



# DECKING THE HALLS

*The dream of a magazine-worthy tree, surrounded by perfectly wrapped packages, leads to a different — even better — version of perfection.*

“It looks like Christmas threw up in here.” I knew this wasn't the right response, but it's the first thing that came to my mind. So, I managed to blurt out, “Magical!” This is one of those somewhat generic compliments when you're at a loss for what to say. And it worked. I was off the hook, my friend Phil was happy, and the Christmas decorating was done.

When you are the eighth child born to middle age parents, Christmas doesn't have the same meaning as it does for many others. Frankly, they were burned out, and at a certain point I remember being the kid that climbed into the garage and pulled down all the decorations, happily decked the halls with our red and gold balls, acrylic garland and, for fun, one year tied nearly one hundred tartan plaid bows because I had seen the completed red/gold/green color scheme in a magazine. It was clear early on who the decorator in the house would be. Over time, it grew to be a rather solitary annual event more influenced by *A Charlie Brown Christmas* as I sang the saddest rendition of “Christmas Time Is Here,” one of the most melancholy songs I could find. At least it was animated.

I always have wanted the perfect Christmas tree. As an interior designer, I am always envious of the seasonal design magazines where the stunning 9-foot tree is artfully decked with matching ornaments, perfectly spaced white lights (designers don't do multi-colored bulbs), and stunning gifts artfully wrapped to match the theme of the tree. I mused over ornaments, pulled pictures from magazines, and developed a design file of ideas that I wanted to implement. My partner at the time had other ideas.

He had collected ornaments since he was a child and his family made a point of exchanging ornaments. He had a tradition when he was little of pulling out his felt knee-hugger pixie elf tree ornament and telling it everything that had happened over the year. His ceramic choir singers, Christmas hand towels, and holiday candles that were never burned because they were so pretty never failed to elicit a resigned sigh from me. This was not the stuff of decorating magazines; how was I ever going to get on the cover of *Traditional Home*?

I have one friend from the south that uses dough to create a realistic appearance of snow on a tree branch. A friend here in Portland likes pink Christmas trees; another collects snowmen that take over his house during the holidays. And a few collect, well, all-things-Christmas. What is absolutely adorable about all of them is the joy that their holiday tra-

ditions bring to each of them. In their exuberance, they have made me realize that decking the halls isn't about having a picture perfect home. It's about what matters to you most.

As an interior designer, I've worked with numerous clients in designing their homes. The first questions that come up are: What does 'home' mean to you? What traditions do you honor? What items do you cherish? How do you want your home to feel? The same questions can be applied to the holidays: What do the holidays mean to you? What traditions do you honor, or more importantly, what traditions do you want to create? How do you want your holidays to feel? What do you cherish about the holidays?

A couple of years ago, my friend Phil, who adores Christmas, was decorating a restaurant and enlisted a couple of dozen people to install the décor. There was everything from vintage sleds hanging on the walls topped with misfit toys, to oversized gold leafed frames around sparkling green wreaths. The columns had upside down Christmas trees stuffed with brightly wrapped packages and all of the tables had custom centerpieces. I had never seen so much Christmas stuff and we didn't use everything. Even the foyer was outfitted with a fireplace complete with crackling logs, nutcrackers, Santa in various shapes, and lights, lights, lights everywhere. When everything was complete it truly did look magical and brought a genuine sense of joy and sparkle to all of the spaces.

Seasonal holidays are an anniversary of sorts. Regardless of your religious affiliation or nationality there is an annual event that is supposed to be about something. My partner David and I are celebrating our fourth Christmas as a couple. Slowly we've developed our own Christmas traditions of food, celebrating friends and embracing the holiday traditions of others. Together we have created our own traditions here in Portland that I've come to love. There is the excursion to the Christmas tree farm where we agonize over the best tree, and I've come to love watching David fuss over the lights for hours. (One night he came to bed around 3 a.m. after removing all the ornaments and re-doing the lights). We have both started buying ornaments as gifts for one another, and I am slowly building my stock of designer approved items to decorate the house. As we sit back and view all our handiwork, I smile, and though it will likely never be on the cover of a magazine, I think it's just perfect. \$

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