsmanship and heritage design, or ones that can be personalised with the recipient's name for a thoughtful touch, to be used for years to come.

LIGHT THE WAY

Candles and twinkly lights are an essential part of Christmas, adding a welcome glow to every space. Make candle-buying a more thoughtful process by sourcing ones from companies that offer a refill service, whereby the empty pot can be refilled after they have been used up.

Invest in LED lights for the tree, garlands and to drape around the home. These are an energy-efficient alternative to traditional incandescent models, using up to 90 per cent less electricity, and they last longer.



ABOVE Sample pots of clay paint, £4.99 each, Earthborn Paints

OPPOSITE Detailed paper stars, from £18; Teardrop paper decoration, £42; Burnished Gold paper finial (on table), £43; ceramic table decorations, from a selection, all Layered Lounge

WELL-WRAPPED

Wrap gifts in ways that make them a pleasure to give and receive and are wonderfully eco-friendly too. Wallpaper comes into its own as a fabulously flamboyant alternative to conventional gift wrap, so use up rolls left over from decorating. Similarly, a simple roll of kraft paper can be transformed with designs created with rubber stamps or potatoes prints using eco-friendly paint from leftover sample pots.

For a more sophisticated look, be inspired by the Japanese and use fabric to wrap gifts. Furoshiki is the ancient method of wrapping items in cloths for protection and transportation but has become synonymous with wrapping gifts in a more environmentally sustainable way than paper, as the fabric can be reused time and time again. Simply wrap around the gift and either tie the four corners together or use a length of ribbon to secure.

There is scope too for introducing a bit of creative ingenuity. Why not use festive tea towels or napkins to wrap presents for food lovers or pretty print cotton handkerchiefs or scarves for little luxuries? Be creative and enjoy the ritual of wrapping gifts for friends and family in a sustainable way.



'Twas the Night Before' refillable range, from £18, Great House Farm Stores



PAPER WORK

Look back to Christmases past for a reminder of the amount of waste that can be produced before planning a more thoughtful and sustainable approach to decorating the house. It is best to avoid baubles that are made of plastic or micro plastic, including those that have a sprinkling of glitter that may not be of the biodegradable type.

Also consider whether it makes sense to buy decorations that might be easily

broken in storage and therefore might need to be replaced sooner than a more sustainable alternative. Instead, opt for decorations made of paper such as concertina stars, honeycomb baubles and densely layered snowflakes, as their structural make-up allows for easy folding down into a manageable size that can be successfully stored away when the festive season is over. What is more, sizeable ones are readily

available and can create drama and visual impact with only a handful of shapes and colours.

Other paper products can be used to create handmade decorations too. Strips cut from remnant rolls of wallpaper can be transformed into paper chains and hung from the ceiling. Similarly, a cluster of white lace-like paper doilies would make a wonderful winter white window treatment. ▶



Reusable Monogrammed Napkin Christmas crackers, from £50 for a box of two, The Embroidered Napkin Company

CRACKING IDEA

Christmas is not the same without crackers but this year make a change and instead of paper crackers filled with plastic trinkets that no one really wants, invest in some stylish fabric crackers that can be reused year after year. Many double up as a napkin once opened and can be filled with tiny gifts of that guests will adore, such as chocolates, miniature soaps, and even jewellery or cufflinks. Look out for ones that are part of complementary fabric ranges to co-ordinate with table linen or which can be personalised with each guest's initials to create a truly joyful welcome as well as a keepsake.

ABOVE Chilford solid wood table, from £1,200 (small); Spindle Back chairs in Carbon, £180 each; Bembridge hanging wreath, £60; Rattan Christmas tree skirt, £50; decorations, from a selection, all Garden Trading

GO NATURAL

Forage for foliage and decorate the house with abandon. Cut branches from shrubs and trees in the garden or pick festive favourites when out on a winter's walk and bring back a selection of the best of the seasonal berries and leaves. Take enough to adorn the mantelpiece or to update a woven willow wreath from a previous Christmas to suspend over the dining table as a striking focal point. Team foraged goodies with other natural materials such as hessian to make oversized bows for decorating the backs of chairs. Similarly, tiny garlands tied together with hemp twine can be used to wrap around napkins for a charming place setting idea.

CONSIDERED COUNTDOWN

Start the festive season and fuel anticipation with a sustainable Advent calendar to count down to the big day. Easily create one out of simple kraft containers, as shown here, or envelopes and decorate it with numerical stickers, or invest in a handcrafted wooden calendar with drawers that can be refilled year after year and which has the potential to be a family heirloom to be passed down through the generations.



ABOVE Scandi Advent Calendar Christmas stickers and boxes, £19.50, The Danes



GIVE GENEROUSLY

The Christmas season is a time for giving, not only with our nearest and dearest but also with those we may not know and who could benefit from a helping hand. A simple and meaningful way to do this by sending Christmas cards supporting a charity. There is nothing nicer when writing cards than knowing a charity will be benefiting at the same time through a percentage donation from the proceeds.

Why not go a step further and select cards that are designed by homegrown artists and made in England from recycled and recyclable materials to support eco-friendly practices? Small gestures can have a big impact whether sharing meaningful messages with loved ones or helping causes in need. ▶

LEFT Mistletoe & Holly Charity Christmas cards designed by Laura Stoddard, £8.50 for a pack of 10, Willow & Stone

PERSONAL TOUCH

Take time to learn a new hobby or skill to make gifts or decorations that are truly bespoke and made with love as well as providing some enjoyable evenings spent crafting in the lead up to Christmas. All it takes is some simple skills and a few basic materials such as fabric, skeins of wool or embroidery silks to get started.

Courses are widely available online, or else order a DIY kit that embraces the art of weaving with a set that includes a small hand loom, a selection of wools and easy-to-follow instructions.

Learn how to make pretty bauble-style decorations that can be given as gifts. Why not go a step further and personalise each one with the recipient's initial and attach to a present as an impromptu gift tag that can be hung on the tree and enjoyed for years to come.



THOUGHTFUL GIFTING

Rather than panic buying and giving a friend or loved one an item that might not be suitable, opt for something that has a wide appeal but a personal touch too, and which can, if desired, be shared with others as well.

A hamper filled with luxurious and organic gourmet products from the local farmers' market or artisan food stores will demonstrate that care has been taken when buying for someone with specific food tastes. A box filled with a selection of cheeses teamed with a vintage port will

always go down well, particularly if teamed with a jar of homemade chutney or some home-baked savoury crackers.

Consider, too, a gift for the garden or a balcony, such as a plant, potted tree or even a seed grower's kit, that will carry on giving and be enjoyed all year long. ■

ABOVE *The Christmas Cook's Box*, £18, *The Gluttonous Gardener*

LEFT *Christmas bauble decoration festive weaving loom kit*, £22, *Tabby and Tweed*

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CRANBERRY & WHITE CHOCOLATE TART

Impress guests with this simple, festive showpiece combining the sweet creaminess of white chocolate and sharp tang of cranberries.

12 servings or a 24cm tart

INGREDIENTS:

For the tart

200g chocolate biscuits, crushed

100g butter, melted

800g cranberries

2 sprigs rosemary, finely chopped, few leaves reserved

4 tbsp orange juice

1 tsp vanilla extract

100g caster sugar

1 egg

1 tbsp cornflour

TO DECORATE

150g white chocolate, chopped

3 tbsp double cream

2 tbsp caster sugar

2 tbsp white chocolate chips

1 tbsp icing sugar

2 tbsp white chocolate chips

1 tbsp icing sugar

METHOD

• Mix the crushed chocolate biscuits with the butter.

Tip into a 24 cm tart tin and press evenly into the base and sides. Chill.

• Preheat the oven to 180°C, gas 4.

• Reserve 150g cranberries. Puree the remainder until slightly chunky. Mix with the rosemary, orange juice, vanilla, sugar, egg and cornflour and pour onto

the base. Bake for 35 minutes until set. Cool.

• To decorate, melt the white chocolate with the cream. Cool and pour onto the cake. Leave to cool and set.

• Halve a few cranberries, dip in water and toss in sugar. Arrange all the cranberries and rosemary leaves on the tart and sprinkle with the chocolate chips. Dust with icing sugar.

What to do in **DECEMBER**

This is the month to prepare for seasonal merriment by adding thoughtful decorative details, choosing gifts, baking sweet treats and making the home fit for a festive welcome

ADD Festive Cheer

Christmas is always made more special with items that add a little bit of old-fashioned loveliness, particularly handmade and specially sourced pieces that evoke a sense of nostalgic tradition. Take time out to consider the details that really make Christmas so magical, from easy-to-make decorations to pretty tableware adorned with classic festive motifs.

Be creative and make garlands to hang from a dresser or mantelpiece by slowly drying orange and apple slices in a warm oven, and threading with colourful string along with cinnamon sticks, star anise or bay leaves. Alternatively drape along the length of the Christmas table as an alternative to foliage and dot with candles.

Source tableware decorated with well-loved festive motifs such as pretty baubles, bows or sprigs of mistletoe and use to serve sweet treats to guests to make them feel all the more welcome. Elevate homemade mince pies by sourcing a tiny cutter in the shape of a heart or holly leaf to create the lids. They will be sure to raise a smile and bring festive cheer to everyone. ▶

RIGHT *Mistletoe plates, from £22 each, Emma Bridgewater*





GIVE *thanks*

A Christmas pudding made from the best ingredients will always go down well with a host, especially if it is wrapped in a pretty tea towel, which, once unwrapped, can be an aesthetically pleasing addition to a kitchen as well as practical. Bringing a pudding is a wonderful way of contributing to the occasion, and a gift that everyone can enjoy while at the same time relieving the host from the pressure of making one themselves.

If not bestowing a homemade offering, look for delicious gourmet-style puddings that are presented in traditional ceramic pudding basins, ready for steaming and wrapped in a festively decorated linen cloth that is a joy to give as well as receive. The country connoisseur of fine food, Daylesford, has one that is beautifully enclosed in a tea towel printed with enchanting illustrations by artist Nina Fuga.

Christmas pudding in ceramic bowl, £55, Daylesford



Beaumaris sofa in Orla Gold, from £1,650; Kingston footstool in Bainton Sage, from £450; Pale French Grey Hanover sideboard, £880; Fern Green Pussy Willow made-to-measure blind, from £79; Red Festive Botanicals crackers, £24.99 for a set of six; Green Bow garland, £60; Frosted Green Bow wreath, £40, all Laura Ashley



UPDATE *room layouts*

With extra guests and a tree to house, the lead up to Christmas is a good time to consider reorganising furniture and accessories to accommodate everyone while maintaining an atmosphere that is conducive to festive gatherings. Dining rooms, for example, might benefit from a console table or sideboard to provide an additional serving platform and free up space on the dining table for candles, flowers and decorations.

Similarly, in sitting rooms and snugs, small adjustments to seating arrangements can easily be made to allow everyone to be

able to sit, chat and enjoy each other's company without losing that all important sense of togetherness. Nudge sofas closer to the fireplace or logburner, bring in an extra armchair or two from another room or introduce a footstool that can also double up as an impromptu table for serving drinks and snacks or on which to play board games with some after-dinner tipples. Accessorise with plenty of sumptuous cushions in festive shades, warm, tactile throws and soft lighting to create a cosy Christmas scene with comfort and sociability at its heart. ▶

BAKE *sweet treats*

Make several batches of these sweet festive-inspired cookies following the recipe below by Hannah Miles to give as gifts to friends and family. Simply wrap in cellophane bags or a cookie jar and finish with a bow and gift tag. Or have fun transforming them into decorations with a length of velvet ribbon to hang them on the tree, at a window or even around a napkin and cutlery as a place setting idea, with each guest's name neatly piped on with icing, to be enjoyed as an extra sweet treat at the end of the meal.

If time allows, it might even be worth making a batch or two to freeze. They can quickly be baked and decorated to hang on the tree when guests come round – little ones in particular will love seeking them amongst the twinkle of lights and baubles.

WREATH COOKIES

Hanging a wreath on a front door is the beginning of Christmas for me – it is a sign to everyone passing my home that the festivities have started inside. These pretty, wreath-inspired cookies are made with a buttery Viennese dough sweetened with icing sugar. These are made with vanilla but you can vary the flavour by adding citrus zest or peppermint extract, if you prefer.

Makes 12

INGREDIENTS

175g butter, softened
60g icing sugar, sifted
180g plain flour, sifted
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
red sugar sprinkles (optional)
piping bag, fitted with a star nozzle
2 baking sheets, greased and lined with baking parchment

METHOD

- In a mixing bowl, whisk together the butter and icing sugar until light and



creamy. Sift in the flour and add the vanilla, then whisk together to make a soft dough.

- Spoon the dough into the piping bag and pipe 12 rings of stars in wreath shapes onto the lined baking sheets. Sprinkle over the red sugar sprinkles, if using. Chill in the freezer for 30 minutes until firm.
- Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas 4.
- Bake the cookies in the preheated oven for about 10 minutes until the cookies are just firm. Take care towards the end of cooking as the cookies can turn slightly brown, so you need to remove them before they start to discolour. Leave

to cool completely on the baking sheets before looping a ribbon through each one for decoration.

- The cookies will store for up to 5 days in an airtight container.

FURTHER READING



Christmas Cookies by Hannah Miles, published by Ryland Peters & Small (£14.99), photography by Steve Painter



Wooden Trefoil wall bracket, £612,
Sybil Colefax & John Fowler



LIGHT *a candle*

Lanterns, tealights and candles come into their own at Christmas so dot around the house, on mantelpieces, along the table and on the doorstep outside to welcome guests on a dark winter's evening. Remember a little ingenuity can go a long way, so think creatively when adding pockets of illumination around the house. A small wall shelf or bracket is a great space on which to

add a potted pillar candle. Use like a wall sconce or picture light in a room at mid height to cast a warm glow on nearby framed prints or artwork. Create a rustic feel with a terracotta pot from the garden as the candle holder and decorate with tiny sprigs of berries leftover from decorating a mantelpiece along with some aromatic rosemary and bay perhaps. ■



Elevate faux garlands and wreaths with fresh berries, ribbons and candles for a truly personal touch.
Red Berry garland, £35;
Poinsettia wreath, £35;
Foxmoor dining table, £899;
Spindle dining chairs, £279;
Stripe Stoneware vase, £30;
Green Bamboo mirror, £150;
Rechargeable table lamp, £60, all John Lewis & Partners

FESTIVE *flora*

Elegantly adorn the home this Christmas
with fresh festive blooms and foliage

Majestic amaryllis makes a lavish floral display by Stars for Europe whether grown from a bulb or as a cut flower. Add a rich velvet table runner to amplify the mood.





Delight in decorating the house this Christmas with armfuls of fresh greenery and blooms. A tradition upheld since the 15th century, it has long signified the midpoint of winter and gradual lengthening of daylight hours. Regarded as symbols of eternal life, evergreen boughs have been proudly displayed in the home on doors and mantelpieces and hung from ceiling beams as a celebration of the changing seasons and the promise of spring to come.

Today the practise endures in the making of festive door wreaths, table centrepieces, swags and garlands, often incorporating other natural and seasonal treasures such as berries, hips and seedheads. Floral and interior designers are continually exploring new evocative colour and tactile combinations to bring joy and inspire, ensuring these cherished customs prevail.

Seasonal favourites

Holly, ivy and mistletoe are historically synonymous with an English Christmas. Gathered from the garden and hedgerow, they have steadily become an intrinsic part of festive decorations, as carols *Deck The Halls* and *The Holly and The Ivy* indicate. Indeed, their importance as Yuletide decorations goes back indefinitely, with the earliest written account of dressing homes and churches with greenery dating back to 1444. Bay leaves and rosemary have been linked to Christmas, too, stretching back to Tudor times and beyond, and in the writings of Jane Austen.

While Christmas wreaths became a popular feature in northern Europe during the 16th century, it is said that the Georgians popularised the hanging of mistletoe and the 'kissing' bough in this country. For the latter, a pair of hoops were fixed together to make a spherical shape to be adorned with holly, ivy and fruit.

The appeal of these distinctive shapes and evergreen foliage continues, forming the heart of the simplest as well as the most abundant seasonal displays.

Fresh take on florals

Bringing flowers and foliage into the home for Christmas is intrinsically personal. Colour combinations that harmonise with interior decor, as well as preferred flower types and styling choices, can have a huge effect on the ambience. While there are endless creative possibilities and pairings, there are a few blooms and plants that remain firm favourites.

"Amaryllis are tender, flowering bulbs producing huge, showy, trumpet-shaped flowers on top of long, straight stems," says Karen Lynes, manager at Peter Nyssen. Varying widely in colour, blooms can be soft cream and blush pink through to deep crimson. "Plant the bulb to a depth of around five centimetres in a pot large enough to push your thumb between the bulb and edge. Water sparingly until you see the bud or leaves start to appear, then water regularly, being careful not to overwater," she advises. ▶

ABOVE Dress the dining area with sparkling glass vases, fairy lights with a warm glow and terracotta jugs filled with mimosa and olive branches. *Allium mini* super-fine table lights, £19.95; Delicate clear glass bud vases, £19.95 for a set of two; Dip-glazed terracotta jugs, from £14.95, all Sarah Raven

LEFT Cut poinsettias captivate in a vase. Stop the sap by searing the cut stem in hot water at 60° for five seconds. Place directly in cold water to last up to 14 days.



Use fir, ivy and non-prickly holly to create a stair garland – adorn with lights and decorations for an extra festive feel, pairing with arrangements of greenery and flowers on hallway consoles. Alderton metal console table, £325, and candle lantern and vases, all The Cotswold Company





ABOVE In this arrangement by Millie Proust, forced paperwhites, snowdrops and cuttings of *Viburnum tinus* produce a delicate yet festive ambience.

ABOVE RIGHT Old man's beard, hops and vines work well for festive wreaths. Talena Lowther and the team at JamJar Flowers add oversized silk ribbons for luxurious drama.

Floral designer Milli Proust says: "*Viburnum tinus* is a fairly common shrub which begins to flower in winter. My trick is to pluck the dark leaves from the stems to leave the delicate and pretty flowerheads. They almost look like early blossom branches and really come into their own when the leaves stop crowding them. Pair them with forced paperwhite flowers to create delicate and pretty seasonal arrangements – a welcome departure from the glossy and somewhat heavy designs you usually get at this time of year."

Potted cyclamens charm with their curving white, pink and magenta buds and delicate blooms, but poinsettias are perhaps the more familiar sight in most homes. Bearing green leaves and coloured bracts, *Euphorbia pulcherrima* are often purchased for Christmas. Hailing from Mexico, they can prove a challenge to keep long term, but they offer plenty of creative scope. "Poinsettias create an extra Christmassy atmosphere with their star-shaped bracts," says Stars



For Europe horticultural expert Dr Susanne Lux. "As large and small potted plants, they make a beautiful floral centrepiece for a Christmas table, but also long-lasting cut flowers if properly conditioned. Wrap the root balls of mini poinsettias in moss before placing them in vases or adding to a wreath."

Enhancing tradition

Floral designers are always seeking out new materials. "I love a new yet classic take on Christmas arrangements with a mix of antique and festive-coloured scented roses, berries and herbs," says Rosebie Morton, founder of The Real Flower Company. "Our Frosty Morning Moss wreath was inspired by crisp, Nordic scenery, with frosted pinecones, reindeer moss and fluffy miscanthus grasses."

Annaliese Hall and Esther Simpson at Huckleberry Floral Design are also keen on incorporating bold,

RIGHT Inspired by the wealth of colour evident in the Hampshire winter countryside, this fresh arrangement, by The Real Flower Company, showcases berries, ivy and twigs with a splash of cerise waxflower.

BELOW RIGHT Norfolk-based Huckleberry Floral Design mixes twisted willow, eucalyptus and olive branches with sumptuous blue hydrangeas for a magical mantelpiece.



unexpected additions: "Wine red amaranthus, sumac and dried hydrangeas offer depth of colour, while delicate white wax flower and flowering eucalyptus offer a natural highlight. The look is decadent but can be created entirely from flowers and foliage available from the garden at this time of year."

With their jewel-like appeal, berries are hugely in favour with floral designers. No longer holly alone, the red fruit of hypericum, viburnum and winterberry are also highly prized. Bold alternatives also invite attention, with purple callicarpa, elegant snowberry and berried ivy adding drama, but native hedgerows are also a popular hunting ground. "The scarlet jewels of hawthorn berries always look so wonderful in the autumn hedgerows," says Morton. "As with rose hips, we suggest cutting lengths in autumn when they are looking their best. Beware of their evil thorns, remove any leaves and then store them in a cool dark spot to dry." While an endless source of natural inspiration, ▶





ABOVE The alluring tones of dried ornamental cress and blue cypress are a sustainable favourite for wreaths by Petalon.

LEFT An old sugar bowl filled with foraged winter greenery and echinops (globe thistle) is a perfect size for the Christmas dinner table.

Design by Simply By Arrangement

it is essential to leave plentiful resources for native wildlife who depend on berries and seedheads for winter food.

Foraging from the garden and local countryside has long been practised but until recently had fallen out of favour, with fresh materials bought instead. “I love it when people bring their own environment indoors,” says Florence Kennedy, founder of Cornish company Petalon. “They can forage and find from their own gardens. That way, their indoor decorations are a nice reflection of their immediate outdoors.”

Joyous bulbs and blooms

Planting bulbs in autumn to flower at Christmas is hugely rewarding. “Potted bulbs done in November will take you joyously into January,” says Sarah Statham, owner of Simply By Arrangement. “Tiny bulbocodiums in all your favourite bowls, or paperwhites in bigger bowls or even fancy buckets will last well beyond Christmas, and if you’re last minute like me, you might have something to decorate the Christmas Day table.”

Planning ahead allows the creation of truly special floral displays, and fragrant narcissi paperwhites are a firm favourite of grower and bulb triallist Sarah Raven. “I often use 20–30 bulbs to create a great tiered fountain of narcissi that makes the ultimate Christmas table centrepiece. Once they come into flower after planting, pot the bulbs up with branches of silver birch or hazel twigs poked around the base. As a final touch, hang silver and clear glass baubles on the twigs before surrounding the whole thing with a halo of candles.”

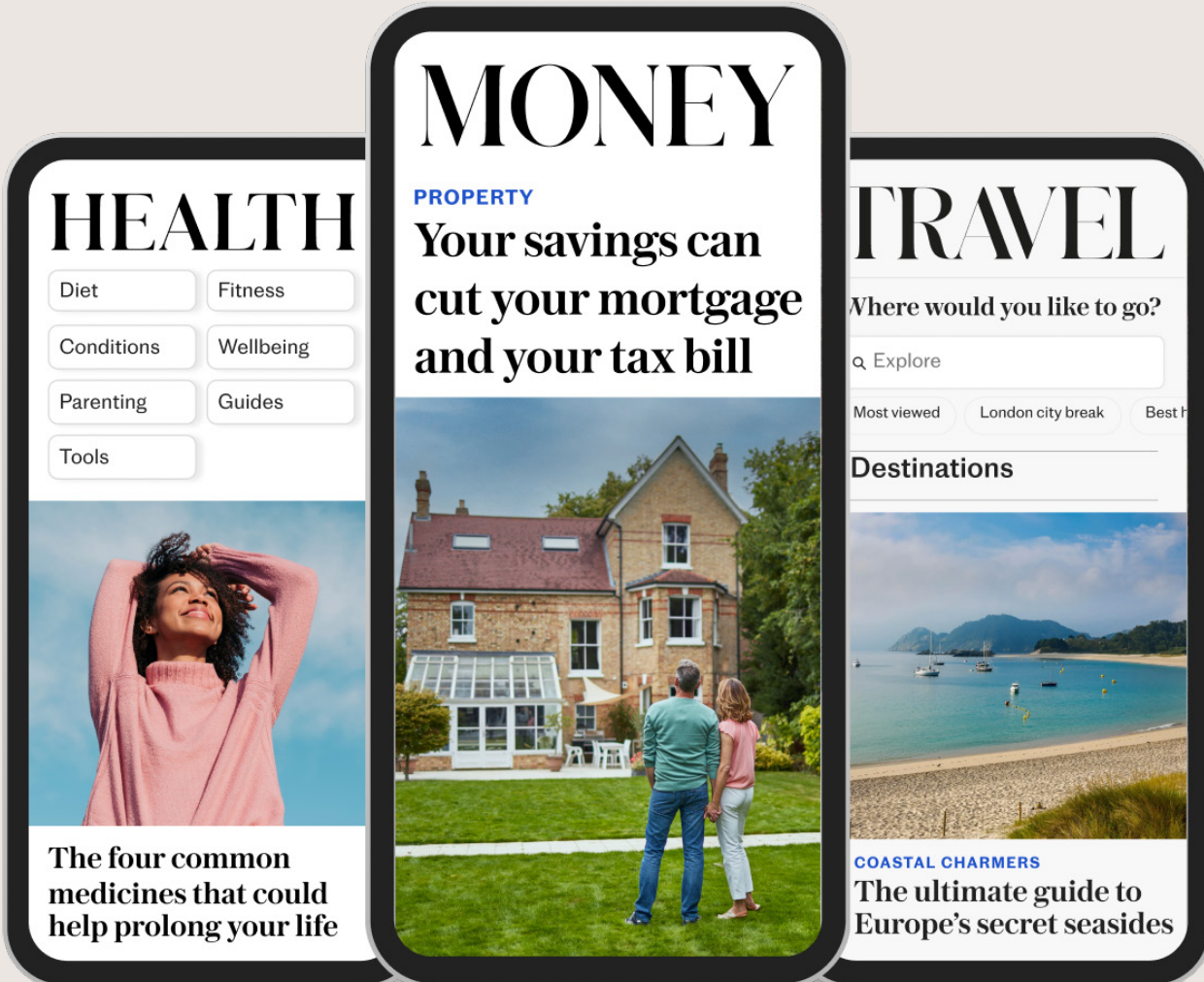
While growing flower bulbs and foraging for greenery are both satisfying and low on air miles, finding locally grown flowers at Christmas can be tricky. “If floral sustainability is an important consideration, midwinter can be challenging,” says Zoe Julian, owner of Scilly Flowers. “UK flower farmers of the Isles of Scilly are busy picking scented narcissi. These cute flowers with heads like mini daffodils flourish naturally outdoors in small, sheltered fields without any need for artificial light or heat all through the winter months.”

Talena Lowther at JamJar Flowers says: “We love to use British flowers and foliage as much as we can all year round. In the bleak midwinter, local flowers are definitely scarce to non-existent, so making Christmas decorations is all about being a bit more imaginative. Old man’s beard, hops and vines work for wreaths. We love to add oversized silk ribbons for luxurious drama.”

Designing with locally grown dried flowers and grasses is another smart solution, as Kennedy explains. “We’ve been delving into the world of dried flowers this year to be able to offer our customers homegrown wreaths. It’s been so exciting getting to dry all the varieties I cannot buy in, like xeranthemum and ornamental cress.” ■

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Oslo real-look artificial Christmas tree (by door), from £129; Pot-grown Christmas trees, from £24.99; Large Black Metal lantern, £24.99; Alabama lantern, £9.99; Essentials pillar candles, from £1.99; Traditional kraft gift wrap, 2m, £1.99, all Dobbies Garden Centres

ONE FINAL THING...

Season's greetings

Create anticipation for December parties and visiting family and friends with a festive outdoor display. Try positioning several potted pine trees, with LED lights twinkling in the branches, either side of the front door. In this scene, there is a combination of real and faux trees. For a relaxed style, take a pointer from how the pots are arranged in an asymmetrical way. Mix in black lanterns with rechargeable candles to keep the look timeless and finish with an oversized door wreath with a sumptuous extra-large bow for the warmest welcome.



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