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FIT FOR *Celebration*

Advice on decorating for Christmas

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Christmas has always had Lena Patten's heart. The Rosseau-based interior decorator and owner of Hilltop Interiors loves everything about the merriest of holidays, but her greatest joy is making family and friends feel welcome through festive touches around her home, and those of her clients.

"I love the classic *A Christmas Carol* movie," Patten says. "It's a touching story and, at the end when Scrooge find happiness by giving, it serves as a reminder that when we do for others, we gain for ourselves." That notion influences her decorating style – Christmas is about cosy, casual elegance for Patten, creating a home that's inviting and warm.

That sense of throwing the door open to family and friends begins with a home's front entrance. "The front entrance sets the mood for the entire home, and beautifully decorated it serves as an invitation to enter," she explains. A decorated entrance welcomes people and the season.

While this is true of any Christmas season, Patten believes decking out the front entrance will be especially important this year because for many people this will be the first time in three years that they'll be enjoying the holidays unhindered by COVID restrictions.

"Entrance decorations don't need to be elaborate," Patten stresses. "It could be as simple as evergreen branches fashioned into a large wreath or arranged in planters and then adorned with ribbon and maybe some string lights. Or, you could go bigger, with topiaries, spectacularly decorated planters, or even a Christmas tree lit by twinkling lights."

The style in which you decorate the entrance should also hint at how the interior will be decorated.

Before hauling the decorations out of the attic and pulling them all from their boxes, create a plan. Patten begins by walking around the home, looking for inspiration, deciding on a holistic theme, and selecting areas to serve as focal points.

Trends come and go. For a few years, country classic with lots of plaid was hot. At other times, black and white was 'in'. Patten recommends not leaning heavily into the current trend. Instead,

she has her own tried-and-true method for bringing good cheer to a home.

"It's always best to take inspiration from how the home is decorated, rather than the current trends. The style of the home, its furnishings and décor, serve as the foundation when decorating for the holidays," Patten explains. "Bright and blingy decorations, for example, works better with a city home. For a cottage country, think rustic and natural. Carry your chosen through throughout the entire home, from kitchen and dining room to the living room and even the bathroom.

"When entering a room, determine its focal point," she continues, "This will generally be a place you want to emphasize." It could be an expansive fieldstone fireplace with a mantle, a beautiful table, windows offering expansive views of the lake, or a sweeping staircase.

Patten likes to include meaningful items when she dresses her home for the holidays. "Using vintage Christmas items here and there – perhaps a time-honoured tablecloth, heirloom decorations passed down through the generations, or dishes from grandma – really adds to the holiday spirit," she believes. "Christmas is a time

to celebrate family and warmly reminisce about people who are no longer with us. The nostalgia of vintage items adds real ambience."

The dining room serves as the focal point, the master of merry ceremonies, for Christmas celebrations. It's where we gather to dine on turkey or fish, to indulge in trifle and pumpkin pie, and raise glasses of wine. Patten makes sure to give the dining table the Christmas treatment.

"I have a Lithuanian background," Patten explains. "For us, the Christmas Eve dinner, 12 meatless courses over a long evening, is the focal point of our celebrations. We put hay under the tablecloth to remind us of the manger, and place pine boughs on the table – there's nothing nicer than the scent of fresh pine."

The dining table needs to be a blend of festive and functional. It's a balancing act. Add decorations, but ensure you leave room for food and space for people to dine comfortably. Add candles and centerpieces but make certain to leave sight lines unobstructed. The idea is to create an inviting scene that will encourage family members to linger and relax long after the meal is done.

"Festive flair can be added with simple elements like lovely napkins, beautiful place settings, a centerpiece for interest, and some

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natural elements as a nod to the outdoors,” Patten offers. “I think cosy candles are a must. There’s nothing more special than the glow of candles on Christmas eve.”

Much of what conjures that special Christmas warmth comes from cues beyond the visual – the scent of pine and fresh cider brewing, the crackling of a fire in the hearth and Christmas carols playing in the background. Engage them all. Set the scene with all the senses.

Infusing a home with the magic of Christmas is just one of many tasks that compete for our attention in the holiday season – baking those delicious cookies that go so well with hot chocolate, shopping for that perfect gift, party after party. Patten recommends starting your decorating early, even if only slowly, so that you’re not running around in December.

Patten offers a final word of advice. “Don’t get carried away visually. You don’t need to use all your decorations, and you certainly don’t have to make it grand. It can be quiet and simple.”



“What’s important,” she stresses, “is that the decor reflects your family, and that it brings you joy.”

That’s the secret to the enchantment of Christmas. It’s about family and the joy we find in spending time in their company. ☺

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