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It's showtime!

A few months ago, our style director Sarah pitched some concepts for our big December shoot. They were all great, of course, but I stopped listening the moment she suggested colour-drenching our Christmas sets in green. In my head, I was already floating through beautiful rooms washed in enchanting shades of sage and emerald… And now here they are, shimmering on our pages (from page 35)! Kudos to the style crew who grappled with mountains of paint and bushels of eucalyptus and fir to conjure a little slice of Birnam Wood indoors during the hottest week of August.

You'd think that editing this issue – effectively living through a 'pretend' Christmas – might dull my excitement for the real thing, but it's quite the opposite. I can't wait for the jubilations to start, and that's down to our gorgeous-but-useful special (page 55) featuring 12 brilliant experts, including some of our HB columnists, who share their own heartfelt spin on how to celebrate with joy and ease. And now I'm fizzing with ideas and ready to launch my own programme of shopping, decorating and entertaining. Yes, there will be plenty of sharing platters involved (page 62).

Here's hoping your run-up to the big day will be full of fun, sparkle and a bit of magic. And remember, you only regret the fairy lights you didn't hang.

Torri x

TORRI MUNDELL **EDITOR**

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

From page 77, our real homes section teems with inspiration from five different households that decorate for the holidays in ways that align with their interiors style, from pared-back Scandi to fabulously OTT. You'll also find shopping round-ups galore, as well as everything you need for a mantelscaping moment (page 48), and the wrapping paper that will upstage every other present under the tree (page 16).

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPH JENNY ZARINS **ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS** COX & COX; RACHEL WHITING **ILLUSTRATIONS** SOPHIE BURGHAM

It's the little things

Wouldn't it be weird if this mini Christmas wish list accidentally landed, open, on my husband's desk...?

Cotton rib socks, £13/three, Arket

Lavender and Petitgrain candle, £50, Toast

The Galloping Horse framed print, £115, Petri Prints

Tomato Leaves hand cleanser, £60, John Lewis & Partners

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ILLUSTRATIONS SOPHIE BURGHAM

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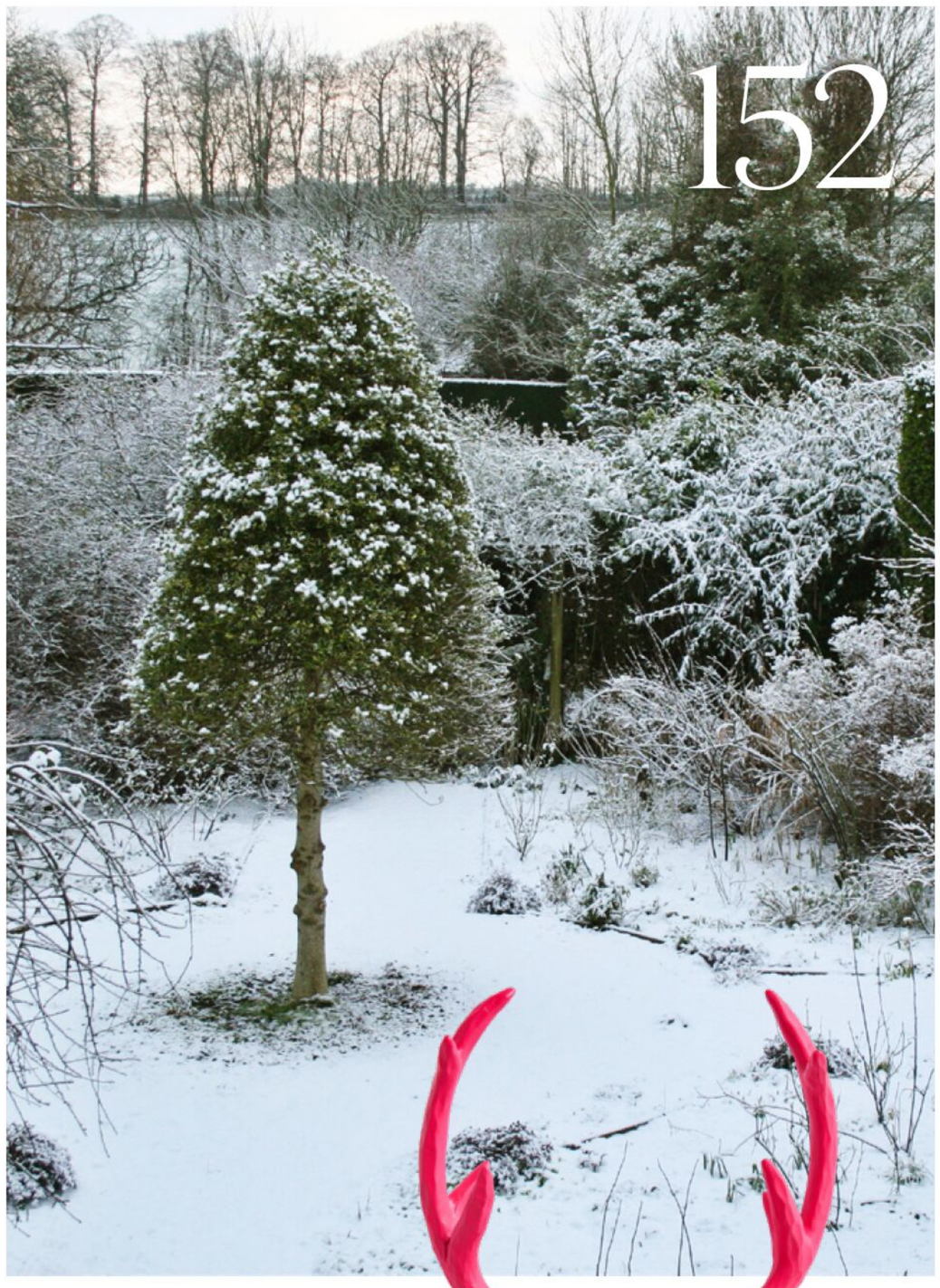

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Photography Polly Wreford
Styling Rebecca de Boehmler
Direction Sarah Keady
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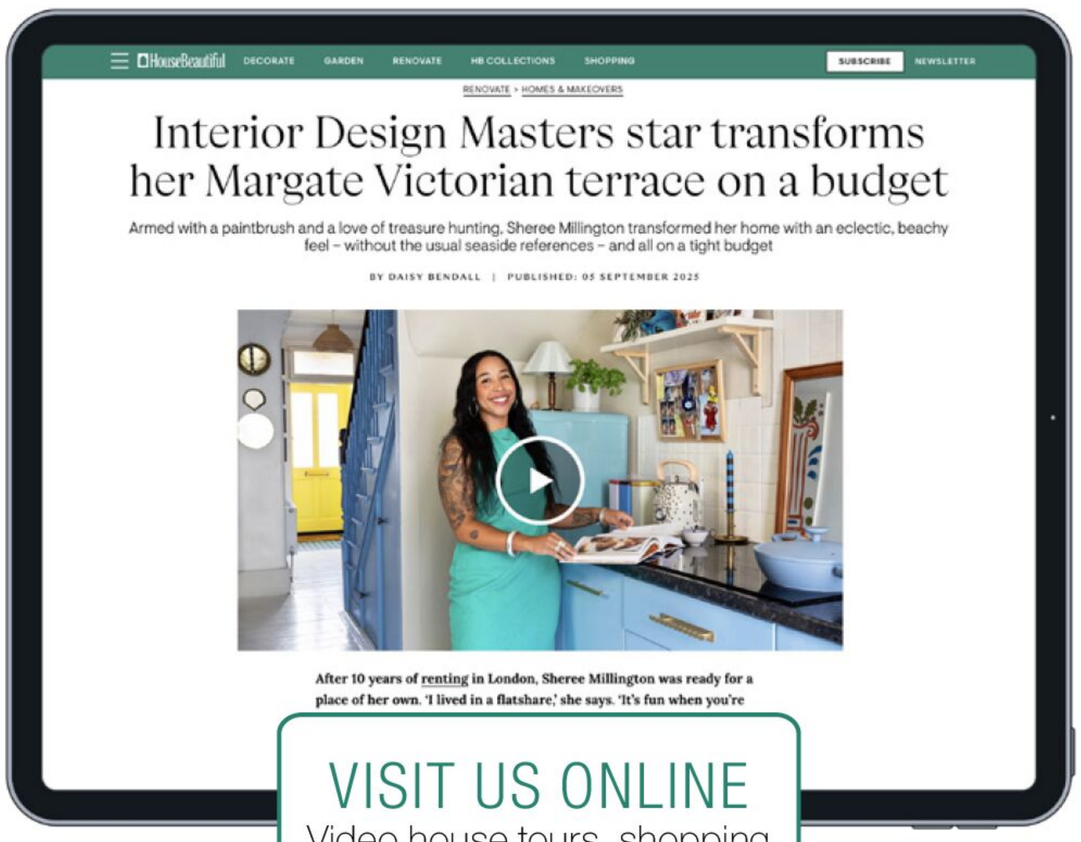

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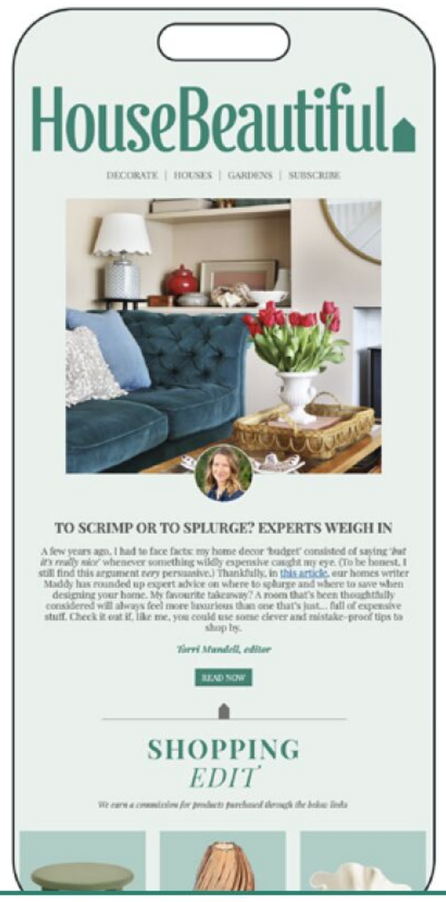

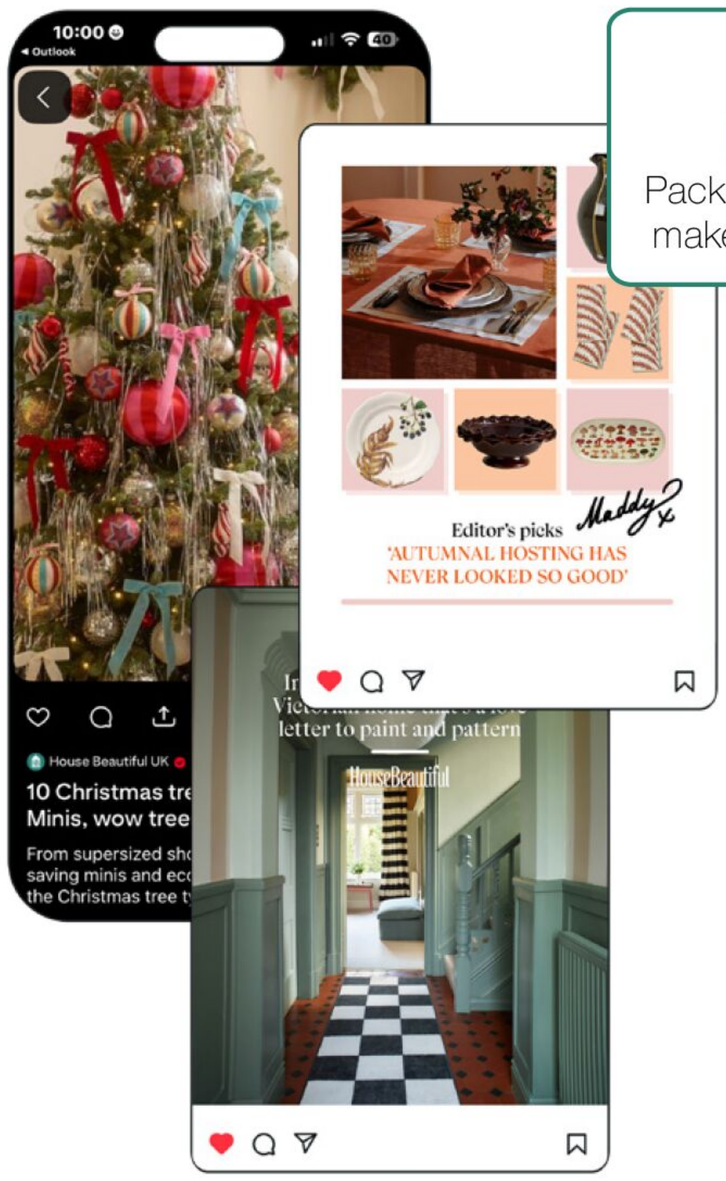

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Deck the hearth with Dunelm's joyous take on mantelscaping, with tasselled stockings and rows of ribbons making merry together. Is your fireplace missing some playfully kitsch ornaments and twinkly candlelight? It definitely is. And would a gleaming bauble wreath be too much? At this time of year, never.

From left: **stacking dolls**, £12; bow **candlestick holder**, £3; stripe **stocking**, £10; knitted **stocking**, £12; gold **mirror ball** decoration, £2.50; **pink deer** ornament, £7; Love Is All You Need **mirror**, £70; Sophie Robinson twisted **candlestick**, £8; Candy Cane **taper candles**, £4/two; disco ball **candlestick**, £3; mirror ball **wreath**, £35; Kitschmas stripe **baubles**, £10/three; Sophie Robinson Wave jute rug in Raspberry, £479; light-up **house**, £15/two; **cocktail shaker**, £15; bow multiwick **candle**, £12; all Dunelm

WORDS LIZ LANE **ILLUSTRATIONS** SOPHIE BURGHAM

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SEASON'S BEST

The mantel edit

Count down to the big day with an Advent calendar to suit, then hang up a joyful stocking on Christmas Eve

Joy **stocking**, £14, Sophie Robinson x Dunelm

Farmshop **advent calendar**, £275, Daylesford Organic

Metallic stars **stocking**, £38, Rockett St George

12 Days of Tracklements **advent calendar**, £25, Tracklements

Tree **stocking**, £11.99, Gisela Graham

Coffee pods **advent calendar**, £29.95, Grind

Velvet bow **stocking**, £25, Oliver Bonas

Beauty **advent calendar**, £98, Anthropologie

Pink and red stripe **stocking**, £60, Emile Wines x Amuse La Bouche

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Charm bracelet **advent calendar**, £68, Meri Meri x Liberty

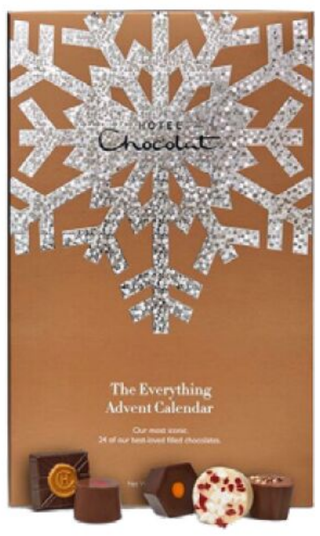
Dhanda recycled wool **stocking**, £40, Nkuku

Velvet stripe **advent calendar**, £55, Oliver Bonas

Milagro **stocking**, £38, Rockett St George

24 Days of Stationery **advent calendar**, £109, Martha Brook

Coretta embellished **stocking**, £72, Anthropologie



The Everything **advent calendar**, £29.95, Hotel Chocolat

Luna **stocking** with pink frill, £95, Molly Mahon

Paper craft **advent calendar** £27, Meri Meri

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SEASON'S BEST

The baubles edit

Playful ornaments to dress your boughs and crown your Christmas showstopper with a flourish

Lover's Eye Blue **decoration**, £16, Scribble & Daub

Multicolour star **tree topper**, £15, John Lewis & Partners

Beaded **bow**, £4, Sophie Robinson x Dunelm

Hedy stars **tree topper**, £46, Anthropologie

Glass candle **bauble**, £22, Anna + Nina

Fa La La La La **flag**, £40, House of Hooray

Bristle greyhound **decoration**, £16, Studio Thie

Issey striped velvet **star**, £14.50, Oliver Bonas

Chappell-inspired **decoration**, £25, Rockett St George

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Paper candy cane **tree topper**,
£17, Pluto Design at Nordic Nest

Marbled **bauble**,
£29, Webb & Gray

Dog star **tree topper**,
£22.50, Oliver Bonas

Bloody Mary **decoration**, £8.50,
Oliver Bonas

Felt penguin **decoration**,
£29, Culture Vulture

Sequinned croissant **decoration**,
£8.50, Oliver Bonas

Pink bow **tree topper**,
£8, Accessorize

Strawberry cake **decoration**,
£10, John Lewis & Partners

Canterbury mirrored **star**,
£40, Garden Trading

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SEASON'S BEST

The table edit

Deck the dining table with charming crockery and crackers to dial up the fun factor

Handmade chrysanthemum **crackers**, £50/six, Cox & Cox

Clara **coupe**, £18, Anthropologie

Regency ivy **crackers**, £39/six, Nancy & Betty Studio

Glass sweetie **plate**, £30, Cox & Cox

Milagro **crackers**, £45/six, Rockett St George

Heidi & Hans skier **side plate**, £138/four, Mrs Alice

London dry Christmas gin **crackers**, £12.50 each, Gin in a Tin

Oddington **platter**, £85, Daylesford Organic

Reusable napkin **cracker**, £40, Colours of Arley

COMPILED BY MADDY ANDO **ILLUSTRATIONS** SOPHIE BURGHAM

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Red bow **candleholder**,
£38, Rose & Grey

Berry and blue **crackers**, £40/six,
John Lewis & Partners

Candy cane **shot glasses**,
£7 each, John Lewis & Partners

Chunky **serving bowls**,
£45 each, Marigold and Lettice

Christmas tree **crackers**,
£38/six, Meri Meri x Liberty

Fleur **jug**, £98,
Rowen & Wren

Dusky Hellebore **crackers**,
£24.99/six, Laura Ashley

Merry Hangover **mug**,
£22, Anna + Nina

Mini stripe **crackers**,
£12/six, Talking Tables

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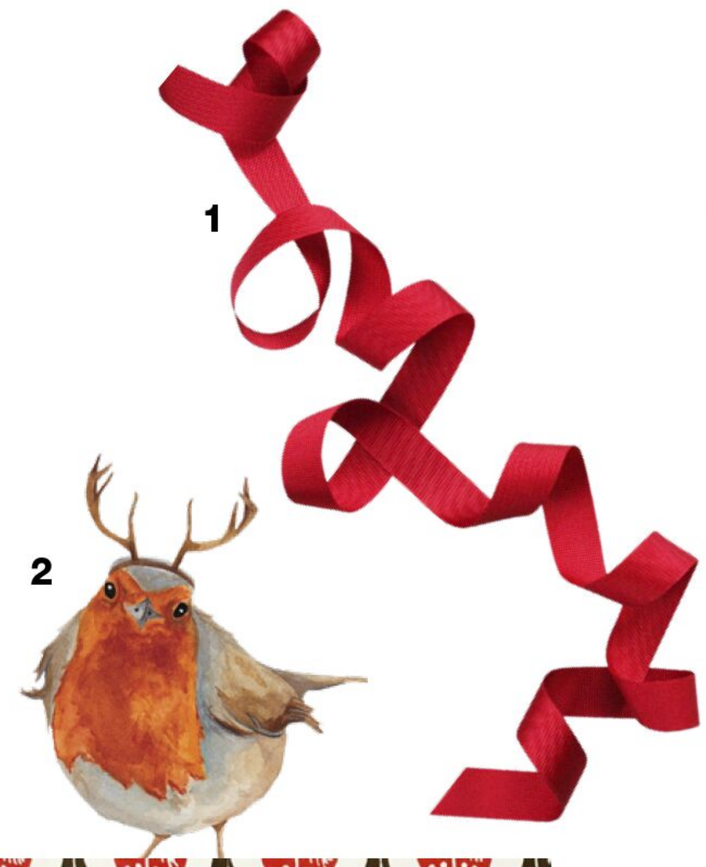
FIND THE BEST

Giftwrap

There are few sights more satisfying than an artful pile of gifts – wrapped with care and tied with a bow – in a beautifully considered palette



3

1 Grosgrain **ribbon**, from £5/5m, Nancy & Betty
2 Robin **gift tag** by Lil Wabbit, from £1.25, Not On The High Street
3 Dancing Trees patterned **paper**, £3/sheet, Cambridge Imprint

CLASSIC RED AND GREEN

The ultimate festive power couple, brought to life with velvet ribbon and traditional patterns

Red bow **garland**, £7/1.5m; **giftwrap**, £1.50/sheet; brass **bells** with foliage, £3; **tabletop tree**, £20; snowy **tree**, £8; snow globe **candle**, £10; green Christmas **candle**, £4; wooden **rocking horse**, £35; wooden **skis**, £15; rush **basket**, £8; seagrass **tray**, £12; all B&M

3

1 Traditional Tartan Christmas **gift tags**, £3.95/five, Nancy & Betty
2 Slim velvet **ribbon** in Berry Red & Gold, £12.50/20m, Cox & Cox 3 Winter Flowers **wrapping paper**, £4.75/3m, Emma Bridgewater

1

2

3

1 Green/White **string spool**, £4.49/50m, Gisela Graham
2 Plain Kraft **wrapping paper**, £8, John Lewis & Partners
3 Little Robin **gift tag pack**, £2/four, Emma Bridgewater

1

2
3

1 Large velvet clip-on **bow**, £7.99, Gisela Graham
2 Pastel Green double-sided **ribbon roll**, £5.49/25m, B&Q
3 Mint Green Reindeer Christmas **wrapping paper**, £3.50/sheet, Making Meadows

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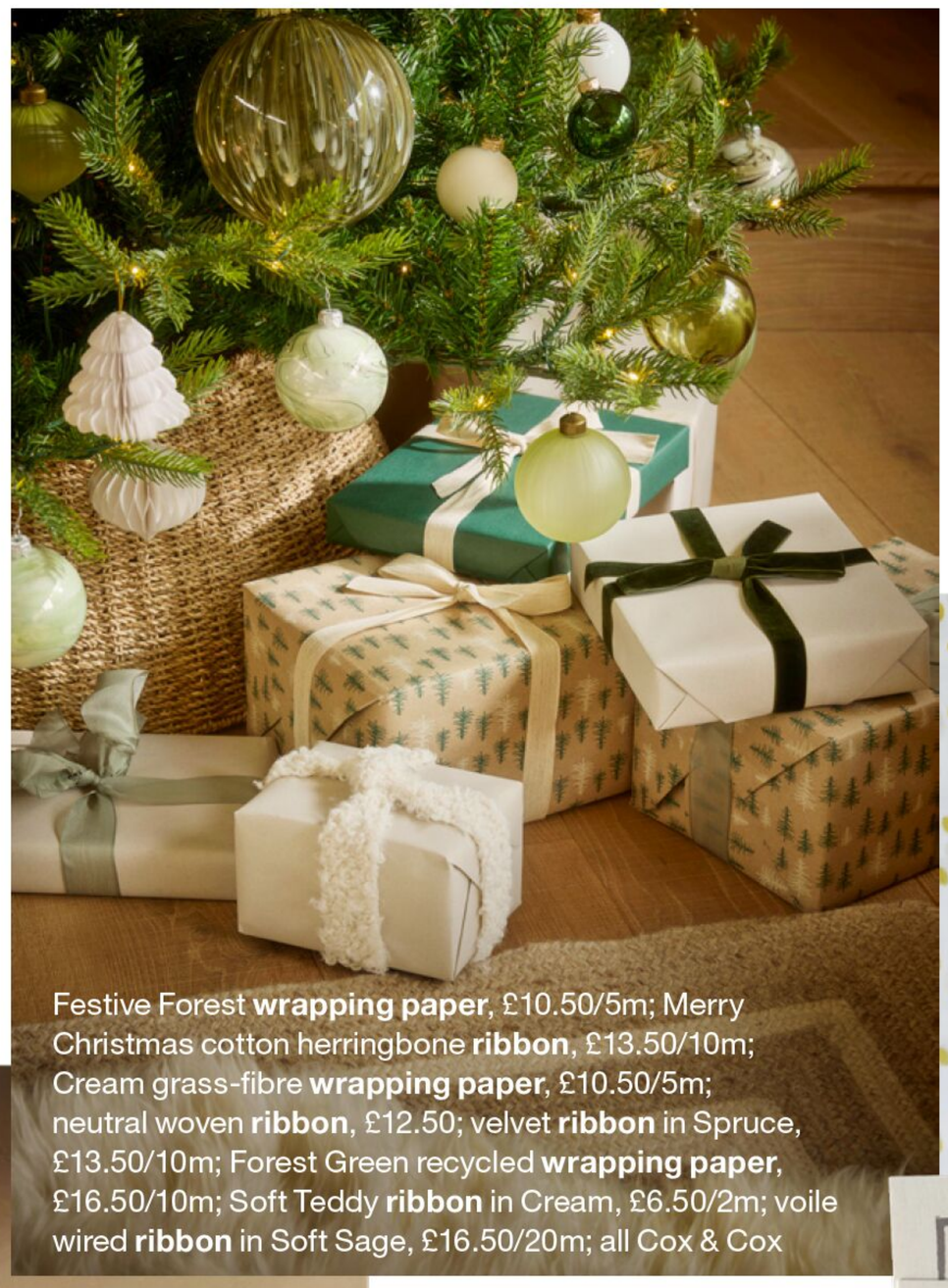
MINIMALIST SHINE

For a sophisticated look, opt for sweet, muted colours and a hint of sparkle

1 Any Occasion **wrapping paper** in Gold, £3.19/roll, Hallmark
2 Cherub **decoration**, £16, Scribble & Daub
3 Vintage **ribbons**, £6/5m each, Cambridge Imprint

1 **Tissue paper**, £1.67/four sheets, Søstrene Grene
2 Neutral woven **ribbon**, £12.50/10m, Cox & Cox
3 Cosy Christmas **gift tags**, £6/10, Sophie Allport



Festive Forest **wrapping paper**, £10.50/5m; Merry Christmas cotton herringbone **ribbon**, £13.50/10m; Cream grass-fibre **wrapping paper**, £10.50/5m; neutral woven **ribbon**, £12.50; velvet **ribbon** in Spruce, £13.50/10m; Forest Green recycled **wrapping paper**, £16.50/10m; Soft Teddy **ribbon** in Cream, £6.50/2m; voile wired **ribbon** in Soft Sage, £16.50/20m; all Cox & Cox

1 12 Days Of Christmas **tags**, £12/12, The White Company **2** Kraft **paper**, £3.50/roll, Hobbycraft **3** Metallic ric rac **ribbon** in Gold, £5.50/13m, The Bristol Artisan

1 Gold Spot **tissue paper**, £1.20/five sheets, George Home at Asda **2** Christmas **gift tags** in Grey, £7.50/30, Cambridge Imprint **3** Eggshell curling **ribbon**, £3.50/400m, Hobbycraft

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MERRY AND BRIGHT

Bring unexpected hues, playful motifs and charming embellishments together under the tree

1 Candy Christmas pink velvet **bow**, £10/eight, Talking Tables **2** Christmas Seventies 7 and 8 **gift tags**, £2.40/four, Storigraphic **3 Wrapping paper** in Spotlight Red on Pink, £5.95/five sheets, Rex London

Fabulously Festive **mug and coaster**, £20; Fabulously Festive **dip bowls**, £38/three; both Eleanor Bowmer for Pure Table Top

1 Kraft heart **tag**, £2/30, Hobbycraft **2** Merry and Bright **wrapping paper**, £2.80/sheet, Storigraphic **3** Grosgrain **ribbon** in Moss, from £5/5m, Nancy & Betty

1 Cocktail **decoration**, £16, Scribble & Daub **2** Bright Crackers **giftwrap**, £7/15m, Next **3** Slim Jolly Edged **ribbon** in Festive Red, £12.50/50m, Cox & Cox

1 Christmas Nutcracker **wrapping paper** by Tuppence Collective, £30/10 sheets, Not On The High Street **2** Box of **ribbons** in Bright, £29.50/30 lengths, Scribble & Daub **3** Merry Christmas **tags**, £6/12, The White Company

COMPILED BY LIZ LANE

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Your festive style guide

The collections, trends and great buys that will transform your home for the season

Elements Griffin **dining chairs** in Emerald and Ochre, £45 each; Halton **dining table**, £799; mirror ball **lights**, £8; Milo scallop wool **rug**, £349; disco ball pendant **lights**, £35 each; pink slim pre-lit flocked **Christmas tree**, £49; all Dunelm

Clementine **crackers**, £39/six; double velvet **bows**, £14/four; Clementine **napkins**, £20/two; Clementine **place cards**, £7.50/12; all Nancy & Betty

Gold band **coupes**, £3 each; metallic cut-out **placemats**, £5/two; Amalfi **dinner plates**, £6 each; gold **candleholder**, £15; Hotel marble **bowl**, £20; hanging **decorations**, from £1 each; all Dunelm

LOOKS WE LOVE

1 KITSCHMAS

Kitschmas is the playful, maximalist trend of the season. From disco balls to candy-coloured trees, this over-the-top look doesn't take itself too seriously – think humorous ornaments, oversized decor and plenty of bright, outlandish colours.

2 NOSTALGIA

From Eighties-inspired Christmas set-ups to vintage decorations, this year, we're looking fondly back to yuletides of yore. Nancy & Betty's mantel clocks and luxe velvet bow ornaments have got us dreaming of a not-so-bleak Dickensian Christmas.

3 CELESTIAL

A cool alternative to snowflakes and candy canes, this 'whimsigoth' look gathers glitzy stars, moody hues and iridescent effects. It's about embracing the magic of Christmas – just not in the way you might expect.

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4 FUN WAYS TO CELEBRATE

LAPLAND UK

This fully immersive experience starts with an invitation from Father Christmas, then you'll be welcomed into the magical Elven world of Lapland. Here, gingerbread decorating, toy-making and ice skating await you. Lapland UK Ascot and Lapland Manchester will run from 8 November-24 December (portal.laplanduk.co.uk).

CHRISTMAS AT WADDESDON

Feeling a touch of wanderlust? Take a European tour… across Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire. Inspired by the travels of Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (the builder of the manor), the house and garden have been decorated to reflect the cities he travelled to and their festive traditions. See waddesdon.org.uk for dates.

DENNIS SEVERS' HOUSE

When Dennis Severs bought a derelict townhouse in 1979, he decided to transform it into an 18th-century time capsule – and a home for the fictional Jervis family. This year, you can experience Christmas at the Jervises' in all its whimsical glory. The Christmas installation in Spitalfields, London, will be open from 21 November 2025-11 January 2026. For tickets, see dennisseversshouse.co.uk.

5

ADD SOME *STRICTLY* SPARKLE TO YOUR TREE

Does anything capture the spirit of Christmas better than a samba performed in red and green sequin unitards? It's a 10 from us! Here's how the HB team will be bringing some of that *Strictly*-inspired glitter-ball glitz to our tree…

Gramophone tree **decoration**, £18, Rockett St George. Car and disco ball **bauble**, £4.99, Dobbies. Dancing **mice**, £10, John Lewis & Partners. Multicoloured **mirror ball**, £2.50, Dunelm. Donny the Dancing Judge **mouse**, £12.95, Graham & Green. Metal **trumpet**, £6, Heavenly Homes and Gardens. Resin Nutcracker **ornament**, £29.99, Gisela Graham

PHOTOGRAPHS LUCINDA DOUGLAS-MENZIES; LUKE DYSON; ©WADDESDON, A ROTHSCHILD HOUSE AND GARDENS/CHRIS LACEY

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6

TAKE A BOW

We saw lots of trees bedecked with bows and ribbons last year, but this year's striped versions are bigger, bolder and even more audacious.

Right: red ticking stripe cotton-linen **napkins**, £29/four; red ticking stripe cotton-linen **tablecloth**, £65; both The Secret Linen Store. Below: black **tree**, £12.50; LED lantern **tree**, £38; LED black **present** decoration, £5; LED **present** decoration, £5; **stag** decoration, £3; Confetti **wine glasses**, £6 each; all Matalan

From top left: Striped velvet Christmas **tree topper**, £16.50, Oliver Bonas. Red velvet bow **decoration**, £18.50, Oliver Bonas. Prism Stripe bow **decoration**, £7, Sophie Robinson x Dunelm. Pink and cream **vase**, £35, Rockett St George

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7 DIY BAUBLES

There's no cosier pastime than painting your own decorations for the tree. We recommend using clay paint on ceramic ornaments (you can find it on Etsy or Hobbycraft). For a fun and more sustainable way of decorating, just add some mulled wine, some Bublé on the speaker and some ribbons (perhaps making use of any leftovers from giftwrapping).

8 WIN AT SECRET SANTA

Unique, beautiful and always useful, these matchboxes are portable pieces of art – and make a great little stocking filler.

Robin Christmas **matches**, £8.95, Annabel James. Arts and Crafts Tile Print **matches**, £9, Heavenly Homes and Gardens. Archivist Dog & Gramophone **matches**, £8.95, Not Another Bill

9 FOODIE DECORATIONS

From croissant-shaped candles to butter yellow walls, food themes have dominated the interiors world this year. We think these delicious decorations make perfect stocking fillers.

From top: embroidered **popcorn** decoration, £8.50, Oliver Bonas. Ceramic LED light-up **gingerbread cottage**, £29.99, Gisela Graham. Embroidered Perelló **olives** decoration, £15, Studio Thie. Glass **Yule log** decoration, £9.99, Gisela Graham

WORDS LIZ LANE **ILLUSTRATIONS** SOPHIE BURGHAM

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Step inside your favourite **Christmas movies**

Get inspired by the golden glow of *Little Women*'s Christmases past, the quirky-trad decor of *Love Actually* and the cosy country feeling of *The Holiday* (and yes, we rewatched them all and called it 'work')

COSY COTTAGECORE

The Holiday

Floral prints, rustic details and neutral shades capture Nancy Meyers' iconic take on country-village style

1 Hanging brass **frame**, £12.95, Rex London **2** Decorative old **books**, £37.95/three, The Wisteria Tree **3** Lasya Exotic cotton velvet **quilt**, £289.99, La Redoute **4** Light Up Kitschmas house **decoration**, £3.50, Dunelm **5** Poles & Roses II Dado **trim** in Courances, £29, Petra Palumbo **6** Cosy Christmas **diffuser**, £30, Sophie Allport **7** Sella **paint**, £120/5L, LL Company **8** Elderberry Pembroke Stripe linen-blend **duvet cover**, from £139; **pillowcases**, £45/pair; both Piglet in Bed **9** Winson printed slub chambray **cushion** in Multi, £25, The Cotswold Company **10** Carena Ghini Feathers upholstered **trunk** in Red Garnet, £495, Oka **11** Cath Kidston Cream/Green ceramic orb **table lamp**, £80, Next Home **12** Montreal **mug**, £5, Dunelm

PHOTOGRAPH AJ PICS/ALAMY

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OLD WORLD WHIMSY

Little Women

For a home worthy of Marmee's girls, embrace vintage furniture, naturalistic details and homemade decorations with a touch of eccentricity

1 Metallic Gold **glass bauble**, £5.99, Gisela Graham **2** Nutcracker **decoration**, £2/set of three, Dunelm **3** Patchwork **bedspread** in Ruby, £180, John Lewis & Partners **4** Door Scape **wreath** with silver glitter leaves, £14.99, Homesense **5** Feather **pen and ink set with stand**, £55, The British Museum Shop **6** Clair de Lune Duet **stool**, £260, French Bedroom **7** Rustic **potted pine**, £29, The Cotswold Company **8** Botanical Berry **cushion**, £55, French Bedroom **9** Hugo Ruby Red merino **throw**, £98, Country Mouse **10** Love Story velvet **armchair**, £465, French Bedroom **11** Gold sparkling star **tree topper**, £14.99, Gisela Graham **12** ***Little Women*** by Louisa May Alcott, £11.99, Amulet Books

PHOTOGRAPH LANDMARK MEDIA/ALAMY

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TRADITIONAL ENGLISH ECLECTIC

Love Actually

Quirky decor, classic patterns and a rich colour palette are the key to nailing this wholesome Richard Curtis look

1 Crafted Christmas Nutcracker **decoration**, £12, Dunelm **2** Noah **cabinet** in mango wood, £899.99, Oak Furnitureland **3** Resin Teddy on Rocking Horse **decoration**, £9.99, Gisela Graham **4** Young pine pre-lit **Christmas tree**, £295, Cox & Cox **5** Yala Hammered **gin glasses** , £40/two, Nkuku **6** Mushroom **wrapping paper**, £11/five sheets; grosgrain **ribbon** in Moss, from £5/5m; both Nancy & Betty **7** Yuletide Robin **stocking**, £15, The Cotswold Company **8** Foxham three-seater **sofa bed**, £1,440, Willow & Hall **9** Campervan **decoration**, £3, Dunelm **10** Michael Michalsky London **rug**, £419, Ruggable **11** Piaf rechargeable **table lamp**, £95; empire **shade** in Classic Green Chalk Stripes, £36; both Pooky **12** Teatro **cushion cover** in Fig, £32, Walton & Co

COMPILED BY LIZ LANE **PHOTOGRAPH** PETER MOUNTAIN/UNIVERSAL/DNA/WORKING TITLE/KOBAL/SHUTTERSTOCK

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DECORATE

PHOTOGRAPH POLLY WREFORD **STYLING** REBECCA DE BOEHMLER **DIRECTION** SARAH KEADY
FOR WHERE TO SHOP, SEE THE DINING CREDITS ON PAGE 46

IN THIS SECTION

DECORATING ADD MAGIC TO EVERY ROOM * FESTIVE EDIT TREES, WREATHS & GARLANDS
* 12 WAYS TO CELEBRATE TIPS FROM OUR STYLE EXPERTS & TRENDSETTERS

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Evergreen

Drench your home in the colour of the season. Soft shades of sage and forest hues mixed with brushed gold, warm wood and candlelight set the stage for inviting evenings at home

PHOTOGRAPHY POLLY WREFORD
STYLING REBECCA DE BOEHMLER
DIRECTION SARAH KEADY

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Soft, drapey fabrics will create an elegant but relaxed atmosphere – and can be used to cover a makeshift extended table. Hanging linen to the floor, loosely tying napkins and placing blankets along benches will add some drama while keeping it all cosy.

For where to shop, turn to page 46

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Bring in some nature

Simple foliage is all you need to create an impactful scheme – and it will also make your home smell great. Lavish amounts of fir and eucalyptus come together for a showstopping garland over the mantelpiece, or pop a few green sprigs in vases for a sweet touch.

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Arrange a tempting table for your guests with food that looks as fabulous as it tastes. A stack of decadent cheeses, piles of fruit and sweet treats is wonderfully celebratory, while homemade crackers bring some post-dinner entertainment.

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Forget bar carts and trolleys – use what you've got to give your guests their very own happy hour. Dust off your best glasses and decanters, and put out bowls of garnishes for everyone to help themselves. Keep a tray at the ready so you can serve in style.

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Where to shop

PRESENTS

Asiatic Blade Green **rug** (used as background), from £279, Rugs Direct. **Wrapping papers:** Festive Forest (top), £10.50/5m; Forest Green (bottom row, left), £16.50/10m roll; both Cox & Cox. Feathered print (middle row, left) and Green Marble (middle row, right); both from £2.20/sheet, Paper Tree Nook. Fable Forest (bottom row, right), £11/five sheets, Nancy & Betty. For similar green and gold (top right), try Japanese Chiyogami in Scandi Green, £2.85/two sheets, Artcuts. Spruce Leaves (centre) £5.99/sheet, Prims Prints Design at Etsy. **Ribbons**, from a selection, Jane Means and Ribbons For You. Brass Christmas Rose on stem **decoration**, £36.50; gold-beaded **snowflake**, £4.95; squirrel **tag**, £2.45; all Greige. Hanging brass **leaf with bell**, £6, Heavenly Homes and Gardens. Green **label**, £2/10, Jane Means

DINING PLACE SETTING

Tablecloth in Lazio Forest, £46/m, Clarke & Clarke. Green stripes **charger plates**, £48 each, Villa Bologna Pottery. Edie **dinner plates**, £50/four; waffle **napkins**, £35/four; gold leaf **bowl**, £50; all Cox & Cox. Metal leaf **napkin ring**, £4.50, Heavenly Homes and Gardens. Tortoise **cutlery**, £105/five-piece set, Nina Campbell. Rowanberry **paper tinsel**, £23.50, Toast. HK Living olive green **wine glass** (on right), £70/four, Rose & Grey. Beldi **wine glass** (on left), £36/six; fluted green mirror **votive**, £5; both Raj Tent Club. Dapple Woodland Green **tealight holder/vase**, £25, LSA International. Bingley brass **candlestick**, £24,Rowen & Wren

DINING ROOM

Wall in Normandy Grey absolute matt emulsion, £59/2.5L, Little Greene. **Garland** (on wall), price on request, Floral Atelier. **Curtain** in Eliasson Kyanite/Emerald, £68/m, Harlequin. French Connection Sunaha **ceiling light**, £280, Next Home. Luto extending **dining table**, £649, House Beautiful Collection at DFS. Zuberi natural mango wood **dining bench**, £399, Barker and Stonehouse. **Tablecloth** in Lazio Forest, £46/m, Clarke & Clarke. **Tablecloth trim** in Merengue Garden pleated metallic border, £74/m, Samuel & Sons. Belleville **dining chair**, £350/two; Edie **dinner plates**, £50/four; waffle **napkins**, £35/four; gold leaf **bowl**, £50; all Cox & Cox. Emerald green fluted **vases**, £95 each; green stripes **charger plates**, £48 each; all Villa Bologna Pottery. Metal leaf **napkin rings**, £4.50 each, Heavenly Homes and Gardens. Tortoise **cutlery**, £105/five-piece set, Nina Campbell. HK Living olive green **wine glasses**, £70/four, Rose & Grey. Green glass moulded **candlestick**, £5.99, Gisela Graham. Chaipat brass **candlesticks**, from £38 each; Nahan Forest Green **throw**, £100; all Nkuku

LIVING ROOM

Mantel **garland** design, price on request, Floral Atelier. **Wall** in Chelsea Green II; **ceiling and above dado** in Apple Smiles II; both pure flat emulsion, £62/2.5L, Paint & Paper Library. Innermost Circus **ceiling light**, £420, The Longest Stay. Asiatic Blade Green **rug**, from £279, Rugs Direct. Pellaro curved swivel **chair** in Amigo Garden, £429, Barker and Stonehouse. Harp **armchair** in green bouclé, £329, John Lewis & Partners. For a similar **coffee table**, try Noland; Lotus rust **tealight holder**, £11.95; all Graham & Green. Pre-lit Grand Spruce Christmas tree, £495/7.5ft, The White Company. Gold star **tree topper**, £4.99, Gisela Graham. Dapple Sun Amber **vase/lantern**, £50, LSA International. Ribbed wood **tray**, £20, Habitat. Irda glass **tealight holders**, £25/three; Elagulu pine cone **candleholders**, £28 each; all Nkuku. **Baubles**, all from a selection, Raj Tent Club, Gisela Graham, Layered Lounge and John Lewis & Partners. **Wrapping paper**, from a selection, Cox & Cox, Rowen & Wren, Paper Nook and Nancy & Betty. **Ribbons**, from a selection, Jane Means, Ribbons For You and Hobbycraft

COFFEE TABLE DETAIL

For a similar **coffee table**, try Noland; marble-effect **tray**, £55; Rustic Leaf **candleholder**, £9.95; all Graham & Green. Ribbed wooden **tray**, £20, Habitat. Dapple Sun Amber **vase/lantern**, £50, LSA International. Moss Green scalloped **votives**, £5 each; Marble glass **bauble**, £10; both Heavenly Homes and Gardens. Metal star **candleholder**, £4.99, Gisela Graham

CRACKERS

Fable Forest (fill your own) **cracker** (with white ribbon), £28/six, Nancy & Betty. Homemade **cracker fabric** (gold trim) in Riva Forest, £48/m, Clarke & Clarke. Homemade **crackers** (gold ribbon) in Mrs Platt wallpaper, £2/A4 sample, Petra Palumbo. **Ribbons**, from a selection, Jane Means. Jumbo ricrac in Antique Gold, £2.50/m. Eternal Maker Shop at Etsy. Marble-effect **tray**, £55, Graham & Green. Double iron leaves **wreath** (in background), £23, Heavenly Homes and Gardens.

SIDEBOARD

Leshan Jade **sideboard**, £1,795, Graham & Green. Brass-effect **candlesticks**, £55/two; large **cloche candleholder**, £79; both Barker and Stonehouse. Taraza marble **candlestick**, £45/set of two, Dunelm. Gold glass **cake stand**, £28, John Lewis & Partners. Cheese celebration **cake**, from £70, Cornish Cheese Co. Irda glass **tealight holders**, £25/three, Nkuku. Green Petal ceramic **dish**, £24; **napkins**, £10/two; both M&S. Metal leaf **wreath**, £80; Amber etched hurricane **candleholder**, £20; light green **ceramic fir tree**, £16; all Heavenly Homes and Gardens. Ochre glazed **urn vase**, £55, Cox & Cox. Tiered **ceramic tree**, £36, Layered Lounge. Brass leaf and white-beaded **garland**, £19.50, Greige. Victorian Green Leaf **plates**, £120/six, Raj Tent Club. Poterie Barbotine **pitcher**, £52, Toast. Ashby oak **tray**, £78, Rowen & Wren. Artichoke **bowl**, £250, Villa Bologna Pottery. Rockett St George gold star **side plate**, £26/two, Next Home

COCKTAIL DETAIL

Tibetan singing **bowl**, £30, Raj Tent Club. Dora brass squirrel **bottle opener**, £40, Nina Campbell. Crystal **cocktail glasses** with oval design, £62/four, The Vintage List. Tall green Ramine Baroque **candleholder**, £160, Artemest. Mila dark emerald **decanter**, £55, Nkuku. Olive green glass disc **bud vase**, £4.49, Gisela Graham. Brass Christmas Rose on stem **decoration**, £36.50, Greige. Gold hammered **cocktail shaker**, £15, Dunelm

HOME BAR

Check marble-top **drinks cabinet**, £1,149, John Lewis & Partners. **Ribbons** (used as background), from a selection, Jane Means and Ribbons For You. Mushroom velvet storage **footstool**, £49; gold hammered **cocktail shaker**, £15; both Dunelm. Tall green Ramine Baroque **candleholder**, £160, Artemest. Nelson Gloss **ice bucket**, £401; Jewel **champagne flutes**, £41.50 each; Berry & Thread **glass tree**, from £200; all Nina Campbell. Crystal **cocktail glasses** with oval design, £62/four, The Vintage List. Cask whisky **decanter**, £150 (including two tumblers); Dapple Woodland Green **tealight holder/vase**, £25; both LSA International. Mila dark emerald **decanter**, £55, Nkuku. Tibetan singing **bowl**, £30, Raj Tent Club. Gold **jigger**, £9.95, Graham & Green. Ashby oak **tray**, £78, Rowen & Wren. Cosy Soft Moss Green **rug**, £30, Habitat. **Presents**, as before

STYLING ASSISTANTS KAREN CARPENTER; LIZ LANE; AREESHA RICHARDS
WITH THANKS TO MASON THE DOG. NEVER LEAVE BURNING CANDLES UNATTENDED
OR WITHIN REACH OF CHILDREN OR PETS

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All the *trimmings*

We've rounded up the trees, wreaths and garlands that will add a little – or a lot of – dazzle to your home and your holiday

Statement TREES

1 CHRISTMAS CUTE

A candy-coloured palette and lots of sparkling lights will transform your tree into a coquettish dream. Just add lots of stripes and coordinating candles.

2 HIGH CONTRAST

For timeless elegance with a touch of luxury, use a mix of just black and white. Fill in the gaps on the tree with fabric bows – and an oversized version for the tree topper.

3 BEYOND THE PINES

Drape a tall cactus tree in colourful beads, quirky decorations and lights for a totally unexpected approach that will brighten up your living space.

4 YULE-TILE

Patterned tiles are the ornaments you didn't know you wanted. Explore Petra Palumbo's festive collection – available in a range of colours – for inspiration.

PHOTOGRAPHS (1) PETRA PALUMBO; (2) COX & COX; (3) HOMESENSE; (4) NEXT HOME; (5) SOPHIE ROBINSON/DUNELM

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5 AUTUMN WONDERLAND

A slim tree fits into tight corners and you can embrace mocha shades and woodland-themed decorations for a twist on a classic look.

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GARLANDS with style

PHOTOGRAPHS (1) COX & COX; (2) LIGHTS4FUN.CO.UK/OLIVER PERROTT; (3) LUTO DINING TABLE & TWO BENCHES, £1,137 & COSMA DINING CHAIRS, £229 EACH, BOTH HOUSE BEAUTIFUL COLLECTION AT DFS; (4) DUNELM (5) HABITAT

1 MAKE IT PLAYFUL

Brightly coloured pom-pom garlands topped with ribbons together with oversized silver baubles and tinsel stars will make your mantelpiece sing.

2 THE FESTIVE FESTOON

Loop patterned paper chains around swags of foliage to inject a touch of handcrafted magic to your space.

3 TOUCH OF HONEY

For a fresh, naturalistic centrepiece, hang green honeycomb paper decorations, baubles with leaf designs and sprigs of pine.

4 HOLIDAY HEADBOARDS

Use any fabric trimmings in festive colours to create a unique – and sustainable – garland that will look great attached above a bed.

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5 COLOURFUL SCANDI

A bare branch creates a sculptural garland base. Just add ribbons and thread through glittery baubles.

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1

2

WREATHS that wow

3

4

1 TALK OF THE TABLE

Choose a berry wreath with muted hues to make a relaxed, sophisticated centrepiece.

2 PERFECT PUNCTUATION

A shaggy, oversized design will transform an alcove into a sweet and seasonal feature wall.

3 UPSIZE IT

Framing your door with oversized bauble garlands and matching them with a colourful, glowing wreath will create a merry maximalist welcome.

4 GO WILD

Forget berries and holly – loosely tied thistles and wildflowers add a sense of untamed Christmas glamour to your front door.

WORDS LIZ LANE **PHOTOGRAPHS** (1) COX & COX; (2) POOKY; (3) B&M; (4) ANNIE SLOAN; (5) POLLY WREFORD/REBECCA DE BOEHMLER/SARAH KEADY. WITH THANKS TO MASON THE DOG. NEVER LEAVE LIT CANDLES UNATTENDED OR NEAR CHILDREN OR PETS

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Plain 60cm **wreath**, £35; pyramid **lanterns**, from £30 each; Basket pre-lit **Christmas tree**, £140/4.5ft; all John Lewis & Partners. Pre-lit potted 90cm **Christmas tree**, £99.99; pre-lit 75cm **Christmas tree**, £69.99; both Lights4fun.co.uk. Churchgate Jute **doormat**, £20, Dunelm. Children's Vierzonord neoprene-lined **boots**, £85, Le Chameau. Karru cotton velvet **sack** in Forest Green, £50, Nkuku

5 MERRY & BRIGHT

Give a warm welcome with sparkling lights on foliage and a selection of candles in lanterns by the entrance of your home.

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Hosting made effortless

From the furniture to the finishing touches, here's how to curate a table that everyone will want to gather around this winter

EXTEND THE WELCOME

An extending dining table is a wise investment in any home – it remains compact for everyday meals, but allows you to seat extra guests for a celebration in just a few clicks. Design-wise, these pieces have come a long way from the clunky separate panels of yore. Furniture Village's dark wood Jai table has a cool, contemporary pedestal base and a butterfly mechanism that means you can switch it to full size in seconds.

SCALE NEW HEIGHTS

When it comes to tablescaping, it's all about playing with scale. Begin with a central focal point – you can't go wrong with a tall, eyecatching vase bursting with seasonal blooms – and then build smaller pieces, such as colourful glassware and statement candlesticks, in from there. Just make sure nothing is so big that it blocks the conversation.

SIT COMFORTABLY

If people are going to linger in your dining room, they need chairs with back support. Avoid anything hard or angular, and seek out seating with soft curves and plenty of padding. Furniture Village's Jai swivel chairs, upholstered in a rich rust fabric, are an excellent sink-in-and-stay-a-while option.

Jai large extending **dining table** with four **swivel chairs** in Rust, £1,749, Furniture Village

ADD TACTILE TOUCHES

If a full tablecloth feels too formal, try a runner with fabric placemats for a more relaxed and inviting setting. Details such as embroidery, scalloped edging and frills add character and elevate the look.

GO FOR GLOW

Nothing ruins ambience like the dreaded 'big light'. Lean into options that emit a soft, diffused glow instead. Position Furniture Village's Nivara table lamp on a sideboard for light that enhances rather than distracts. It's so chic, it looks like an ornament before you even switch it on.

Find stylish, quality furniture for the whole home under one roof at Furniture Village stores and furniturevillage.co.uk

Crete three-door **sideboard**, £799;
Nivara two-light **table lamp**, £119;
Laila **cushion**, £45, all Furniture Village

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12 *ways to* MAKE YOUR CHRISTMAS AT HOME *even lovelier*

ALL SPARKLE, NO STRESS

Showstopping sharing platters that take 30 minutes to put together, gifts that last a lifetime, a diffuser that smells like a cedar forest... We spoke to 12 wise and stylish creatives about the thoughtful details and traditions that add warmth, colour and fun to their season

COMPILED BY JAMES CUNNINGHAM, SARAH KEADY AND TORRI MUNDELL
ILLUSTRATIONS SOPHIE BURGHAM

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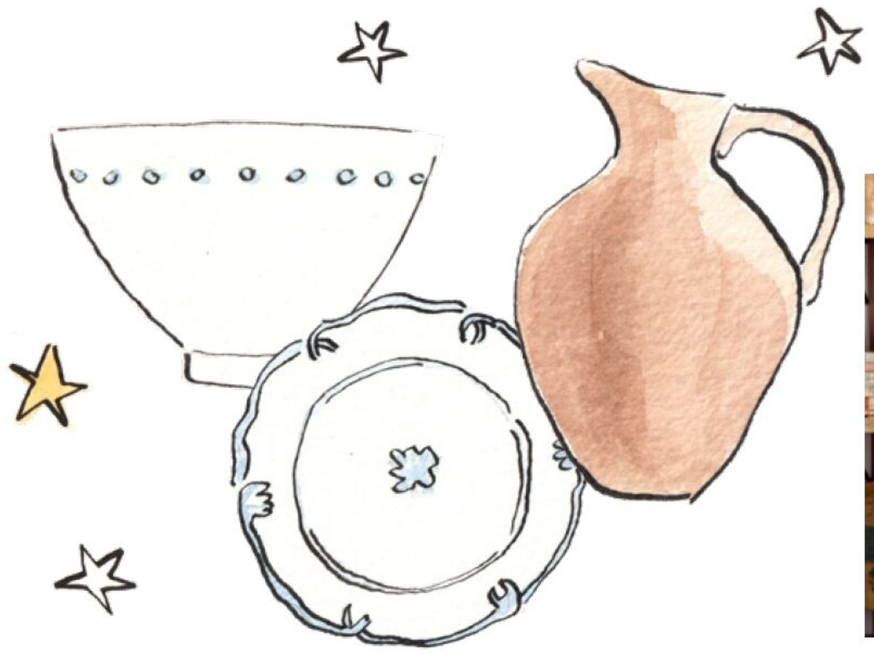
CELEBRATE



‘Make decorating and gifting meaningful’

Africa Daley-Clarke

Our *House Beautiful* columnist describes how a purposeful approach to spending, entertaining and embellishing will bear great memories, thoughtful gifts and the pause we all need during the busiest time of the year

The festive decor in Africa’s living and dining room reflects her considered approach to the season

Each year, the festive season arrives in a rush of abundance - a joyful spectacle that appeals to every sense. In the past, I’ve let it sweep me along, chasing every tradition and trinket. But over time, I’ve learned that leaning into a slower, more intentional Christmas, is much more worthwhile. Taking lessons from the intensity of previous years, I think I’ve finally found a rhythm that holds on to the wonder, but leaves room to breathe.

I START BY STRIPPING AWAY THE NOISE AND KEEPING ONLY WHAT MATTERS – good company, meaningful conversation, and traditions and objects chosen with care. That might mean pairing a treasured family ornament with a new handmade piece, setting the table with passed-down linens or choosing from small, independent makers whose process and provenance are worth celebrating. Sustainability isn’t a restriction here; it offers a rare kind of creative freedom. When you choose with care, the table feels more inviting, the decorations tell a story and the season becomes less about performance and more about presence.

Over time, these guiding ideas have become three principles I return to each December. They are ways to cut through the noise, stay true to my values,and make the season feel deeply personal without losing its magic.

1 **INVEST IN CRAFT, NOT CORPORATIONS** Seek out makers whose work tells a story: hand-thrown ceramics, hand-printed textiles, candles poured in a kitchen. Every pound that is spent keeps a skill alive. Ask about their process; most creatives love to share.

2 **CHOOSE MATERIALS THAT WILL LAST** Favour sustainable, recycled or organic natural materials whenever possible. They’ll age beautifully, often developing a patina over time that will only deepen their charm.

3 **MAKE IT PERSONAL** When friends and family unwrap a present, I want them to be taken straight back to the moment or memory that inspired it. A great gift should carry its own story. *thevitamindproject.com*

AFRICA’S CHRISTMAS WISH LIST

Stockings, £90 each, Tuck it in
Handmade by Lucy Strawson, each stocking is dyed using plants such as chestnut, weld and indigo. They’re double lined, finished with an eight-point star and designed to be treasured for many festive seasons.

Carved olive wood serving board, £57, Spindle by Sisters
Sustainably sourced from naturally fallen olive trees and hand-carved in Bethlehem, each board displays the wood’s rich grain and carries a piece of Palestinian heritage.

Irrawaddy brass jug, £52, Kalinko
Inspired by water jugs often found outside Buddhist pagodas in Myanmar, this brass piece is crafted to reflect the gold leaf of pagodas and the country’s culture of kindness.

Pinwheel patchwork quilt, £325, Toast
Made in India from soft cotton, this vibrant quilt is hand-stitched and finished with bound edges. Designed to last, it reflects Toast’s commitment to slow, considered living.

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPH KASIA FISZER **ROOM PHOTOGRAPHS** KEZI HUSSEYIN

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Styling tip

Bring nature indoors for balance. Gather branches, pine cones or greenery from your garden and place them in simple vessels, letting their textures soften your space.

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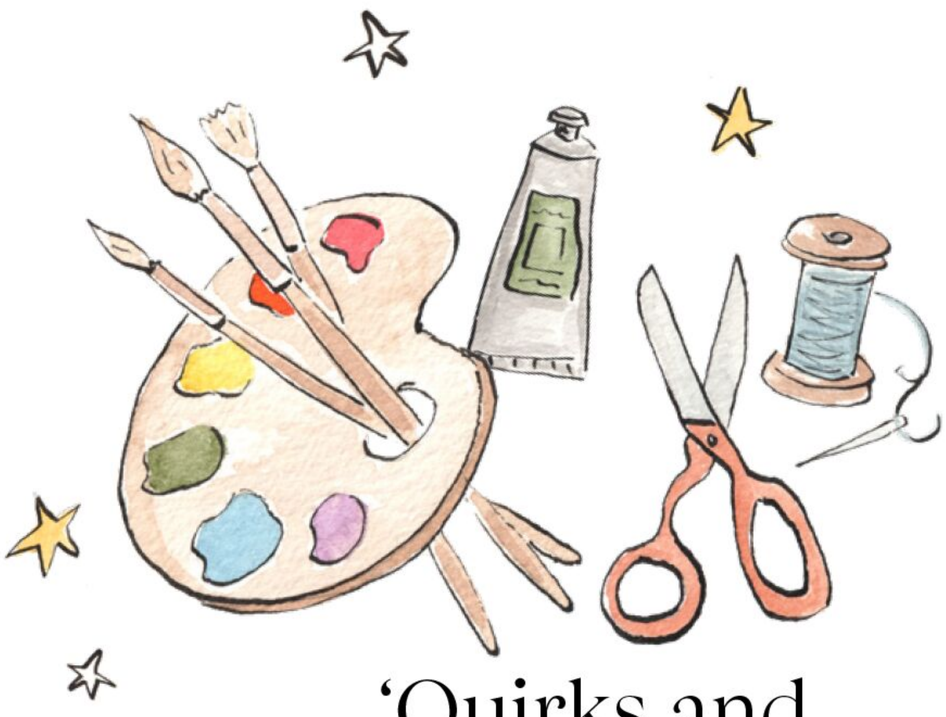


‘Quirks and wobbles are the best part of a handmade gift’

Molly Mahon

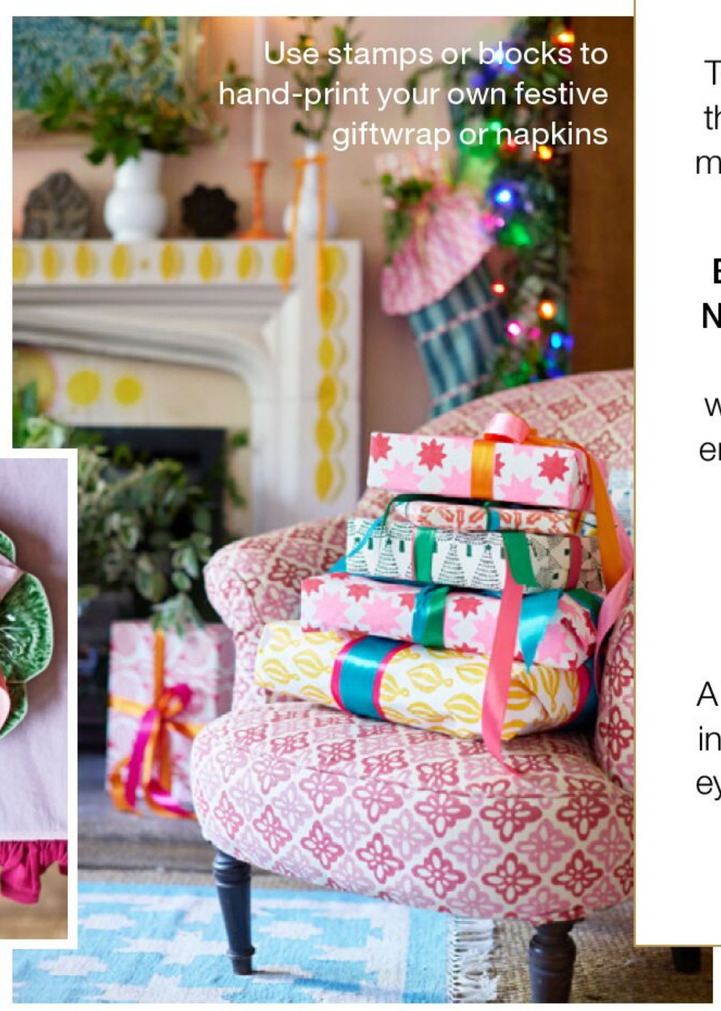
The textile designer and maker shares how crafting your own gifts is a blessing for both for the maker and the recipient

FOR ME, CHRISTMAS IS THE SEASON OF MAKING. There’s something about the colder days, festive spirit and the gentle hum of anticipation that makes my fingers itch to print, snip, create and decorate. We live in a world where it’s so easy to pop something mass-produced into a basket, but slowing down to make something with your own two hands... that’s where the magic is.

CREATIVITY IS A JOYFUL GLUE THAT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER. I love a bustling family crafting session. Not only does it take us away from our screens, we’re also left with something gorgeous at the end. If you’re not craft-confident, remember that it’s the quirks and wobbles that are the hallmarks of something handmade. Why not start by making a festive paper garland? All you need is some recycled paper, a few acrylic paint colours and a potato if you don’t have any wooden blocks. Print stars or holly shapes, cut them out in long strips and staple or glue together. Instant charm!

AT THIS TIME OF YEAR, I ALSO SAVOUR THE QUIET MOMENTS WHEN I’M STITCHING OR PRINTING BY MYSELF. One of the most memorable gifts I’ve made was a block-printed quilt for a dear friend. It took a long time, but I knew that every press of the block and every stitch of the thread would be wrapping her in the love and warmth that she deserves. That’s the joy of handmade: it’s the gift of your time as much as it is your skill.

mollymahon.com



Use stamps or blocks to hand-print your own festive giftwrap or napkins

FIVE CRAFT KITS FOR THE SEASON

Paint your own Nutcracker kit, £3, Hobbycraft

Whether you paint in classic hues or give your Nutcracker a colourful makeover, this will give the whole family the chance to discover their inner artist.

Celebration woodblock printing kit, £25, Toast

These charming blocks can be used with fabric paint to bring a festive look to tea towels, napkins and more.

Christmas jumper decorations kit, £13, Cotton Twist at John Lewis & Partners

Take Christmas Jumper Day to the next level – this kit leaves no mess, making it perfect for kids.

Bauble embroidery kit, £16, Nancy Nicholson at Clothkits

Dip in and out of this set on wintry afternoons to craft three embroidered decorations using felt and specialist thread.

Diamonds tapestry kit, £135, Molly Mahon

A Twixmas project worth investing in – use luxurious wool to stitch an eye-catching panel before framing or using for a cushion cover.

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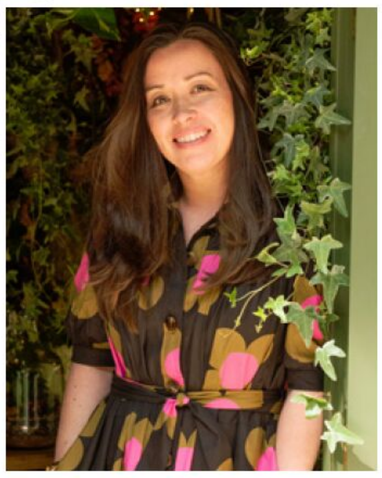


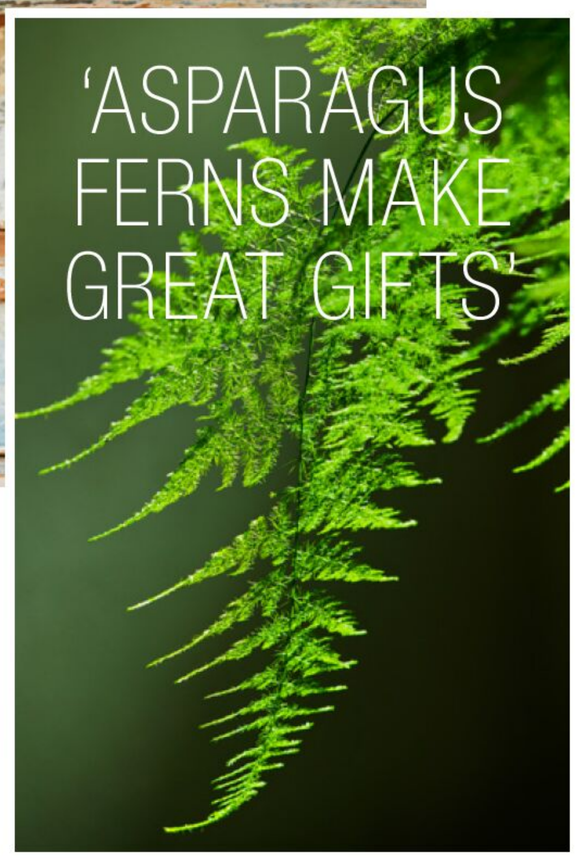
‘Who wouldn’t love a showy, trumpet-shaped amaryllis?’ Abbi Dixon

The houseplant expert and owner of Botanic in York isn’t anti-poinsettia, but she’s got a soft spot for these other stunning, easy-to-look-after plants that flourish through the winter

WHILE POINSETTIAS ARE ALWAYS POPULAR, I’M A HUGE FAN OF ANTHURIUMS. With their exotic flower-like spathes in white, pink or red, they would add a tropical feel in any bright, warm room. And one of our bestsellers is the showy, trumpet-shaped amaryllis (below). For a clean, contemporary look, grow one from a bulb in moss in a round glass flower vase. They require very little watering and will last the whole season from November till January. Once the flowers have gone, prune the stalks and leaves to encourage new growth after the dormant winter season. I also like to display cyclamens and tall ferns planted in aged terracotta pots.

ONE OF MY FAVOURITE GIFTS FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY IS A FITTONIA, A PLANT THAT THRIVES IN A TERRARIUM. They are tropical plants that come in a variety of colours – including ‘Forest Flame’, a gorgeous deep red – and have delicate patterned leaves with contrasting veins. Give them indirect light in a humid spot and they’ll be happy. Asparagus ferns also make great gifts and are ideal for terrariums although they will need pruning or rehoming as they mature. At our Christmas-themed terrarium workshops, we show how to create a personal present that will suit the recipient. And finally, don’t forget to wrap these green gifts in jolly red paper and ribbon.

Take part in a Christmas-themed terrarium workshop to create a personal present



WHEN CREATING A DISPLAY, IT’S BEST TO GROUP PLANTS IN UNEVEN NUMBERS. I’ll bring together three or five, varying the leaf textures and patterns and playing with different heights. Add an established trailing pothos to the mix and frame it all with a couple of pint-sized, dwarf Monterey cypress, which are lemon-scented and look like mini Christmas trees. Keep the whole thing very natural and dot with a few silvery star decorations, ivy and holly from your garden. You could even tuck a few festive characters into the plant pots for a fun finishing touch.
botanicyork.co.uk

INTERVIEW VIKKI ELIAS **PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPH** ANGELA STUBBS BRAND PHOTOGRAPHY **PHOTOGRAPHS** GETTY IMAGES

THREE PLANTS THAT FLOURISH AT CHRISTMASTIME

CHRISTMAS CACTUS
This plant delivers fabulous bright blooms and flat spiky stems throughout

ANTHURIUM
Also known as flamingo flowers, these vibrant sculpted plants love humid environments.

CYCLAMEN
Long, slender stems topped with sweet-scented flowers will bring colour to any corner.

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‘Choose decorations that capture a moment in time’ Lisa Cherry

Thinking, breathing and buying Christmas all year round hasn’t dampened the John Lewis Festive Lead’s enthusiasm for the season. Lisa shares how she chooses ornaments that will delight her future self

RATHER THAN SITTING IN A CORNER AND LOOKING PRETTY, CHRISTMAS TREES ARE NOW TAKING CENTRE STAGE. As someone with a front-row seat to the festive trends, I know we’re putting them up earlier and using them to reflect our own personal style rather than simply doing the same thing every year. Baubles are leading this change. We’re no longer buying pre-mixed sets, but curating unique collections that make our trees (yes, many of us now decorate more than one) truly individual.

DECORATIONS ARE IRRESISTIBLE LITTLE LUXURIES, WITH PEOPLE POPPING BAUBLES IN STOCKINGS AND GIVING THEM AS SECRET SANTA PRESENTS. The trendy talking point ones always fly off the shelves first – this year, I’m predicting our new custard cream decoration will be a huge hit. But as Christmas draws nearer, more timeless styles start to steal the show. Our classic striped bows and felt animal decorations are sure to spark joy, as will two new characters inspired by a certain chart-topping Britpop duo.

I LIKE TO THINK OF BAUBLES AS FESTIVE TIME CAPSULES. Every Christmas, I add a couple to my own tree to represent something personal – a tennis ball and a slice of pizza [shown right] will be making their debut this year, commemorating my first visit to Wimbledon and the arrival of my treasured pizza oven! When the festivities are over, I’m always very careful when packing the decorations away. I also like to tuck a bottle of red wine and £30 into the bauble box. That way, I get to enjoy a glass of wine and a guilt-free takeaway while decorating my tree next year. *johnlewis.com*

Left and above Stripe **bow**, £15; spa mouse with wine **decoration**, £10; fondant fancy felt **decoration**, £8; pizza slice, plant, cheese, avocado and lemon **baubles**, all £8 each; other **baubles** and **accessories**, from a selection; all John Lewis & Partners

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‘It’s ok to cheat a little for perfect corners’

Katie Leamon

A stylishly wrapped gift heightens the enjoyment of giving something, the stationery designer has discovered. Here are her tips on how to elevate every offering you make

THERE’S NOTHING QUITE LIKE A STACK OF BEAUTIFULLY WRAPPED PRESENTS TO BUILD ANTICIPATION AT CHRISTMAS. With their colours, patterns and decorative flourishes, they create a sense of magic under the tree. It’s not often that gifts get to be admired for days before they’re opened, so why not rise to the occasion? **BEFORE I HAD CHILDREN, WRAPPING PRESENTS USED TO BE A RITUAL WITH A GLASS OF FIZZ AND AN OLD CHRISTMAS FILM ON IN THE BACKGROUND.** Nowadays, the process is a lot more gradual and mainly involves desperately searching for places to hide things! My approach, though, hasn’t changed. My golden rule is always to mix organic and geometric patterns, so for instance, if I use holly berry-printed paper, I’ll opt for a striped ribbon. I also love being sustainable – reusing last year’s cards as gift tags and swapping foil bows for holly leaves, foraged berries and sprigs of fir tucked into ribbon. I never use anything that can’t be recycled. **MY PARTNER ONCE PRESENTED ME WITH A GIFT WRAPPED IN KITCHEN FOIL, SO I’M USED TO DISPENSING ADVICE TO BEGINNERS!** My biggest tip? Cheat a little. Keep your delivery boxes handy as wrapping a square or a rectangle is so much easier than contending with something oddly shaped. Measure how much paper and ribbon you need (it’s always more than you think) and only cut once you’re sure. Crisp corners and a tight ribbon are the shortcuts to making the finished result look effortless, even if you’ve had to work for it! *katieleamon.com*

Wrapping paper and **ribbons**, from a selection, Katie Leamon

‘MY PARTNER ONCE GAVE ME PRESENTS WRAPPED IN KITCHEN FOIL’

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‘A sharing platter is more fun than a seating plan – and will still dazzle your guests’

Giovanna Ryan

A beautifully styled grazing board is irresistible, *House Beautiful*’s food writer tells us. She shares three ways to take yours to the next level

There’s something so joyful about sharing platters. It’s food designed for togetherness and socialising. No formal courses, no rigid seating plans, just a generous spread that invites guests to dive in, graze and linger. Whether it’s a heaving board of cheeses and charcuterie or a vibrant arrangement of dips, fruits and sweet treats, sharing platters are the ultimate social food: abundant, relaxed and very customisable. All this, plus you can splash out on a few extra fancy elements and ingredients to minimise time in the kitchen and maximise time with the people you love. This season, embrace the art of assembling a platter that’s as beautiful as it is delicious and let the feasting begin! *@giovannaryan*

Styling tips

How to put it all together

1

Start with ‘hero’ elements – vibrant dips, marinated cheeses, pickled veg, slices of cured meats and smoked fish. These anchor the spread, while smaller bites, such as nuts, crackers and dried fruits, fill the gaps and add texture.

2

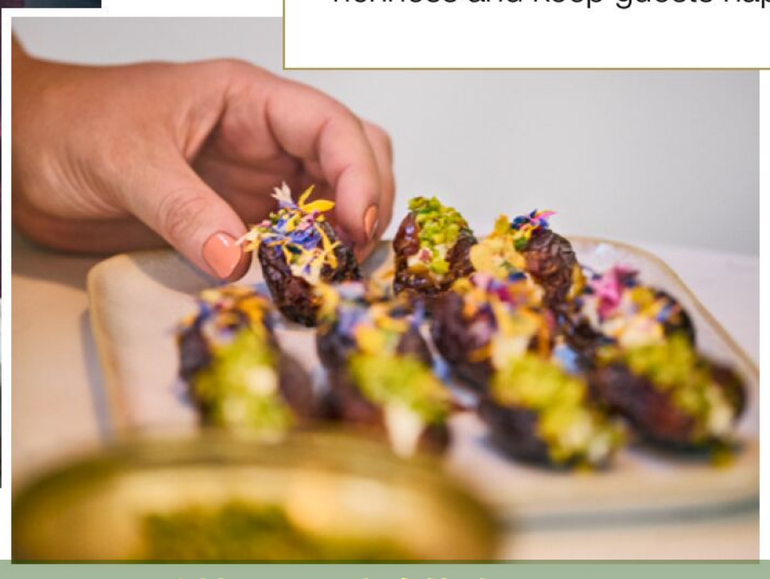
Make dips look extra-special with a spoon swirl, then finish with olive oil or melted butter, cracked pepper, spices, chopped nuts and fresh herbs.

3

Colour and contrast are key. Jewel tones pop – think pink pickled onions, charred padron peppers, golden egg yolks, pistachios and edible flowers. Pair soft-boiled eggs with dark green dill and capers, or mix white and dark chocolate on a sweet platter for visual drama.

4

Don’t neglect your ‘carriers’ – crackers, toasted breads, savoury biscuits and crisp radicchio leaves. These are the backbone of your platter, so choose quality and variety. Ensure there’s plenty to balance the richness and keep guests happily grazing all evening.



Sharing platters are a relaxed way to entertain. Here, Giovanna adds pickled onion to her Scandi-themed platter (left) and arranges stuffed dates for her sweet board

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PLATTER 1: SPANISH VEGGIE

Bring together a punchy romesco dip, blistered padron peppers, marinated Manchego cheese and your fanciest crisps. Serve with a glass of good red vermouth over ice.

PLATTER SUGGESTIONS

Crisps dotted with pickled chilli, chopped olives and red onion; radicchio leaves; olives; fried padron peppers; salted almonds; olives; flatbread.

MARINATED MANCHEGO

Put 400ml good olive oil in a pan with 3 rosemary sprigs, 8 peeled garlic cloves, 1 tbsp coriander seeds, 1 tsp black peppercorns, a pinch of chilli seeds and the zest of 2 oranges cut into thick strips. Heat up very slowly, then, once it starts to gently simmer, take it off the heat. Break Manchego cheese into rough pieces and put the chunks into the pan along with orange slices from 1 large orange. Leave to infuse for at least 12 hours before serving.

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PLATTER 2: SCANDI

This elegant, elevated platter sets the tone for a special celebration – pair with something crisp, cold and sparkling.

PLATTER SUGGESTIONS

Flaked trout; smoked salmon; capers; pickled red onion and cucumbers; radishes; Gruyère cheese; rye toast; jammy eggs; roe.

CARAMELISED ONION DIP

Finely slice 4 brown onions and cook in a knob of melted butter over a medium heat until very soft and caramelised. Add 2 grated garlic cloves and cook for a further 5 minutes. Combine in a small bowl with 300ml sour cream and 1 tbsp each of chopped dill and parsley. Season and serve topped with a slug of olive oil and dill fronds.

PHOTOGRAPHS JENNY ZARINS

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PLATTER 3: SWEET

This is decadence at its most cosy and the perfect accompaniment for a festive film or family boardgame (and a bucket of tea or hot chocolate).

PLATTER SUGGESTIONS

Fresh figs and kumquats; dried pineapple dipped in dark chocolate; dates stuffed with cream cheese and rolled in chopped pistachios; biscuits; chocolate bark; pretzels for dipping.

SPICED SALTED CARAMEL

Put 175g caster sugar in a pan over a medium heat and allow to caramelise. Don't stir it, but watch it like a hawk until it becomes a deep amber colour throughout. Remove from the heat and add 50g butter, 300ml double cream, 1 tsp cinnamon, ½ tsp salt and a pinch of chilli flakes (optional). Put it back on the heat, stirring until fully combined and thickened slightly. Leave to cool before serving.

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‘Comfort is key when it comes to hosting’ Jessica Hanley

Overnight guests don’t expect a penthouse suite; what they really want is to feel at ease. The Piglet in Bed founder shares the little things that will help visitors relax – plus advice on how to get invited back

Retro **alarm clock**, £12.95, Rex London.
No 1 **hand wash**, £27, C.Atherley.
Pembroke Stripe **robe**, £69, Piglet in Bed.
Mino + Bluetooth **speaker**, £30, Lexon

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING A HOST CAN DO IS MAKE THEIR GUESTS FEEL GENUINELY AT HOME. That’s something I’ve learned over the years and means I no longer ever worry about creating a ‘hotel’ experience when people stay the night. Instead, I think about what I’d appreciate if I were visiting. At Christmas, especially, it’s much more about making things easy and comfortable.

MY RELAXED STANCE PROBABLY STEMS FROM THE FACT I’M A LAST-MINUTE KIND OF HOST, ALTHOUGH I LIKE TO THINK NO ONE WOULD REALISE! I always keep a few things on standby so it doesn’t feel like a total panic when guests are due to visit. There’s always freshly laundered linen ready to put on the bed, a stack of towels (ideally with a matching robe) and a little stash of spare toiletries to arrange on top of the bed. A quick tidy and a spritz or two of room spray, and no one needs to know you made the bed five minutes before they arrived!

THERE’S A FINE LINE BETWEEN HAVING YOUR ATTENTION FULLY FOCUSED ON YOUR GUESTS AND JUST LETTING THEM GET ON WITH IT. When people are staying for more than one night, they’re often perfectly happy to entertain themselves – this is a win-win as it gives the host time to relax. I’ll often suggest a local running path, a favourite coffee shop or even a book I’ve recently enjoyed so visitors can have some independence. It’s the best way for them to feel like they’re staying with you rather than on top of you. *pigletinbed.com*

Christmas stockings, £49 each; **bedding**, from £45/ two pillowcases; all Piglet in Bed

‘IT’S GOOD TO KEEP A STASH OF SPARE TOILETRIES ON STANDBY’

ALSO: HOW TO BE THE PERFECT GUEST

Simple ways to make your host’s life a little easier

GIVE A POTTED PLANT INSTEAD OF FLOWERS

Save your host the scramble for a vase and finding space for a bouquet in a house that’s already brimming with decorations. A low-maintenance potted plant can be popped on a windowsill and enjoyed far longer than flowers.

LEND A HAND

Don’t just sit back and enjoy the hospitality. While your hosts may have their culinary choreography down to a fine art, even ticking off a small chore can help – it’s likely there will be recycling to be taken out or a dishwasher ready for unloading.

MAKE IT EASY

At the end of your visit, remove the pillowcases, duvet cover and fitted sheet from your bed and neatly fold and stack them beside your used towels. This means they can be popped straight into the machine, saving your host precious time.

SEND A THANK YOU

The practice of posting a handwritten note may be something of a lost art, but it’s still a thoughtful way to express your gratitude. If you can, choose a card design that really reflects your host or your time spent in their home.

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‘Wrap your Christmas memories in fragrance’

Vicky White & Freya Nicholson

The co-founders of home fragrance brand Plum & Ashby have mastered the art of conjuring a snug, welcoming atmosphere with inviting seasonal scents

SCENT IS THE SHORTCUT TO MEMORY AND HELPS ROOT US IN MOMENTS, MAKING THEM EVEN MORE MEANINGFUL. We truly believe that just one flicker of a flame or gentle waft from a diffuser can transport you back to a Christmas from years ago. Scent is particularly important during winter as there’s something quietly magical about the season that can be deepened by the right fragrance.

THE SECRET TO EXTRA COSINESS? LAYERING FRAGRANCES. This is something we do in our own homes as a way of adding in a whisper of spice or a floral note that softens something smokier. Diffusers are best placed somewhere with airflow, such as hallways and near doorways, and are also great popped near a radiator to maximise their scent throw. Candles are more of a ritual, working beautifully on coffee tables and mantelpieces. Trim their wicks before lighting and allow the top layers of wax to fully melt before snuffing them out.

CHRISTMAS DOESN’T NEED TO BE PREDICTABLE, SO THIS YEAR WE’RE CELEBRATING SCENTS BEYOND ORANGE AND CINNAMON. One of our favourite candles is Cedarwood and Pine Needles, which is like stepping into a Nordic forest. With a grounding green and crisp fragrance, it captures the essence of Christmas without being sweet or cloying. We like to think we’re not just bottling scent, we’re also bottling a feeling. *plumandashby.co.uk*

Fir Balsam and Winter Berries **candle**, £33; **diffuser**, £33

ALSO: HOW TO SCENT YOUR SPACE NATURALLY

‘Layer fragrance in a way that turns the whole house into a sensory experience,’ says Freya Nicholson of Plum & Ashby

FORAGE FOR FRESH GREENERY

A winter walk to collect pine, fir, eucalyptus, rosemary or bay brings crisp, resinous notes indoors. Weave stems into wreaths and garlands for doors, mantelpieces and banisters. Warm rooms and gentle airflow help their natural oils release slowly.

SIMMER FESTIVE SPICES

A simmer pot with orange peel, cinnamon sticks and cloves will scent the house. Gentle heat fills the air and lifts the aromatic scents to create that unmistakable festive atmosphere. To make it easier, use Fortnum & Mason’s mulled wine kit.

CRAFT FRAGRANT POMANDERS

Stud whole oranges with cloves to create pomanders and the indoor warmth will release the scents. Finish them with ribbon and hang on the tree or door handles. V V Rouleaux is great for ribbon and Steenbergs for organic cloves.

PHOTOGRAPH SARAH FRANCES KELLEY

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‘Create a party in a glass with a few special ingredients’

Marco Rosina

According to The Soho Hotel’s head bartender, the key to a successful bash is being able to enjoy it yourself. This comes down to advance prep and some simple festive twists to your go-to tipples

COCKTAILS ARE SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST DRINKS; THEY’RE A DELICIOUS WAY TO MARK THE MOMENT. Whether you’re dressed up and waiting for guests to arrive or toasting with family, they make any occasion feel special.

REMEMBER THAT AS A HOST, YOU DON’T HAVE TO BE THE DRINKS HERO. Instead, keep things simple by making what you know and just switch up one or two ingredients. This year, it’s all about big, bold flavours and spices. I’ll be grating nutmeg on top of my espresso martinis for a festive kick and caramelising orange segments in cinnamon and sugar to use as garnishes. On my bar trolley, seasonal additions are a pear, orange and ginger chutney from Rosebud Preserves (£5.50/jar) and a mulled apple cordial from Country Cordials (£4.50/250ml).

DO AS MUCH PREP AS YOU CAN IN ADVANCE. Batch-making cocktails and pouring them into bottles ahead of time means you can just shake (or stir) and pour to serve. For me, the ultimate festive drink is a freezer martini using Sacred’s spiced vermouth (£20.85/50cl). You only need to offer three cocktails: one in a tumbler, one in a flute and one in a martini glass. Load up the snack bowls with olives, nuts and crackers so you’ll have the time to enjoy the party too. *firmdalehotels.com*

THE SOHO HOTEL’S MULLED NEGRONI

One of Marco’s seasonal specialities, this delicious cocktail swaps out the classic vermouth for a splash of characteristically festive mulled wine

SERVES ONE

- **25ml gin**
- **25ml Campari**
- **25ml mulled red wine**

Add the three ingredients to a rocks glass or tumbler filled with cubed ice. Let the mixture sit for 30 seconds before garnishing with a stick of cinnamon, a slice of pear and a few blackberries. Serve

‘MAKE WHAT YOU KNOW BUT SPICE UP THE INGREDIENTS’

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‘How I learned to love hosting in a small space’

Emily Henson

Every December, this stylist and author (as well as *House Beautiful*’s DIY and decorating expert with a knack for clever fixes) adapts her compact bungalow to welcome friends and family. Here, she shares three tips from her hosting cheatsheet

Table and **glassware**, from a selection, Rowen & Wren
Below: gingham **eye mask**, £16.50, Yonder. Soft Scoop **seat pad**, £39; Sleepover **floor cushion**, £195; both **Loaf**. Large stripe **bow**, £85, The Primitive Home

When guests descend on my bungalow at Christmas, I’m forced to come up with creative solutions for hosting in less-than-ideal circumstances. My task is to somehow expand my three-bedroom bungalow like a concertina to accommodate my grown children, siblings, nieces, nephews and friends.

The first Christmas in my current home was spent under bare plasterboard ceilings and dangling (but safe) electrical cables. I still chose to entertain and found that guests are forgiving if there is an element of fun to the madness.

Ultimately, it’s about the mood we create rather than the perfect setting, so if you let go of the need for perfection and add enough fairy lights, candles and mulled wine, Christmas chaos can quickly transform into fond memories...

Sumptuous faux holly and fir **wreath**, £80, Cox & Cox

1 THE MORE REALLY IS THE MERRIER. If I have more dinner guests than my smallish dining table will accommodate, I bring in my fold-up trestle tables from the garage. Normally used for photoshoots, they aren’t the loveliest things. I disguise their plastic tops and unsightly metal legs with a huge white sheet and layer that with prettier textiles and my eclectic collection of plates and glassware, plus candlesticks and greenery along the centre. For extra seating, I have a stack of wooden stools that tuck in a corner for most of the year, being used as impromptu stepladders or side tables in a pinch. When I entertain, I top them with comfy seat pads.

2 MAKE IT A SLUMBER PARTY. I don’t have a huge house with loads of storage, but I want it to be the place where friends and family gather. Embrace your inner pre-teen by creating a fun sleepover atmosphere. I take a multi-pronged approach when I have more guests than beds. An inexpensive fold-up bedframe from Facebook Marketplace is kept in my (very full) garage, a couple of blow-up mattresses are stored in my (very full) loft, and a sofa that doubles as a single bed when fitted with a sheet – they all get called into action. I keep extra bedding in those brilliant vacuum seal bags in the loft or under beds, storing sets together and labelling them for easy identification. Provide fresh bedding, plentiful towels, eye masks and earplugs and your slumber party will be a success.

3 DOWNSIZE YOUR TREE. I love a big Christmas tree, but my last few have been on the petite size, raised up on a side table for extra height, because frankly I didn’t have the room for a big tree plus a house full of people. If you think you’ll be hosting a lot of guests and you don’t have an abundance of space, consider shrinking your tree expectations. Once it’s lit and decked out, you’ll barely notice the difference. If you go small with your tree, perhaps go big with its decorations – I added a huge bow to mine. Or forgo a tree altogether and hang an oversized wreath on a wall - I made mine with a big metal hoop I found at a junk shop, greenery cut from my overgrown hedges and loosely tied ribbons. *emilyhensonstudio.com*

FIND EMILY AT @LIFEUNSTYLED

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‘This is no time for minimalism’

Sophie Robinson

When it comes to Christmas decorating, the interior designer and *House Beautiful* columnist recommends going bold and, most importantly, having fun. The way she decorates her home reflects her all-out attitude to spark joy – especially at this celebratory time of year

Clockwise from left: Flouro **candles**, £3.50 each, Graham & Green. Kashmiri **bauble**, £7, Ian Snow. Emily Taylor Holiday **Village House**, £36, Anthropologie. Metallic **wreath**, £22, Oxfam Shop. Stag head **wall plaque**, £40, Next Home. Candy-shaped **bolster**, £14.99, H&M Home

This picture: all **items**, from a selection, Sophie Robinson x Dunelm

1 LET’S TALK ABOUT COLOUR. Don’t feel bound by the traditional reds, greens and golds if they don’t excite you. I adore a jewel-toned palette at this time of year – think emerald, sapphire, ruby and amethyst, because they feel both luxurious and vibrant. These hues sing against the decor in my home and bring some much-needed warmth and brightness when it’s so often grey and dreary outside. My advice is to choose a bolder colour scheme than you’d usually dare. It’s the perfect excuse to ring the changes and play with tones that will lift your spirits and add excitement to every corner.

2 INTRODUCE REPETITION. Maximalism thrives on layering, but when you have a lot going on, it’s coherence that keeps it chic rather than chaotic. Repeating a motif helps to anchor the look. It could be a shape, like bows, stars, or paper honeycombs, or even a pattern like stripes or florals. Scatter these touches throughout your home and you’ll create a rhythm that ties the whole scheme together, even among the joyful abundance.

3 UPSCALE. At Christmas, bigger really is better – oversized bows on banisters, giant baubles nestled under the tree or even a cheeky generous-sized reindeer perched on your hall table. This is your moment to embrace a little eccentricity. I think humour absolutely belongs in Christmas decorating, so don’t shy away from being a bit bonkers. Ultimately, Christmas is about honouring tradition while flexing your creativity and inventing your own. So shake up your palette and go supersized in order to create a little magic this year.

sophierobinson.co.uk

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From £3 for a **hanging decoration**; all other **items**, from a selection, Sophie Robinson x Dunelm

Styling tip

String lights are your best friend at Christmas. Layer them everywhere: through garlands, wreaths, tables and trees. Choose warm white for a magical glow that transforms your home at dusk.

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‘Festive tableware is a delight to unbox every year’

Sophie Edwards

Some of the most memorable moments you’ll spend this season will be around a shared meal. Villa Bologna’s creative director makes a compelling case for creating a stunning tablescape for your get-togethers

DRESSING THE TABLE IS SOMETHING OF AN ART, BUT AT CHRISTMAS THIS TAKES ON A WHOLE NEW LAYER. The table becomes the centrepiece of the celebrations, but tradition and memories are equally as important as how it looks. This doesn’t mean reinventing it every season, of course, but adding in small touches can elevate what you’ve already got.

AS SOON AS DECEMBER ARRIVES, I GO ALL OUT. Every corner of the house gets dressed and our table stays fully decorated for the entire season and so an everyday meal early in the month can feel memorable. I don’t follow rigid rules, but typically I have nativity pieces and tealight holders running down the middle of the table, together with sprigs of holly, ivy and red berries. I also create arrangements with clove-studded orange pomanders.

A LAYERED TABLE SETS THE SCENE. I always go for plenty of height, with candles in different holders and overflowing bowls, and I’ll bring out platters and jugs that only get used at Christmas, dig out vintage table linen and layer in our own hand-painted pottery. You definitely don’t need everything to match perfectly. At each place setting, use something special: don’t save the good things for later. I treasure pieces that have a story to them and believe these little eclectic touches can make the season all the merrier.
villabolognapottery.com

From top: Green Scroll **dinner plates**, £28 each; Angel **tealight holder**, £40; **candles**, £6/two; Stripes **tableware**, from £12; Vine **candleholders**, from £40 each; Artichoke **bowls**, from £95 each; Gessato **tumbler**, £22; all Villa Bologna

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MERRY MINIMALISM

Next Home's new Seeking Simplicity collection has all you need for a stripped-back, sophisticated festive season

Duvet cover and pillowcase set, from £30

Which Christmas camp do you fall into: 'merry and bright' or 'all is calm'? If you lean towards the latter, you'll find welcome respite in Next Home's latest collection. Overflowing with natural textures, organic shapes and heritage patterns, the Seeking Simplicity range spans both festive items, and high-quality furniture and accessories you'll want to keep on display all year round. The primary palette of the pieces initially feels cool – think crisp snow-white ceramics and inky-blue details. But by layering in taupes, beiges and browns with soft linens, complementary woods and hand-woven rattans, the retailer cleverly warms things back up for a finish that's cosy, inviting and ready for all manner of seasonal revelry. Feeling inspired? Here's how to bring the look to life in your own home.

IN THE HEIGHTS

Soften an angular wooden dining table by bookending it with upholstered chairs – not only does this elevate the overall look, it offers more flexible seating options to suit various Christmas crowds. To style the space, bring the eye upwards by suspending paper decorations – like the lacy paper snowflakes pictured – above your dining table at varying heights. This trick creates the illusion of a grander environment with higher ceilings.

THE BIG CHILL

Whether it's your own space or a restful guest bedroom, a neutral palette is a fast pass to serenity. A duvet with embroidery adds a lovely tactility that feels especially cossetting on cold winter nights. Add a gentle glow to the room with petite wall lamps positioned above the headboard, and up the festive factor by replacing wall art with a simple wreath.

ALL WRAPPED UP

Details like pretty place settings are the ones visitors will remember long after the celebrations have wrapped up, but they don't need to be overly fussy. Start with a woven, fringed placemat to bring in some welcome texture, then continue the look with reactive glaze tableware; each piece in the set pictured above is intentionally slightly irregular, giving it an artisan look and feel. Finally, bring in a sense of whimsy by wrapping a sprig of seasonal foliage in a coordinating bow; the finished product feels effortless and informal, but still suitably special.

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WINTER WISH LIST

Lilly accent **chair**, £399

Embossed **vase**, £24

Twyford rechargable **wall light**, £55

Fringe-edge **placemats**, £24/four

Lana 12-piece **dinner set**, £65

NEXT HOME

Shop the Next Home collection in stores and online at next.co.uk

*DELIVERY COSTS APPLY. SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY. RESTRICTIONS APPLY. FOR TERMS AND CONDITIONS, VISIT NEXT.CO.UK

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HOMES

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PHOTOGRAPH RACHEL WHITING

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QUIET BEAUTY

Emily Salomon's home in Denmark brings together muted tones, meaningful traditions and plenty of candlelight for a hushed – but no less joyful – take on the season

HOME PROFILE

WHO LIVES HERE

Emily Salomon, a content creator, her husband Nikolaj, a consultant, and their two sons, Kurt and Skipper

THE PROPERTY

A house dating from 1943 in Hornbæk, north of Copenhagen

WORDS NICOLA KRAGH RIIS/NICO STUDIO | **PHOTOGRAPHY** CHRISTINA KAYSER O/LIVING INSIDE

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LIVING ROOM

The Christmas tree features a mix of new and inherited baubles, with Georg Jensen candleholders gifted by Emily's grandparents, whimsical handmade decorations and fresh flowers in glass vials

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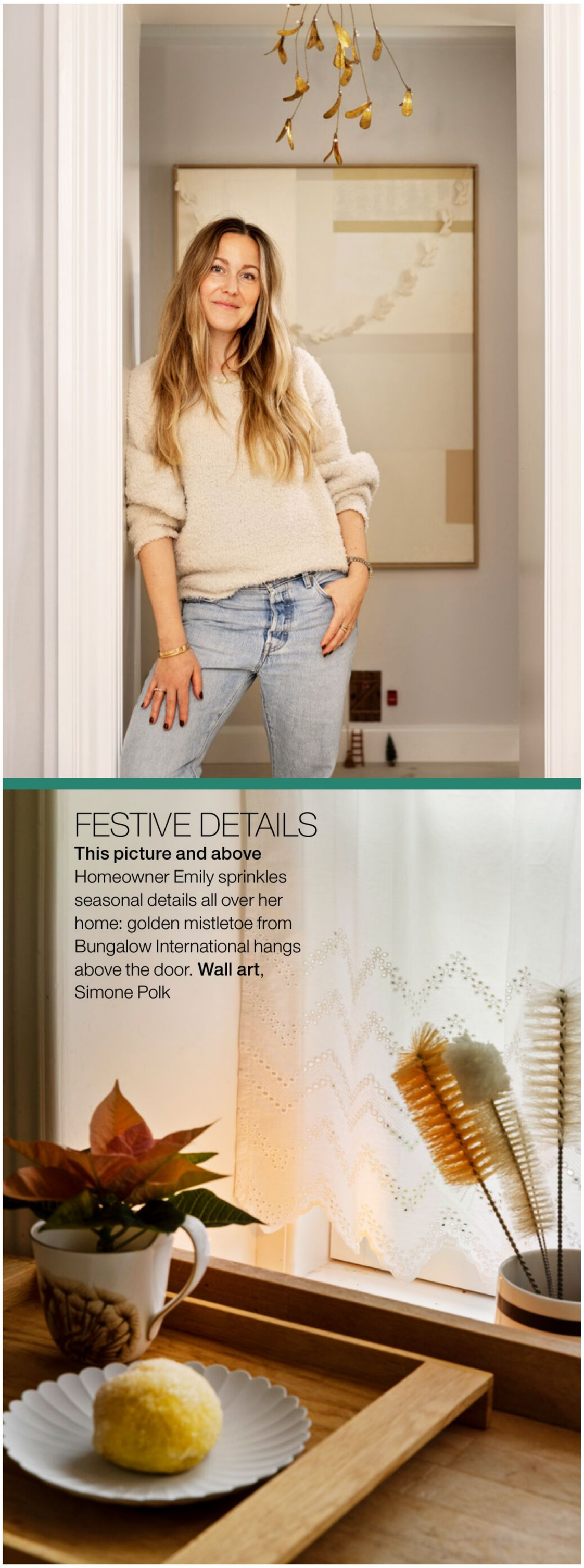

FESTIVE DETAILS

This picture and above
Homeowner Emily sprinkles seasonal details all over her home: golden mistletoe from Bungalow International hangs above the door. **Wall art**, Simone Polk

In **Hornbæk**, on the northern coast of Denmark, **Emily Salomon** shares a sweet white-painted house with her **husband** and their two **young sons**.

With ceilings just below five metres high, the rooms lend themselves naturally to the cosiness of the season Emily has come to love the most. As a young adult, she was less likely to embrace all of the festivities, but 'I've started throwing myself back into it now I'm a mother,' she reveals. 'Christmas is very much about the adults working behind the scenes to create magic for the children. I grew up with that myself and I want to pass it on. Their enthusiasm for everything rubs off on me and has given me back the joy of the season.'

Though Emily now adds a touch of festive magic to every room in her home, the effect is never glitzy or overdone. That's thanks to her love of natural materials and decorations with an artisanal or handmade feel. On the front door, for instance, a hydrangea wreath is tied with an oversized fabric bow, sewn by a friend to withstand Denmark's wet winters.

Inside, the stunning Christmas tree stands at more than four metres tall, dressed with quirky paper cut-outs and glass baubles. Fresh flowers add a final flourish with white anemones threaded through the branches in small glass vials attached with green hobby wire. Instead of fairy lights, Emily fastens small candles securely to the branches of the tree – a tradition carried over from childhood. Her grandparents used to gift her two candleholders every year and she treasures her large collection. 'As a child, I wasn't too keen, but I love them now and it means that all my childhood Christmases are on the tree,' she says.

These happy memories of growing up mingle with new rituals, such as adding baubles shaped like dinosaurs and croissants to the tree and her boys making ornaments and decorating biscuits to fill the cookie jar.

Choosing their oversized tree is another cherished family ritual. 'It's kind of childish and fun to go to the tree farm and ask for the biggest one, but it's become our tradition and the children love it,' says Emily. Once

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LIVING ROOM

An understated colour palette of neutral tones, green and gold has been used throughout. **Chair** and **sofa**, Ilva

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DINING AREA

This page and opposite
Much of the family's Christmas is centred around the long wooden dining table, from mixing cookie dough to lighting the Advent candles. **Plates**, Jennie Keramik. **Pendant** and **glasses**, Ferm Living and Iittala. Ice skate **decorations**, Maileg

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‘When you’re a **colour-shy** person like me, it’s great that there are so many ways to bring in **Christmas** without going **big and bold**’

the tree is installed, Christmas cheer spreads through the house. The long dining table, surrounded by classic Carl Hansen chairs, becomes a hub for the family; it’s where cookie dough is mixed, Advent candles are lit and celebratory meals are shared. Candles, baubles and little gifts are arranged in the display cabinet, while the drawers below store ribbons and wrapping paper. Even the guest bathroom is adorned with a large, glittering bow hung on the mirror.

Other Danish seasonal traditions centre on food. Bowls of sweets and crisps are always within reach, and the biscuit tin is stocked with *vaniljekranse* (traditional Danish vanilla wreath butter cookies) and other pastries from La Glace, the Copenhagen patisserie Emily used to visit every December with her grandfather. Swedish Christmas buns are home-baked, filling the kitchen with festive spice. ‘I always have to have the same Christmas biscuits and vanilla wreath cookies. And you don’t have to bake them yourself,’ Emily admits with a laugh.

The colour palette is calm and understated – natural tones, green and gold rather than traditional red – and reflects Emily’s style throughout the home. It’s a chance to use the special plates and ceramics she’s collected over the years, while candles and paper stars glow in the windows, and poinsettias and amaryllis brighten corners. ‘When you’re a colour-shy person like me, it’s great that there are so many ways to bring in Christmas without going big and bold,’ she points out.

And while Emily revels in the spirit of the season, she’s conscious of not letting herself feel rushed and overwhelmed. ‘The most important thing is that it’s fun and not to have a thousand things to do. There shouldn’t be a to-do list, so I’d rather say no to an event and move an appointment to January and remember to enjoy myself instead of stressing out in December.’

And with a long winter ahead of them, the family is in no rush to put any of their Christmas decor away. Emily begins to deck the halls in mid-November and will leave the decorations up long after the new year. ‘For me, the season is a welcome pause in the depths of winter,’ she says. ‘It’s a pocket of tradition and childlike magic that carries me through the cold months.’

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SEASONAL DISPLAYS

This page and opposite
A cabinet is dressed for Christmas with candles, gifts and ornaments among the crockery and glassware, while bowls of seasonal treats are a large part of Emily's festive traditions. Fluted Fountain **vase**, Ferm Living

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‘For me, the season is a **welcome pause** in the depths of winter. It’s a pocket of **tradition and childlike magic** that carries me through the cold months’

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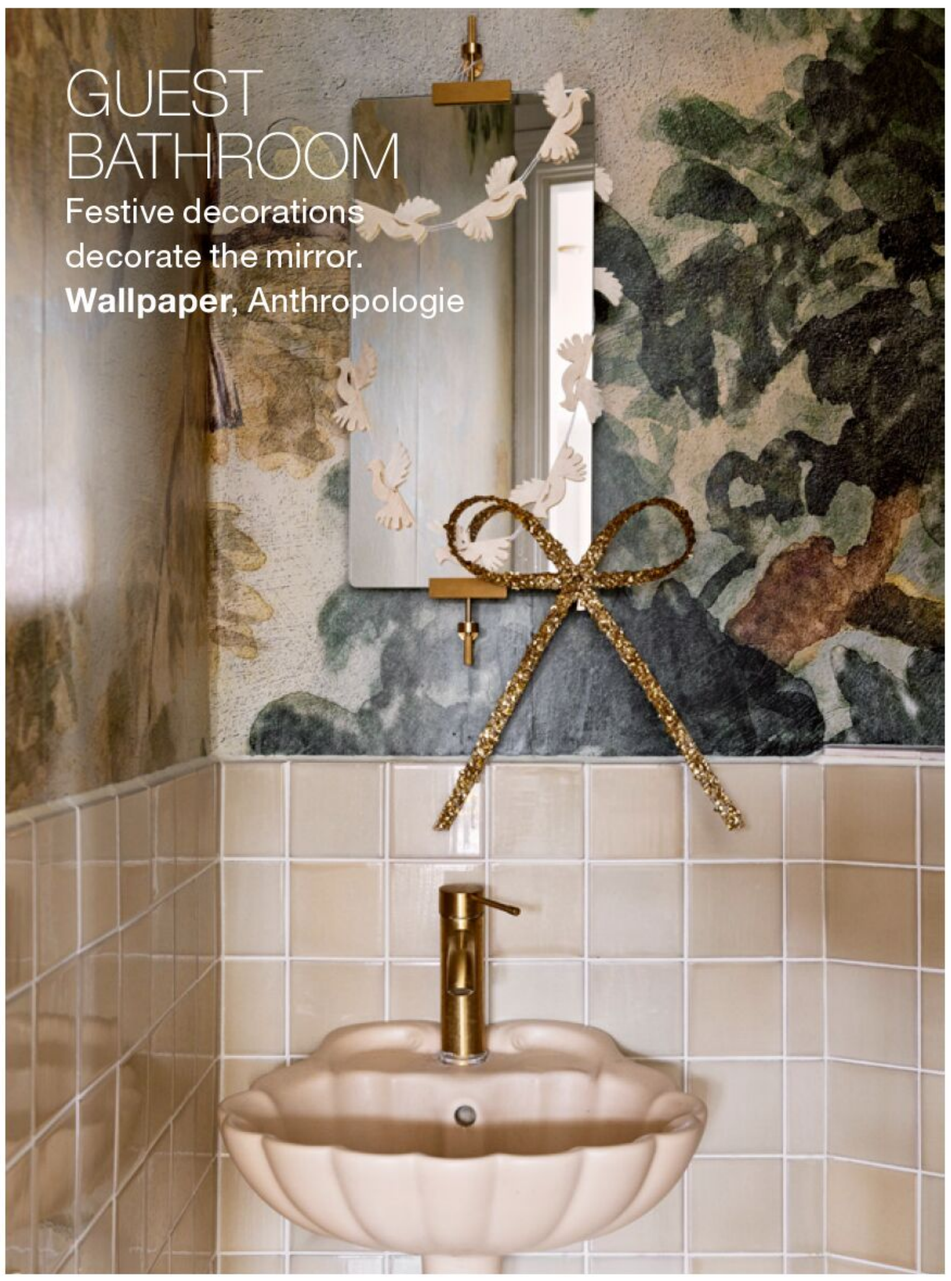
CORNER SPACE

A desk tucked under the eaves is the perfect place to sit and wrap presents. **Shell cup** and **bowl**, Christina Iversen Studio

GUEST BATHROOM

Festive decorations decorate the mirror. **Wallpaper**, Anthropologie



NEVER LEAVE BURNING CANDLES UNATTENDED OR NEAR CHILDREN OR PETS

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HOW TO

Make simple decor look chic

Emily's home has a beautifully understated look – here, our expert panel reveals how to create a similarly elegant festive scheme

REFINE YOUR PALETTE

Neutrals can dazzle just as much as bolder shades

✱ 'A Scandi-inspired palette can make Christmas feel calmer,' advises **Lisa Coppin**, The Cotswold Company's chief creative officer. 'A simple scheme is always a beautiful canvas to build on.'

✱ For seasonal interest, introduce different textures – a sheepskin rug, bouclé cushion or chunky knitted throw can add richness without bringing a mix of different colours into your space.

✱ Decorating in a neutral palette works for the whole year, meaning you can tinker with what you already have. 'Add in touches, such as ornate napkin rings, for a subtle nod to the season,' suggests Lisa.

TELL THE SAME STORY

Subtle seasonal shifts will bring the magic

✱ If you're a minimalist or a devotee of the Scandi look, there's no need to change your style come December. Some thoughtful additions to accessories can make a room feel festive.

✱ 'Rather than overhauling everything, layer in a few seasonal touches and build on what you love,' says **Poppy Munson** from Nkuku. 'Invest in pieces that will bring joy long once the festive season is over. This makes shopping for the time of year much more mindful.'

✱ Don't underestimate the power of candlelight: a flickering flame, housed in a brass holder or simple glass jar, can make any little corner glow.

EMBRACE NATURAL ELEMENTS

Flowers and foliage can mark the season beautifully

✱ 'When we're spending so much time indoors, bringing natural elements inside will add subtle colour, organic texture and wonderful fragrance,' says **Suzy Humphreys**, founder of Layered Lounge.

✱ For pleasing visual contrast, blend natural greenery with dried flowers; a real Christmas tree can be decorated with dried flower decorations, for example.

✱ Not green-fingered? Don't worry. 'We're noticing people starting with faux wreaths and garlands, and adding different embellishments to simple green backdrops as the seasons change,' says Suzy.

1 Paper **starbust**, £43, Layered Lounge **2** Handmade winter snowflake **cracker**, £45/six, Cox & Cox **3** Louise **jug**, £95, Sharland England **4** Svara **flower stem**, £20, Nkuku **5** Cumbrian beeswax **candles**, £10/two, Another Country

WORDS JAMES CUNNINGHAM **PHOTOGRAPHS** CHRISTINA KAYSER O/LIVING INSIDE

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HOME PROFILE

WHO LIVES HERE

Pandora Maxton, interiors stylist and influencer (@pandora.maxton) and her husband James, who works in PR and communications, their three children, Fin, Cameron and Ellen, along with their two dogs, three sheep, 10 chickens and horses

THE PROPERTY

An extended farm cottage built in the 1960s in Yorkshire

DINING AREA

Red and white is the colour theme for the Christmas table, which has been extended to the tree with its red gingham ribbons **Tablecloth**, **napkins**, **candles** and **crackers**, Talking Tables. **Dining chairs**, Home Essentials. **Pendant**, Collectiviste

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A WARM WELCOME

Throughout the festive season, this lively family home is decked with a gorgeous mix of garlands, greenery, flowers and trees that take their cue from the surrounding Yorkshire woodland

WORDS ALISON GIBB
PHOTOGRAPHY DOUGLAS GIBB

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The first thing Pandora and James Maxton noticed when they viewed their Yorkshire property was the trees. 'I fell in love with them,' Pandora recalls. 'They sound like the sea when they sway in the wind and on a stormy night, it can honestly feel like waves crashing.' The house, situated not far from York and surrounded by acres of woodland, offered the space they needed for their horses, many of which Pandora inherited from her late mother's riding school.

The Maxtons embrace country living to the fullest. 'We love the sense of space and privacy we have here, and we live outside as much as possible,' Pandora says. 'Even on Christmas Day we sit out under the veranda pergola and light the firepit.' It's no surprise then, that she loves to deck the halls with foliage and trees, which nod to the Yorkshire countryside that encircles them.

Hydrangea blooms from the garden are given a second life after they have had their time in a vase – once dried, they become part of a collection that has been built up over many years. Their soft tones of pink and lilac sit beautifully against the deep green of the Christmas tree. The family's festive traditions are so loved that they're now sacrosanct: on Christmas Eve, there's a 'nibbly' picnic by the fire, at which each family member opens one present; while on Christmas Day there's a breakfast table laid with smoked salmon, fresh ham and Buck's Fizz, the slow unwrapping of stockings and exchanging of gifts, and a late afternoon lunch. Assorted relatives often start to drop in throughout the Christmas week and stay on for the Maxtons' lively New Year party.

You wouldn't know it now, but the house was built in 1969 alongside a chicken farm and hatchery. When Pandora and James bought the house in 2002, it was in pristine condition but had been untouched for decades, so it was a time capsule showcasing the decorating style of the Sixties.

In 2004, the pair began extensive renovations, adding a two-storey extension with a garden room, utility, office and extra bedroom complete with ensuite. Internal walls were taken down to create airier, more open spaces downstairs and a larger primary bedroom upstairs.

What if they could do it all over again? 'We now wish we'd added more space,' Pandora admits. 'We could have done with bigger rooms as the children grow up, especially with the new norm of working from home.'

With her background in fine art and illustration and a career in interiors,

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HYDRANGEA BLOOMS FROM THE GARDEN ARE GIVEN A SECOND LIFE ON THE CHRISTMAS TREE

GARDEN ROOM

Opposite and this page
The large tree from Festive Productions is decorated with dried hydrangeas, while James's collection of film posters hangs on the walls. Wooden **flooring**, Tapi. Moroccan-style **rug**, Ruggable. **Sofas**, Oak Furnitureland. Berry **garland**, Lights4Fun

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LIVING ROOM

This page and opposite, above Pandora has decorated the mantelpiece with colourful dried hydrangeas and added a slender tree from Festive Productions, complementing a wall in Tuscan Red by Little Greene

‘WE LOVE LIVING HERE – WE FEEL AS IF WE ARE IN OUR OWN LITTLE WORLD’

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Pandora took the lead on the decor. 'I had a real vision for the space and knew exactly what I wanted when we did the initial project,' she says. 'But I regularly change things up as the house is very flexible and there is always plenty of opportunity to experiment.' James focuses his attention outdoors, where his vegetable garden yields an abundance of produce he turns into chutneys and jams that his family can enjoy all year long.

The house flows beautifully between indoors and out, with French doors opening onto patios from every downstairs room. Together, the couple have created a home that celebrates both cooking and entertaining. Pandora, who delights in tablescaping, takes a 'no holds barred' approach at Christmas, layering colour, pattern and vintage finds with exotic fruits, flowers and candles for a feast as visual as it is culinary.

Her style is eclectic and unapologetically personal. 'I am definitely a maximalist,' she says. Inspired by Mediterranean culture, she treasures the lifestyle as much as the look. 'I love that it's centred around the table – food and conversation are priorities and alfresco dining is routine.' Their pergola, with its bamboo roof and Perspex cover, makes that possible year-round, whether under summer skies or winter rain.

For Pandora and James, their home is more than a house – it's a world of its own. 'We love living here,' Pandora reflects. 'We feel as if we are in our own little world, yet we have all the amenities of our delightful village on our doorstep and the historic city of York is only 15 minutes away.'

EXTERIOR
Built in 1969, the house is surrounded by a variety of native trees including cedars and poplars

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KITCHEN

This picture and right
Upcycled units painted in Little Greene's Olive Colour are a fresh contrast to the white Aga and Murano marble worktop from Lapicida Stone. **Fairy lights**, Sparkle Lighting. Natural slate **tiles**, B&Q

BATHROOM

Striped towels from Piglet in Bed liven up the salvaged rolltop bath. Laminate wood-effect **flooring**, Tapi. Edulis Sky **wallpaper**, Graham & Brown

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CHILD'S BEDROOM

Pandora installed the panelling behind the bed to add character to this newly built room. **Bed**, Oak Furnitureland

MAIN BEDROOM

Opposite, below right
Originally two small rooms, this room was enlarged when the house was extended. Cotton gingham **bedding** in Berry, Piglet in Bed. **Wall shelves**, La Redoute. **Bed**, **bedside tables** and **chest of drawers**, all Melody Maison

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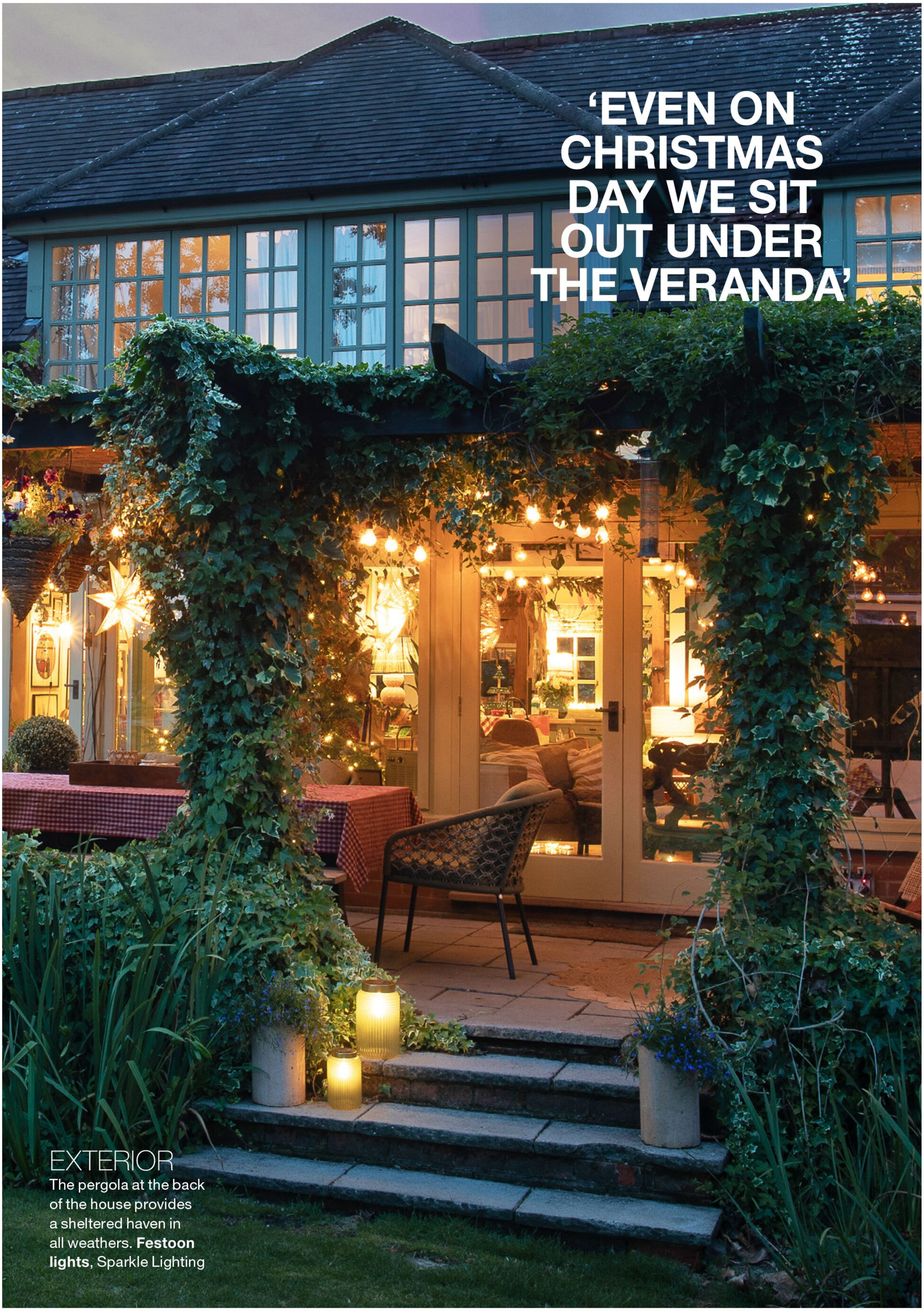

EXTERIOR
The pergola at the back of the house provides a sheltered haven in all weathers. **Festoon lights**, Sparkle Lighting

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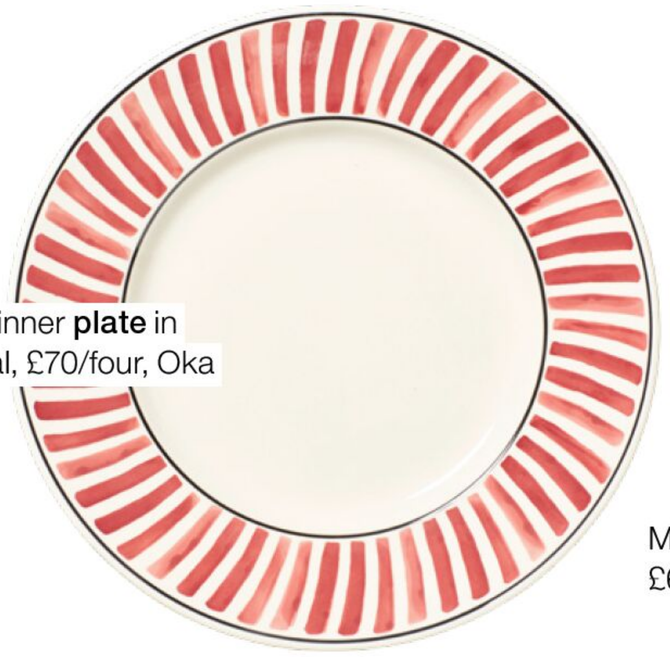
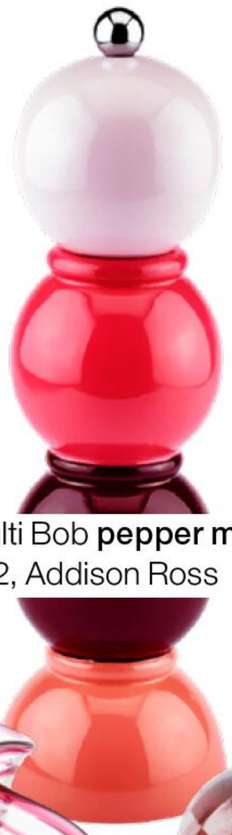


Kintaro dinner **plate** in Cochineal, £70/four, Oka



Multi Bob **pepper mill**, £62, Addison Ross

Swirl bon-bon **bowl**, £100, Nina Campbell

Carnaby **napkin rings** in Merlot, £18/four, Neptune

We're inspired by...

Pandora's dining table is a joyful mix of blush and berry hues – these gorgeous buys would set a similarly fun and colourful scene

Decorative velvet **bow**, £10/eight, Talking Tables

Pink and burgundy dash **platter**, £72, Rosie Gore at Glassette

Linen **tablecloth**, £89, Piglet in Bed

Aloha LED fabric-wrapped wax **candle**, £35/two, Tinkalink

Linen **napkins**, £36/four, Chalk Pink Linen Company

Pink swirl **vase**, £70, Rockett St George at Next Home

Llanera **wine glass**, £58/four, Nkuku

Divine miniature tree **decoration**, £1.50, B&M

Nova Stripe **tumbler**, £40/four, The Conran Shop

Ceramic woven **basket**, £45, Shrimps x Oliver Bonas

COMPILED BY JAMES CUNNINGHAM

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‘NO ROOM IN THE HOUSE ESCAPES THE FESTIVE MAGIC’

A creative couple have transformed a tired cottage into something special: a home that dances with light, character, colour and seasonal decor

WORDS JAMES CUNNINGHAM **PHOTOGRAPHY** RACHEL WHITING **PRODUCTION** DAISY BENDALL

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HOME PROFILE

WHO LIVES HERE

Amy Hemmings-Batt, founder of lifestyle brand Coco & Wolf, her husband Harry, their two children Coco and Wolf, and Bang Bang the cat

THE PROPERTY

A Victorian cottage, extended in the 1920s, in the hamlet of Henton in Somerset

KITCHEN

The cabinetry was custom-made by Amy's husband's company. They wanted it to feel contemporary but in a way that was sympathetic to the space

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DINING ROOM

Crystal bulb pendants and gold paper chains add a sense of glamour above the table, while oversized decorative bows offer extra flamboyance

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As the founder and creative director of Coco & Wolf, a lifestyle brand that designs beautifully patterned bedding, sleepwear and childrenswear, it's no surprise that Amy Hemmings-Batt has a finely honed instinct for the visual. 'It's fair to say I take creative control of the house at Christmas,' she says, laughing. The process of decorating her cottage, which sits in a scenic village half an hour's drive from Bath, starts straight after her husband Harry's birthday in early December. 'We've always got two real trees and no room in the house escapes,' she says.

The cottage glows with a warm Christmas atmosphere, but that wasn't always the case. It has taken time and patience since Amy and Harry moved from London 10 years ago. The plan had been to move into a property nearby, but the pair suddenly changed their minds. 'This house, which was in the perfect location but had supposedly sold, suddenly came back on the market,' Amy recalls. When the couple arrived for the viewing, they only needed to walk up and down the garden before deciding that, whatever was inside, they were going to go for it. 'From the outside, it looked almost like two separate buildings, with the older and newer sides immediately obvious,' Amy says.

Although there were no structural issues, the property needed complete modernisation. 'When we moved in, we were really keen to make it feel like one family home rather than the two disconnected parts. We wanted to approach this as sympathetically to the original Victorian building as we could.'

From the William Morris wallpapered hallway, doors lead through to two reception rooms, an open-plan kitchen and dining space, a separate utility room and a downstairs loo. Upstairs, there are two further bathrooms and five bedrooms. 'I always say it's more like four and a half though, as one of them is so tiny,' explains Amy. But this layout wasn't the original plan. 'We renovated gradually as it was such a big project, and unexpectedly found that we were using rooms in a way that surprised us.'

The idea had been to knock down walls and create a big, open-plan living space, but instead the couple extended outwards from the kitchen

TABLE SETTING

Above, left and right Amy dresses the Christmas table, a famlly heirloom, in a combination of Coco & Wolf linens, inherited pieces and treasures shehas picked up on her travels

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LIVING ROOM

The sideboard, mirror and artwork all came from family, while the ceramic fruit bowl was handmade by Amy's mother

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SITTING ROOM

The ‘grown-up’ living room is north-facing, making it feel especially cosy at Christmas. The Loaf wingback chair belonged to Amy’s grandfather

‘EVERY YEAR, THE CHILDREN EACH PICK A DECORATION FROM LIBERTY AND ADD IT TO THE TREE’

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SNUG

Amy's tree is decorated in handmade bow decorations and finished with a skirt, both by Coco & Wolf. The wooden tree was built by Amy's brother and she made pouches to transform it into an Advent calendar

'CHRISTMAS IS A CHANCE TO LAYER UP MY NEW DESIGNS AND TRY MIXING AND MATCHING THEM'

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and installed large steel windows to create a light-drenched dining space. 'We needed to replace the original Crittall windows in the newer part of the house and decided to install them here too to make it feel cohesive,' Amy reflects. 'The wintry light is so warm and cosy in here, and we get to see the garden frosting up.'

The family's Christmas celebrations are centred in this room. The island, tailored to Amy's specifications by Harry's company, Walrow Kitchens, becomes a giftwrapping station while decorations pop up all over. 'I'll do the pinwheels above one day, ornaments on the shelves another and then paper garlands over the dining area the next,' says Amy.

The table was handmade by her grandfather. 'This has hosted so many Christmas feasts and New Year's dinners over the decades, so it feels special to have it sitting here,' she muses. The surface is decked out in Coco & Wolf linens, with quilted placemats, floral napkins and decorative bows taking centre stage: 'I love to layer contrasting textiles together, but always make sure the napkin bows match the placemats.' Heirloom cutlery, vintage glassware and treasured china – including plates that Amy bought travelling and that 'only get used at Christmas' – complete the look.

Situated in the older part of the house, the sitting room has limewashed walls and flagstone floors that make a charming backdrop for the festivities. Above the woodburning stove, an oversized bow takes pride of place. 'The Christmas tree here is actually the only place in the house where I'm hands-off,' says Amy. 'Every year, the children each pick a decoration from Liberty and add it to the tree. Wolf once had a fascination with Rubik's Cubes, which explains how that particular bauble earned its spot.' In the adjacent playroom, used as a snug for watching television, reading and playing board games, Amy has bedecked the cottage's second tree in fabric bows made from offcuts.

Although the cottage can be draughty in winter, floral bedspreads and richly patterned silk sheets help to keep the family cosy. 'We always have guests to stay at this time of year, which I love as it's a chance to layer up my new designs and try mixing and matching them,' Amy says. 'I like to leave them a little gift – this year they'll be treated to one of our Liberty-print silk eye masks.'

When the decorations come down in January, the cottage's inviting warmth, resplendent with colour, pattern and charm, lingers on. 'This is a really special place to be,' says Amy. 'It's magical.'

See Amy's designs at cocoandwolf.com

FRONT DOOR

Below left Amy hangs two wreaths every year. This one was made by Bouquet Florist in nearby Cheddar, which also runs festive workshops

HALLWAY

Below Farrow & Ball's Breakfast Room Green is a serene partner to the floral wallpaper. The antique chest, another heirloom piece, now houses Amy's handbag collection

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‘NO MATTER THE SEASON, THIS IS A REALLY SPECIAL PLACE TO BE’

COCO’S BEDROOM
With walls painted in Graupel by Farrow & Ball, this room is also given a festive feel with fairy lights and pretty decorations

DETAIL

Above The knitted nativity figures, handmade by Harry’s great-aunt, have become treasured decorations

BATHROOM

Right Amy made the little scalloped edging for the windowsill. The walls and woodwork are painted in Farrow & Ball’s Lulworth Blue

HB
TAKE A VIDEO TOUR
Explore Amy’s Victorian cottage at housebeautiful.com/uk/amy-house-tour

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HOW TO

Add a soft touch to your festive decor

Floral prints and pastel colours bring lovely highlights to Amy's home, and style experts agree they offer a magical way to do things a bit differently

GO BEYOND RED, GREEN & GOLD

Be creative with a range of muted pastel shades

✱ 'There's a wonderful freedom in decorating with unexpected colours at Christmas,' says **Lucy Uren**, creative director at Rowen & Wren. 'Dusky pinks, watery blues and pistachio greens might not be traditional but they can feel just as festive.'

✱ While reds and greens can make rooms feel darker, pastels have a lighter touch and will work within most palettes, so decorations in these hues are bound to look good in your existing scheme.

✱ Follow Amy and use pastel shades to create lively focal points, whether that's a colourful tree or a display of paper decorations. 'They lend themselves to a more playful approach,' says Lucy. 'It's about sparking joy rather than following convention.'

✱ Start with simple swaps. Make a candelabra look more contemporary by using pale pink tapers or use a mix of ribbon and paper in soft, unconventional hues to wrap your gifts.

✱ Texture is also key – accessories in velvet and silk look extra-special, elevating the prettier colours, while pieces in soft wool and cashmere will add a sense of richness and make them feel more cosy.

CELEBRATE PRINT & PATTERN

Yes, floral motifs can sparkle as much as tinsel

✱ 'The magic of using less-predictable patterns at Christmas is that they make your home look far more personal,' says stylist and interior designer **Sam Grigg**. 'They instantly bring a layer of joy.'

✱ Balance busier designs with simpler, less-decorative pieces so that each print can enjoy the spotlight. Homeowner Amy has used white china with patterned placemats and napkins, and paired floral bedding with solid-hued quilts.

✱ 'Christmas should be fun, so use patterns in colours that make your home feel brighter and happier,' advises Sam. 'Florals instantly add charm, and richly hued motifs with oversized blooms or ditsy prints in pastel shades can feel just as festive as holly or poinsettias.'

✱ If you're introducing a pattern into a pared-back scheme, why not start with a showstopper? An ornate design on a tree skirt, for example, will create an element of surprise, but as long as the colours work with the ornaments above, it will look harmonious.

1 Dinner **candles**, £20/four, Not Just A Shop
2 Capel & Adelajda **decoration**, £19, Coco & Wolf
3 **Giftwrap**, £3/sheet, Cambridge Imprint
4 Champagne **saucer**, £62/four, The Vintage List
5 Silk **ribbons**, from a selection, Lancaster & Cornish

WORDS JAMES CUNNINGHAM

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‘I GIVE MYSELF PERMISSION TO GO OTT’

For small-business champion Holly Tucker, the festive season is all about putting a smile on people’s faces with fun and fabulous decorations

WORDS JAMES CUNNINGHAM | **PHOTOGRAPHY** ANNA STATHAKI | **PRODUCTION** BEN KENDRICK

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HOME PROFILE

WHO LIVES HERE

Holly Tucker MBE, founder of Holly & Co, her husband Frank, their son Harry and the family's Border terriers, Mudly and Chewbacca

THE PROPERTY

A Victorian detached house, at one point a school, in the leafy south-west London suburb of Twickenham

A FESTIVE WELCOME

This page and opposite
Holly's decorations this year centre on whimsy and romance, with swathes of red and pink paper honeycombs. A vibrant Nat Maks wallpaper adds to the colourful scene, with its Make Holt flamingos and Catherine Colebrook sacks from Holly & Co

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THE TABLE
Crackers from See + Quin (which can be personalised) sit on KCHossack Pottery side plates, all available at Holly & Co

Christmas decorating is my yoga,' laughs entrepreneur Holly Tucker. 'My brain goes into one of its happy places, so it's total mindfulness without having to go to a class!' The process of transforming her Twickenham home into a winter wonderland starts early. 'I love a theme,' she explains. 'In the past, it's been Frida Kahlo; another year it was an aviary. Of course, this means I'm always on the lookout for next year's big idea. I collect all my inspirations – the colours I love and the pieces I find – into a folder that becomes my festive master plan.'

It's perhaps no surprise that Holly is so organised. Her passion for discovering independent makers and new labels led her to set up Not On The High Street in 2006, before she became a government advisor on small creative businesses. Now, she champions them on the Holly & Co website, a platform for gifts, homeware, accessories and then some, all designed by brands Holly has hand-picked. 'I want it to feel like a more joyful way to shop, and the small businesses are how that happens. They're always the first with the trends and have the most inspiring ideas,' she says.

Holly's home is the perfect canvas for her creativity. When she and her husband Frank first discovered it back in 2014, they fell in love with its location. 'We've got herons, swans and parakeets

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DINING ROOM

Opposite and this page
Marbled wallpaper by Nat Maks is a colourful backdrop to a pewter chandelier, wall-mounted zebra and hand-painted drum

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‘I ALWAYS WANT THE HOUSE TO FEEL A FUN PLACE TO BE, ESPECIALLY AT CHRISTMAS’

LIVING ROOM

Over the festive season, this space becomes the family’s cinema spot. ‘We’ve even got personalised popcorn bowls,’ says Holly. The bow decorations are from one of Holly’s vendors, Cesca Molly Flowers

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coming into the garden, but I can be at a lunch meeting in Soho in 45 minutes,' she explains. The house was in sound condition when they bought it, but hadn't been renovated in 40 years. Gradually, the couple updated it, knocking down walls to open up the living space and converting the garage into an expansive kitchen. Arranged over two levels, it has five bedrooms, three bathrooms (plus a downstairs loo) and a home office each for Holly and Frank. 'We knew this was going to be our forever home, so we were happy to make everything happen slowly,' she says.

As soon as December arrives, Holly takes a different approach. 'All the decorations go up on the first of the month,' she explains. 'I'll do it all in the morning and just have the most inspiring time.' Her theme this year came from a picture she found in a fashion magazine. 'It was an amazing paper bow on a wreath and I thought, that's it!' Centred around whimsy and romance, it involves paper decorations, playful colours and pretty bows dotted everywhere.

'I always want the house to feel alive and a really fun place to be, especially at Christmas,' she adds. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. Turn around one corner and you'll encounter a wall-mounted zebra draped in baubles; around another is a flock of flamingos draped in tinsel: 'It's safe to say that I give myself permission to go OTT.'

For the rest of the month, Holly can be found in what she describes as her 'festive headquarters'. The house's giftwrapping room plays host to a stack of presents that builds up from September. 'I'll tackle gifts for one family one weekend, then another the following,' she says. 'It's a lovely way to properly think about what you're buying and who it's for.' Everything is then wrapped up in ribbon that Holly commissions from one of her favourite vendors.

In the family's downtime, they're most often in the kitchen. The room's focal point is a giant olive tree, rooted in the central island and climbing towards the tall sloping ceiling. 'I got it from a company that usually does faux trees for hotels, but didn't realise it would weigh nearly 300 kilograms,' Holly explains. 'Eight grown men couldn't lift it, but that didn't stop me.' Throughout the festive season, it is decked out in baubles just like any

DETAILS

The whimsical sheep surrounding this fireplace and in the hallway are actually footstools designed by the Dorset-based small business Ewenique Furniture. The woodwork is painted in Chappell Green by Farrow & Ball

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DECORATIVE ELEMENTS

Above left Giftwrapping has its own dedicated space. The cabinets are painted in Smoked Trout by Farrow & Ball, with tiles by Maude Made **Above right** Pretty baubles decorate colourful glassware **Below** Hand-painted serving boards by Alex Ebdon are a decorative feature on the countertop

other Christmas tree. Evenings are spent in the sitting room, where this year's fir is trimmed in pink crepe-paper bows: 'This is our space to hunker down. We get the fire going, put on some candles and relax in front of the television.'

As with her decorations, Holly's approach to the big day itself is a twist on the traditional. 'The three of us each get a stocking from Father Christmas, regardless of our age,' she says. 'Now that our son Harry is 20, our new tradition is washing down the morning's mince pies with a shot of whichever bottle he's found in his stocking!' Holly's mother and sister both live nearby, and together they've devised a strategy to share the hosting duties between them. 'We call it the Christmas Safari – we walk to each other's houses, dogs and all, for different parts of the day. One house hosts the starter, another does the main lunch and we go to the third for the desserts,' she explains. No matter which course she's serving up, Holly's dining table takes centre stage. 'I love to surprise and delight my guests. This year, our talking point will be the centrepiece turkey, made entirely in chocolate. For me, Christmas is all about putting smiles on everyone's faces.'

Explore the festive collection at holly.co

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THROUGHOUT THE FESTIVE SEASON, THE OLIVE TREE IS DECKED OUT IN BAUBLES

KITCHEN

Set within the island, the olive tree makes a showstopping statement. The cabinetry was designed by Sola Kitchens

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HOW TO

Get the look

Embrace Holly's festive maximalism with a lively mix of jubilant colours and lots of playful decorations

COMPILED BY MADDY ANDO

1 Recycled glass **baubles**, £13/six, National Trust Shop **2** Botanical **tiles**, £12 each, Maude Made **3** Bronze Dew Drop **jug**, £99, Casa by JJ **4** Lombok **cushion**, £40, John Lewis & Partners **5** Mel **side table**, £40, Habitat **6** Artificial **olive tree**, £255, Perch & Parrow **7** Metre **candles**, from £22.95/two (excluding holders), Holly & Co **8** **Honeycomb onions**, £12/six, Studio Thie **9** Tiffany **sofa** in Cruise Smart Velvet, £2,370, Sofa.com **10** Peacock **floor lamp**, £140, Next Home **11** Pembroke stripe linen-blend **tablecloth**, £89, Piglet in Bed

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LIVING ROOM

Opposite The mantelpiece is decorated with flowers and foliage, including hydrangeas, fir and bright berries, while the tree is dressed in collected red and white ornaments

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A CONSIDERED *Christmas*

With its beautifully conceived palette and curated feel, this home is always ready for entertaining. The owners' festive decor is equally welcoming, with a few cheery colour updates and touches of green doing the talking

WORDS SARA BIRD | **PHOTOGRAPHY** DAN DUCHARS/THE CONTENTED NEST

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HOME PROFILE

WHO LIVES HERE

Sam Palmer, an accessories designer (@the_flint_house), her husband Adam, a clothing designer, and their two children

THE PROPERTY

A three-bedroom Georgian terrace with a living room, dining and kitchen extension in West Sussex

Some families feel that their home is meant to be. The timing was just right for Sam Palmer and her husband when they first spotted this elegant Georgian flint terrace in a West Sussex conservation area; the couple and their two children were back in the UK after years in New York and Boston. Living temporarily with Adam's parents nearby, they had been searching for somewhere they could call home. 'As soon as we saw the house, we knew we wanted it,' says Sam. 'It was on the school run, so we'd pass it every day and stop to admire it. We never thought it would come up for sale, but when it did, we were the second viewing through the door – and we made an offer straightaway.'

Despite the sale being agreed in 2018, the family only moved in later in 2021, staying at Adam's parents while they planned and carried out the building work. Structurally, the house was sound, but the interiors were drenched in colours that didn't chime with their taste. 'It was stuck in the 1950s,' remembers Sam. 'There was bright red patterned carpet in the living room, a yellow-and-red kitchen with a chequerboard floor and teal leopard-print lino all the way up the stairs.' Today, that same staircase is dressed for Christmas with a simple green garland, but back then it was all about stripping back and starting again.

And while the bones of the front rooms were good, the rear of the house was awkward and disjointed. The kitchen was a constricted galley with a limited pantry attached, and a lean-to and outdoor loo beyond. Outside was a cluster of sheds.

Sam's plan was to retain the original features where she could and reinstate any that had been lost. 'We needed to make a better use of the rear space with a modern family kitchen opening into the garden.' This meant preserving the flooring, skirting and doors

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KITCHEN
Skylights set in the pitched ceiling draw light into this space, accentuated by the creamy white walls and ceiling

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‘WE CELEBRATE FROM THANKSGIVING, A TRADITION FROM OUR TIME IN AMERICA’

DINING ROOM

Embracing the lack of natural light in here, Sam chose a soft peach palette, which brings a cosy warmth. Original floorboards and a striped rug add texture underfoot

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while adding those architectural details that had been lost over the years, such as the ceiling cornices and roses. Stripping wallpaper revealed decades of patterns layered over one another. 'Even the front door had 13 different colours of paint,' says Sam. While the renovation was taking place, the upstairs rooms were used to trial colours for the downstairs space, and a temporary kitchen was squeezed into the dining room to make the house habitable until the work was finished.

Sam did lots of research on similar properties to come up with a cohesive look for the decor and details, opting for warm whites, neutrals and organic textures, with dark-wood vintage pieces peppered throughout the scheme. 'Our furniture collection has evolved over time, and includes pieces we've had in our previous homes,' explains Sam. 'We always knew what we liked and bought what we loved, and we knew these pieces would work in our final home.'

Christmas decorations fall naturally into their scheme. 'We start celebrating from Thanksgiving, a tradition taken from our time in America,' says Sam. 'Then from early December, Christmas really begins.' She returns to the same colour scheme every year but has been gradually adding new ornaments and details, really leaning into the celebratory mood with candles and lots of floral displays. The dining room's plaster-pink backdrop, antique rug and vintage pieces create a cocooning atmosphere in December, with earthy linens and plenty of foliage arranged on the long table. Thanks to its large front windows, the living room feels merry and bright; it's here that the family install their tree, decorated with Sam's favourite red-and-white glass baubles and bows collected over time. On the mantel, hydrangea, fir and berries bring in seasonal texture.

Upstairs, the main bedroom is calm with creamy walls, natural linens and a golden rug, as well as a few seasonal flower arrangements and candlelight. In each of the children's attic rooms – one pale and playful with scalloped details, the other painted a deep spruce green – there is a tree that the children decorate themselves with ornaments Sam has kept since her childhood.

By the time Christmas arrives, garlands trail the banisters, a wreath hangs on the front gate and the tree is aglow in the front room. Nothing feels overdone – Sam's layered approach to festive decor reflects the relaxed character of the house itself. Similarly, Christmas for the Palmers is a low-key and relaxed affair. 'Our time at home is full of little customs, starting with getting the house festive,' concludes Sam. 'For the main day, it's just our family, enjoying being together at home.'

DETAILS

Above and left On the table, Sam has mixed earthy mid-tone linens and crockery with bright gingham crackers and fresh foliage, while a jolly wreath adds a festive touch outside

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STAIRCASE

Below Abundant greenery and foliage bedeck the handrail and banister

MAIN BEDROOM

Colour-drenching the walls, cabinetry and linens in creamy neutrals has created a restful mood

CHILDREN'S BEDROOM

With its spruce shades and panelling, this attic room has the feel of a woodland cabin

BATHROOM

Above Sam sectioned off the shower with an elegant archway

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HOW TO

Get the look

Echo Samantha's style and create a home full of cosy character and rustic flair

1 Beca **pendant light**, £65, Laura Ashley **2** Handmade **teacup and saucer**, £95, Henry Holland Studio
3 Vermont **napkin**, £21/four, Walton & Co **4** Pinecone **wreath**, £38.50, Charlotte's Shopping **5** Dove **decoration**, £11.95, Rockett St George **6** Jolene **throw**, £145, Secret Linen Store **7** **Poinsettia**, £9.99 (incuding pot), Dobbies
8 Albury **footstool**, £275, Next Home **9** Louie **vase**, £14.99, The Wisteria Tree **10** Burnt Orange patchwork **stocking**, £48, Toast
11 Old Sage **matt emulsion**, £55/2.5L, Thorndown Paints **12** Antique **stool**, £295, Shimu

COMPILED BY JAMES CUNNINGHAM

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RENOVATE

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CREATING A COSY AND COMFORTABLE GUEST BEDROOM

PHOTOGRAPH GETTY IMAGES

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The 2026 kitchen trends edit

Six key style ingredients for the heart of the home

1 COLOURFUL APPLIANCES

Stoves has unveiled its Colour Boutique collection, a vibrant update to its Deluxe range cookers, with six new shades inspired by the natural world – think Deep Marine (right), Garnet Red and Ice White. Prices start at £1,099.

2 FEELGOOD TABLESCAPING

Colour is the key to creating a cheerful mood at the dining table. These joy-inducing Dopamine Brights napkins, £14 for four from M&S, will bring a burst of fun and energy to mealtimes.

3 THOUGHTFUL MAXIMALISM

We love this refined take on the madcap maximalist aesthetic. The effect is more curated with colour, texture and pattern, which are layered with intention rather than excess. The perfect place to start? The Illume Pebble Concrete vinyl flooring, £47.99/sq m from Quick-Step, which gives playful terrazzo-inspired vibes to this richly hued red and green dining nook.

Cotswolds **kitchen**, Ledbury Studio

4 MODERN METALLIC

Heavy metal is back, but instead of an industrial kitchen look, today's version favours finishes with character and a lived-in timeworn patina.

5 THE NEW-LOOK ISLAND

Give your kitchen island a stylish update with either fluted panelling, bold patterned ceramic tiles or a warm wood-effect finish. Try this completely waterproof panel in Warmia Walnut, £200/598mm x 2,400mm, Naturepanel.

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Suffolk freestanding double kitchen **larder**, £4,550, Neptune

6 FREESTANDING KITCHENS

FIVE TIPS ON HOW TO DESIGN ONE THAT WORKS

Fred Horlock, design director at Neptune, shares his expert advice

1 Freestanding kitchen cabinetry needs space to breathe. Treat each piece as you would any other item of furniture in your home. To enhance their visual impact, avoid tucking pieces into corners or pushing them against strong architectural features.

2 Combine freestanding elements, such as an island or larder, with fixed cabinetry. This will allow the freestanding elements to be viewed as feature pieces rather than a group of individual cabinets.

3 Without built-in storage to hide behind, wiring and pipework need to be carefully concealed within walls. Plan this early to maintain a clean aesthetic.

4 While I wouldn't recommend moving freestanding kitchen cabinetry around regularly, it does offer long-term flexibility. A kitchen island and a beautiful yet practical larder can be taken with you if you ever move home.

5 When planning your kitchen, try to design the room as a whole first, then add freestanding pieces gradually. Stick to a consistent material and colour palette so new additions sit harmoniously together.

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The 2026 bathroom trends edit

These six gorgeous updates spell instant spa vibes

Edwardian **basin with pedestal**, from £954; **WC**, £1,593; both in Bespoke Cosmic Green; Burlington

1 THE NEW NOSTALGIA

Say goodbye to cool precision and hello to a warmer, more characterful bathroom space. The new nostalgia trend blends vintage charm with handcrafted touches. Capture the look with tones of burnt orange or mint green along with 1960s-inspired shapes and patterns.

2 JAPANDI CALM

Embrace the Japandi look – a fusion of Japanese minimalism and Scandinavian comfort – for a warm, Zen-like bathroom retreat. We love Quorn Stone's Kyoto Light Oak slatted wood-effect large-format wall tiles, from £40/sq m, for their soothing, tactile texture.

3 BERRY SHADES

From juicy cherry to warm plum, rich reds are the shades of the season. These saturated hues bring spathroom vibes and a cosiness to your space.

Twilight Fig **diffuser**, £8.99; Lost in Cherry **diffuser**, £5.99; **candle**, £3.99; all The Range

4 VANITY MIRRORS

These elegant mirrors combine style and function. Black **mirror**, £6, B&M. Cilo cream pivoting table **mirror**, £49.50, Oliver Bonas. Black light-up **mirror**, £13, Matalan

5 SCULPTURAL SHAPES

We've been seeing curved lines and fluted designs in the chicest bathrooms. 'They bring a more tactile quality, evoke a subtle connection to nature and create a natural sense of flow and movement, making your space feel relaxed and comfortable,' says Mike Manders, co-founder and CEO at Haddon.

Stamford freestanding white fluted stone **bath**, £1,645, Haddon

COMPILED BY SOPHIE VENING

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Stone Glaze Petrol Green **tiles**, £121/sq m; Medici Viola marble honed brick and bespoke **tiles**, from £110/sq m; all Ca' Pietra

6 STATEMENT MARBLE

HOW TO MAKE IT WORK IN A MODERN BATHROOM

Grazzie Wilson, head of creative at Ca' Pietra, shares her styling tips

1 Bring marble into the modern day by pairing it with bold, contrasting finishes. In this scheme (above), deep green glazed brick tiles prevent the marble from feeling overly classical. The variation in tone and surface sheen also injects energy and balance into the design.

2 Swap ornate furniture for a sleek, contemporary vanity in a strong block colour. Clean shapes and minimal detailing help ground the look, allowing the natural veining of the stone to take centre stage.

3 Small marble tiles can feel overly decorative and old-fashioned. Choose large-format slabs or generously sized squares instead. Fewer grout lines create a cleaner look and enhances the dramatic veining for a modern statement finish.

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BEFORE & AFTER

‘Our new kitchen has become a pre-party destination’

How a sociable couple created an entertaining space that celebrates smart design

WORDS ALEXANDRA PRATT | **PHOTOGRAPHY** ADAM CARTER

For John and Chris Percival, falling for this grand four-bedroom Victorian home in Bristol was easy. Loving its tired and awkwardly arranged kitchen was more of a challenge. However, the battered units and flaking laminate worksurfaces provided a silver lining. ‘We could rip it all out without any guilt,’ says John.

The couple set about making the open-plan kitchen and dining space – once two separate rooms – more functional and better suited to their lifestyle. ‘Everyone seems to congregate in the kitchen, so we wanted to create a sociable space,’ says Chris. Eight months of renovations ensued, with highs (sourcing a full set of vintage Ercol chairs) and lows (smashing the worktops), and while the process was painstaking, the result is pure joy. ‘Our new kitchen has become a pre-party destination, which is great because it means the house isn’t wrecked by the after-party!’

John and **Chris Percival** live in a four-bedroom Victorian house in Bristol with their dogs, Dexter and Bertie

THE PLAN

John and Chris envisioned an open-plan kitchen and dining area made for entertaining. ‘We wanted a big island and enough space to manoeuvre around it,’ says John. And it was important for head chef Chris to be able to chat with guests at the table as he worked in the kitchen. The couple went to Rowena Sim, founder of Bybrook Bespoke, for help as there were protruding nib walls, two chimney breasts and three doorways to contend with. ‘Rowena came up with something totally unique that ticked all of our boxes,’ says Chris.

THE PROCESS

‘We painted the kitchen walls ourselves in Tailor Tack by Farrow & Ball,’ recalls John. ‘Initially it felt as if we were painting Barbie’s kitchen, but once the cabinets went in, it all made sense.’

The cabinetry itself is masterfully arranged. The nib wall that is so often blocked off has been incorporated into the storage – Rowena has worked around it to create a shallow cupboard, which is perfect for spices – and deeper units have been added to house the couple’s beloved coffee station and integrated ovens. ‘We sold the original range cooker and put the hob under the chimney breast, integrating two steam ovens, both with proving drawers, one for plates and one for food,’ John says.

The worktops proved one of the most challenging parts of the build. The couple sourced a rare grey quartzite streaked with pink flecks from a local stone yard, only for the piece to fall and shatter. When a similar piece was finally found, they went to town, using it on the dresser shelves, splashback and windowsill: ‘We did get a little carried away!’

THE BEFORE

‘It was basic with a poor use of space and cabinetry that wasn’t in tune with the age of the property’

THE INSPIRATION

‘We began by looking at kitchen tables on Instagram – where they were placed and how big they were. This one in The Country House Cumbria was the jumping-off point’

THE COUNTRY HOUSE CUMBRIA IS AVAILABLE TO BOOK (AS THE NEW GEORGIAN ERA) VIA PLUMGUIDE.COM

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THE AFTER

'I love that one of us can be perched at the end of the island getting on with work while the other is cooking. We can be in the same space but doing different things'

DESIGN HERO

'The pink chandelier over the dining table isn't something we would normally choose, but it really finishes off the space'

CUPBOARDS

'The nib wall that separates the two spaces has been cleverly integrated within the cabinetry with a shallow unit that's used for spices'

DINING TABLE

'We had the table made by Winkleigh Timber in Devon to accommodate eight or even 10 people. The Ercol dining chairs are from a local vintage shop, Dear Old Thing in Bedminster'

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BEST BARGAIN
'We thought we would have to replace the French doors but a lick of paint – Farrow & Ball's Tailor Tack – made them look like new'

ALCOVES
'Placing the dressers in the alcoves adds so much to the room and also makes use of otherwise dead space. People always ask if they are original'

BIGGEST CHALLENGE
'We stayed in the house during the work, which took eight months, with just a microwave, a kettle and a tap, and living off takeaways'

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BIGGEST SPLURGE
'As we'd agreed not to get an American-style fridge, we went wild and added a Quooker Cube for filtered, chilled and carbonated water, which cost over £1,000'

COFFEE NOOK
'I regret not putting lights in the coffee cupboard – they would have made such a difference on gloomy mornings'

SOURCEBOOK

Kitchen Bybrook Bespoke (bybrookbespoke.co.uk)
Worktops Marmobello (marmobello.co.uk)
Paint Boringdon Green, Three Farm Green and Ashes of Roses, Little Greene (littlegreene.com); Tailor Tack, Farrow & Ball (farrow-ball.com)
Dining table Winkleigh Timber (winkleightimber.co.uk)
Dining chairs Ercol (ercol.com)
Chandelier Pooky (pooky.com)
Tiered pendant Glow Lighting (glowlighting.co.uk)
Door handles Rowen & Wren (rowenandwren.co.uk)

Farrow & Ball Tailor Tack **paint**

Pooky Oldfield **chandelier**

Ercol Heritage **chair**

Marmobello **quartzite**

Rowen & Wren Grove **door handles**

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BEFORE & AFTER

‘I love how good design has the power to completely transform your mood’

Working with an interior designer helped this couple realise their home’s potential and even carve out a guest suite during its renovation – just in time for their baby’s arrival

WORDS RACHEL EDWARDS | **PHOTOGRAPHY** JOEY KENDAL BROWN

It’s the plotline that ratchets up the tension in so many episodes of *Grand Designs*: a couple, with their half-renovated home in peak chaos, announce they’re expecting a baby. This was exactly the scenario for Bella Cowley in York, just as she and her partner had instructed an architect and applied for planning permission. It added a layer of pressure to the transformation of their house, but Bella can also see that the hard deadline ‘gave the project some momentum’.

Bella’s composure owes a lot to her interior designer, Jojo Barr, founder of House Nine Design. ‘We knew our place had potential, but it wasn’t until we brought in our interior designers that we realised just how much,’ says Bella.

One of the standout spaces in their renovation is the top floor, where Jojo and the couple reworked the loft space to create a guest suite. From the sophisticated palette to statement lighting and vintage details, it’s a masterclass in how to create something both beautiful and functional.

Bella Cowley lives in York with her husband and toddler

THE PLAN

With a baby on the way, Bella and her husband knew that creating a comfortable guest room for visitors and grandparents was vital.

‘The challenge was always going to be how to incorporate an ensuite without losing that wonderful sense of openness,’ says Bella. ‘We thought about positioning the shower room directly by the entrance, but it quickly felt too restrictive – you’d walk in and be met by a solid wall.’

The layout was reworked to create a more inviting flow, with a room divider and panels of glass allowing the light to fill both rooms.

THE PROCESS

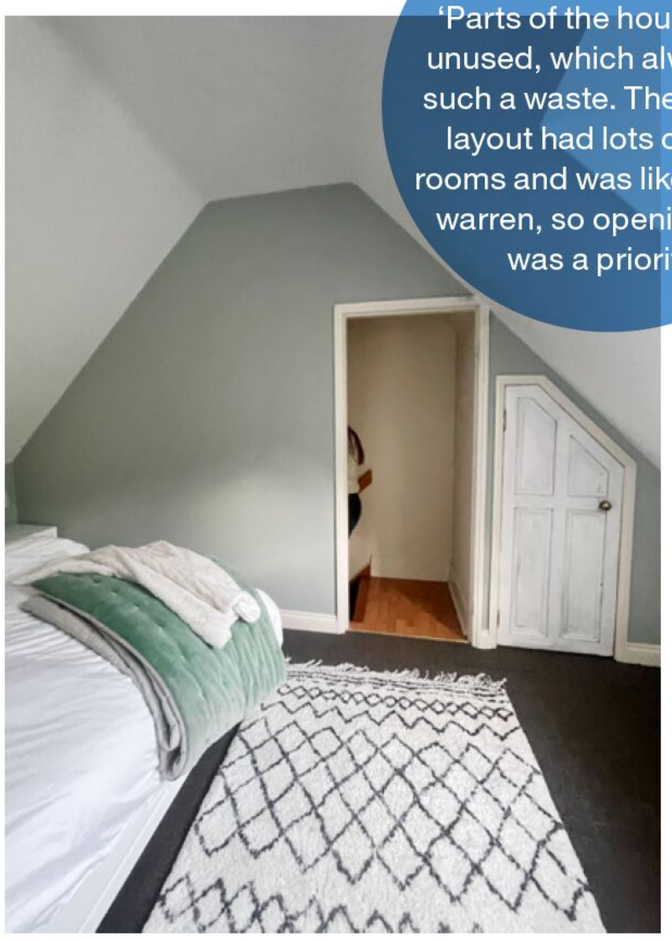
To accommodate both a bedroom and a bathroom, Jojo leveraged as much space as she could. The shower was neatly enclosed and tucked below the eaves, creating a space that feels cocooning.

A generously sized vanity unit, made in collaboration with Parker Howley & Co, adds ample storage, and its wavy, scalloped trim is picked up on the bedside table.

Creamy tongue-and-groove panelled walls in the bathroom feel fresh, while chequered tiles add zest. Curating the space with ‘a natural palette and well-considered lighting completely transformed the way we live in the house,’ adds Bella.

THE BEFORE

‘Parts of the house went unused, which always felt such a waste. The original layout had lots of small rooms and was like a rabbit warren, so opening it up was a priority’



THE INSPIRATION

‘Gleneagles in Scotland, for the way it balances grandeur with warmth. Visiting there feels like home but with luxurious elements’

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BIGGEST CHALLENGE

‘Incorporating an ensuite shower room within the available head height below the eaves was particularly complex, but we got there in the end,’ says Jojo

THE AFTER

‘The natural tones, textures and light help to bring the outside in and connect us to the landscape’

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THE PALETTE

By optimising the natural light in this space and choosing a restrained colour scheme, Jojo has created a calming atmosphere

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FAVOURITE ACCESSORY
The Rebecca Udall rattan bathroom bin. ‘When do you ever find a bin that’s actually pretty?!’ asks Jojo

BEDSIDE TABLE
The Nellie bedside table – Jojo’s own design – was adapted with slimmer proportions to better fit the space

BIGGEST SPLURGE
‘The House Nine x Parker Howley & Co Astrid vanity – an investment piece but one that brings the whole room together’

SOURCEBOOK

Headboard and **bedside table**
House Nine (housenine.co.uk)
Headboard fabric Fermoie (fermoie.com)
Wall paint Coat (coatpaints.com)
Bathroom ceiling light Andrew Martin (andrewmartin.co.uk)
Bathroom vanity House Nine x Parker Howley & Co (parkerhowleynco.co.uk)
Scalloped mirror Attica Studios (atticastudios.co.uk)

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Take a seat

Style & interiors editor **Rachel Edwards** shares her picks for creating an inviting space inspired by the slow-living movement

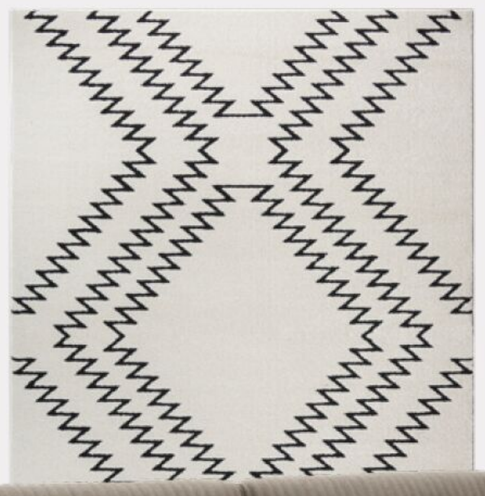
'RESTRAINT IS KEY IN AN AREA LIKE THIS, SO GIVE ANY PATTERN ROOM TO BREATHE'

Bandua **wall light**, £299, Lights & Lamps

Paper Collective **artwork**, £30, Smallable

Riban **vase**, £25, Ferm Living

Terzo **coffee table**, £249, Dwell at DFS



Vada **rug**, from £229, DFS

Luvette **corner sofa** in Taupe, £1,899, DFS

Elm **wood stool**, £85.99, Zara Home

Your living room should be a welcome retreat from the outside world, designed for moments of calm, rest and relaxation. And while bold statements and bright colours might be invigorating for some, they are no match for a cast of deep, comforting tones, tactile fabrics and squishy upholstered furniture.

A living room that feels warm and enveloping begins with the sofa. The Luvette collection by DFS takes the mega-lounging potential of an XL corner sofa and adds the tactility and softness of ribbed teddy upholstery. Its low profile – reminiscent of the laid-back styles of the 1970s, and a big trend for 2026 – adds a sense of ease and informality.

This taupe colour – an earthy middle point between grey and brown – is a great base for a room full of grounding neutrals. Should you wish to warm those up, add in some sunbaked reds and a shock of bright yellow for a bit of contrast.

Clutter will detract from the sense of calm in a space like this, so get smart with your storage. A beautifully made console table and a few rattan baskets ready to swallow throws, devices and toys at a moment's notice will go a long way, and the matching Luvette storage footstool (£249) encourages tidiness, as well as feet-up lounging.

Find your thing at dfs.co.uk or in-store using dfs.co.uk/store-locator

LIFT THE LOOK

FINISHING TOUCH

Pattern will sing in a living room like this, but steer clear of strict geometric shapes – sharp lines can feel jarring in a space designed for softness and ease. Anything nature-inspired, hand-drawn or a little imperfect will fit in beautifully. As with the rest of the decor, restraint is key – don't feel like you have to fill the space, and always give any pattern room to breathe.

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PHOTOGRAPH SALLY GREGSON

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A fresh take on TRADITION

This impressive plan-ahead Christmas lunch from **Flora Shedden** is a mouthwatering mix of traditional recipes and deliciously unexpected flavours

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Roasted squash and apple soup

Squash and apple both develop a lovely sweetness when they're roasted and left to caramelise.

SERVES 4-6

- 900g butternut squash, peeled and deseeded, then cut into 1cm slices
- 2 eating apples, cored and cut into 1cm slices
- 1 large onion, cut into wedges
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled but left whole
- 45g fresh root ginger, peeled and roughly chopped
- 3 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- olive oil, for roasting
- salt and freshly ground pepper
- 10g sage leaves
- 1kg chicken (or vegetable) stock
- yogurt, to serve

CRISPY BREADCRUMB TOPPING

- olive oil, for frying, plus extra for drizzling
- 50g fresh breadcrumbs
- 50g pumpkin seeds
- 10g sage leaves, the smaller the better

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan), gas mark 6. Put the squash, apples, onion, garlic and ginger into a baking tray and drizzle over the apple cider vinegar and a generous amount of olive oil. Season well with salt and pepper, then add the sage leaves. Toss everything together with your hands, then place in the oven to roast for 40-50 minutes until the squash is soft and nearly falling apart, stirring halfway through. If the vegetables brown too quickly, cover the tray with some foil.

2 Spoon the cooked vegetables into a large saucepan and pour over the chicken stock. Use a splash of the stock or some boiling water to rinse out the baking tray, then use a wooden spoon to loosen any caramelised bits. Add those to the pan with the veg, then bring the soup to the boil and cook for 10 minutes or until everything is simmering.

3 Remove the pan from the heat, use a hand-held blender or food processor to blend the soup until very smooth and season to taste.

4 To make the topping, heat a little oil in a frying pan over a medium heat and fry the breadcrumbs, pumpkin seeds and sage leaves for 5 minutes or until everything is crispy and fragrant.

5 Serve the soup with the crispy breadcrumbs, a dollop of yogurt and a drizzle of oil.

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Herby roast turkey

Prepare this the night before, so all you need to do is pop it in the oven on Christmas morning.

SERVES 10 WITH LEFTOVERS

- **1 bulb of garlic**
- **2 onions, unpeeled and cut into 8 wedges**
- **1 head of celery, cut into 6-7cm batons**
- **7kg free-range turkey**
- **200g goose fat, chilled**
- **20g sage, leaves picked**
- **20g rosemary sprigs**
- **salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- **½ nutmeg**

1 Break up the garlic cloves but keep them whole and in their skins, then place in a large roasting tin. I use a 40 x 30cm one that is 6cm deep. Put the onion wedges and celery batons into the tray too.
2 Remove any giblets from the cavity of the turkey and save them in the fridge for making gravy. Place the turkey breast-side up on top of all the veg and spread it with cold goose fat. Press the sage leaves and sprigs of rosemary into the fat so that they stick and cover the skin. Place any leftover herbs and stalks inside the cavity of the turkey. Season with lots of salt and pepper, then finely grate over the nutmeg.
3 Cover the turkey with foil and pop in the fridge until you are ready to cook it. Let it come to room temperature for 1-2 hours before roasting so that it stays as juicy as possible.
4 Preheat the oven to 190°C (170°C fan), gas mark 5. Place the turkey in the preheated oven, keeping the foil on top. Cook for 1½-2 hours, then remove the foil and cook for a further 1½ hours, turning the tin every 30 minutes or so to make sure the turkey colours evenly. If it starts to burn, turn the oven down a little and re-cover with the foil.
5 Cook the turkey according to its weight. I work to roughly 30-35 minutes per kilo. Use a meat thermometer to test if it is ready. Anything above 65°C for a high-welfare turkey is perfect as it will keep cooking while resting, but aim for 70°C if it's a supermarket turkey. Most turkeys come with a cooking guide, so check this first.
6 Once the turkey has reached the required internal temperature at its thickest point, remove it from the oven. Lift it out of the roasting tin and place it on a warm plate or deep serving platter. Cover it with two layers of foil, then place a clean tea towel over the top, followed by a folded bath towel. This will keep your turkey warm and moist.
7 Leave the turkey to rest for at least 1½ hours, but ideally 2 or more. Don't worry about it cooling down too much – so long as it is well wrapped it will maintain its heat surprisingly well and be all the juicier for the long rest.

Roasted potatoes with garlic

Get ahead by peeling and chopping the potatoes on Christmas Eve. Cover with cold water in a lidded saucepan and keep in the fridge – or outside if space is short.

SERVES 6-8

- **3kg Maris Piper potatoes, peeled and halved or quartered**
- **salt**
- **180g goose fat**
- **1 bulb of garlic**
- **20g rosemary sprigs**
- **10g thyme sprigs**

1 Put the potatoes into a large saucepan and cover with fresh cold water. Add a generous pinch of salt, place over a high heat and bring to the boil. Once the potatoes are boiling, cook for 5 minutes until parboiled. Drain and shake them in the pan to create fluffy edges.
2 Preheat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan), gas mark 7. Put the goose fat into a large roasting tin that will fit the potatoes in one layer. Heat the goose fat in the oven for 5 minutes, then carefully add the potatoes and shake the tin to coat them. Return to the oven for 20 minutes. Turn them to ensure an even colour.
3 Remove the tin again and sprinkle the potatoes generously with salt; return to the oven for a further 15-20 minutes until golden brown and crisp. Bash the garlic cloves in their skins; add to the potatoes along with the rosemary and thyme. Shake everything together well, then cook for a final 10 minutes, until the garlic has softened but not burnt. Remove from the oven and serve.

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Poached parsnips with pecan and thyme crumble

I really do recommend boiling vegetables in good stock to add extra flavour.

SERVES 6-8

- 1kg parsnips, peeled and trimmed
- 1.25kg good-quality chicken stock
- 4 bay leaves
- olive oil, for cooking and drizzling

CRUMBLE

- 75g butter, plus extra for greasing
- 75g oats
- 75g wholemeal flour
- 25g Parmesan, grated
- 10g thyme sprigs
- ½ tsp sea salt
- freshly ground black pepper
- 100g pecans, roughly chopped

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan), gas mark 6 and grease a 30 x 40cm roasting tin with butter. Halve the parsnips lengthways, then cut them in half horizontally.
2 Pour the stock into a large saucepan, add the bay leaves and bring to a simmer over a medium-low heat. Add the prepared parsnips and simmer for 20 minutes, or until softened but still quite al dente. Strain and leave to cool.
3 For the crumble, combine the butter, oats, flour, Parmesan and half the thyme leaves in a bowl with the salt and lots of black pepper. Rub in to form a crumble; stir in the pecans.
4 Scatter the parsnips in one layer in the prepared tin. Sprinkle over the crumble and remaining thyme. Drizzle with a little olive oil. Roast in the oven for 20 minutes, then gently turn the parsnips. Return to the oven for 10 more minutes until golden. Serve immediately.

Sprouts with tahini

If you have leftovers, these are delicious stuffed into a turkey sandwich on Boxing Day.

SERVES 6-8

- olive oil, for cooking
- 375g Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved
- 100g kale, stalks finely chopped and leaves shredded into 3cm pieces
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 20g parsley, finely chopped
- 40g butter
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 40g pumpkin seeds

TAHINI DRESSING

- 3 tbsp tahini
- 50g water
- ½ tbsp lemon juice
- ½ tbsp olive oil

1 To make the dressing, mix all the ingredients in a bowl until smooth, then set aside.
2 Cook the sprouts 20 minutes before serving. Heat a little olive oil in a large frying pan over a medium-high heat. Add the sprouts and the kale stalks and cook for 2-3 minutes, or until the sprouts are well coloured but still really crunchy. Add the garlic, parsley and butter and stir well. Cook for a further 1-2 minutes maximum. It is really important not to overcook the sprouts, so take them off earlier than you would normally think to. Season to taste and set aside.
3 Place the kale leaves in a large bowl with a pinch of salt. Use your hands to massage the salt into the kale until it has softened and gone a lovely dark green shade. Add the hot sprouts and kale stalks and stir everything together. In the same pan that you cooked the sprouts in, add a splash more olive oil, then toast the pumpkin seeds over a medium-high heat. Once they begin popping, remove from the heat.
4 To serve, spoon half the sprouts and kale over your serving platter. Drizzle with half the tahini dressing, then sprinkle over half the hot seeds. Repeat this process, then serve immediately.

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Sage, hazelnut and rosemary stuffing

I truly don't know how this is, but no matter what quantity of stuffing is made, it is never enough.

MAKES 26-28 SMALL STUFFING BALLS

- 150g bacon, thinly sliced
- 2 celery stalks, finely diced
- 2 shallots, finely diced
- 1 onion, finely diced
- olive oil, for cooking and drizzling
- 3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 20g parsley, leaves finely chopped
- 30g sage, leaves thinly sliced
- 1 tsp sea salt and black pepper
- 125g sourdough bread
- 180g cooked chestnuts
- 650g sausage meat

1 Heat a large frying or saucepan (ideally with a lid) over a medium-high heat. Add the bacon and cook until golden and the fat has been rendered. Remove from the pan and set aside in a bowl.

2 Add the diced celery, shallots and onion to the same pan, along with a glug of olive oil. Cover and cook over a medium heat for about 15 minutes, stirring regularly, until the vegetables are soft and translucent. Add the garlic and herbs and season with the salt and some freshly ground black pepper. Cook for a further 5 minutes, then remove from the heat and allow to cool for 5-10 minutes.

3 Meanwhile, toast the sourdough, then transfer to a food processor and pulse to create fine breadcrumbs. Add these to the bacon and use your hands to crumble in the cooked chestnuts. Stir in the cooled onion mixture. Lastly, add the sausage meat and use your hands to bring everything together.

4 Roll the mixture into small balls roughly 50g each in size. Arrange them on a lightly oiled baking tray so they fit snugly. Drizzle with a little more oil and cover with cling film. Store in the fridge for up to 2 days before cooking, or freeze and defrost in the fridge overnight before cooking.

5 To cook, preheat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan), gas mark 7. Roast the stuffing balls in the oven for 30-40 minutes. You may need to turn them halfway through cooking so they colour evenly.

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Fig and hazelnut crumble mince pies

I always recommend doubling these ingredients as 12 never seem to last long enough in our house!

MAKES 12

PASTRY

- 125g butter
- 100g icing sugar
- 250g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
- 2 egg yolks

FILLING

- 110g dried figs, destalked and chopped
- 400g mincemeat
- 30g brandy

CRUMBLE

- 75g hazelnuts, roughly chopped
- 50g oats
- 25g light brown soft sugar
- 25g butter

TO SERVE

- icing sugar
- clotted cream

1 To make the pastry, blitz all the ingredients in a food processor on a high speed until crumble-like. Stop, scrape down the sides and blitz again. Stop when the mixture just starts to combine and form a dough. Or work the butter into the flour and sugar by hand until you have a sand-like texture. Add the yolks and gently bring the dough together.

2 Flatten the dough into a rough circle about 2cm thick. This helps chill the dough faster and makes it easier for you to roll out. Wrap in clingfilm and rest in the fridge for at least 30 minutes (or up to 3 days).

3 For the filling, combine all the ingredients in a large bowl and mix well. When ready to bake, preheat the oven to 190°C (170°C fan), gas mark 5. Remove the pastry in clingfilm from the fridge and allow to come to room temperature for 15 minutes.

4 Lightly dust the worksurface with a little flour, then roll out to 2-3mm thick. Use a 10cm pastry cutter to cut out 12 discs of dough, re-rolling any scraps as needed. Lightly flour a 12-hole muffin tin and press a disc into each hole, using your fingers to get right into the corners. Trim off any excess pastry and add to a bowl alongside any pastry offcuts you have from rolling.

5 To make the crumble, put the chopped hazelnuts into a bowl with the pastry offcuts. Add the oats, sugar and butter and mix everything together with your hands until you have a chunky crumble.

6 Divide the mincemeat filling between the tart cases, then spoon the crumble over the top. Bake the pies in the oven for 20-25 minutes, or until the crumble on top is golden brown and the pastry is cooked through.

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Sherry and raisin ice cream

This is a no-churn, very quick-to-assemble boozy dessert that is simply divine.

MAKES 2 LITRES

- **225g raisins**
- **150g sherry (fino or very dry sherry), plus extra to serve**
- **zest of ½ orange**
- **½ nutmeg, finely grated**
- **600g double cream**
- **397g tin of condensed milk**
- **2 tsp vanilla bean paste**
- **amaretti biscuits, to serve**

1 A few hours before making the ice cream, or ideally overnight, soak the raisins. Place them in a small airtight container, then cover with the sherry and add the orange zest and nutmeg. Stir everything together and seal. Allow the raisins to absorb the sherry, but don't worry, there will still be some liquid left.

2 When ready to make the ice cream, combine the cream, condensed milk and vanilla bean paste in a large bowl. Whisk together using a hand mixer until thickened and soft peaks form.

3 Fold in the raisins and sherry and mix until everything is well combined. Spoon into a 2kg airtight container and place in the freezer for at least 6 hours.

4 Serve with amaretti biscuits crushed on top or a drizzle more sherry, if you fancy it.

Clementine fizz

Try this less-boozy alternative to Buck's Fizz as a lovely way to toast the big day.

SERVES 4

- **300g freshly squeezed clementine juice**
- **50g Cointreau (optional)**
- **450g ginger or plain kombucha**
- **sprigs of rosemary, to garnish**

Mix together the clementine juice and Cointreau in a glass or jug, then divide between four Champagne flutes. Top up with the kombucha (gently, as it will fizz up) and serve with a sprig of rosemary.

Recipes taken from *Winter in the Highlands* by Flora Shedden (£26, Quadrille). Photography by Laura Edwards

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'TIS THE SEASON... TO TABLESCAPE

Make the celebrations even more magical this festive season with Dunelm's new collections

December is here, and with it a chance to dress your table for seasonal feasts, whatever your style. Luckily, Dunelm has created a collection to suit every taste and space, from homely decorations with a handcrafted feel to glamorous pieces that take their cues from Art Deco, and heritage designs with heirloom quality. Commit to a theme, mix and match from different collections, or combine with cherished favourites brought down from the loft year after year to curate a look that's uniquely yours. Whatever aesthetic you decide to embrace for the big day, here's how to design a table that will earn you plenty of Christmas compliments.

A TWIST ON TRADITION

Christmas dinner at a classically laid table is even better when there are a few surprises along the way. Dunelm's Heritage collection features traditional colours, motifs and finishes with unexpected twists – think a vintage-inspired palette of red and green layered with clay and rose, or antique-style fabrics embroidered with metallic details. Other ways to achieve the look include a tartan tablecloth topped with scalloped placemats, and cookware you can pop on the table directly from the oven. Add natural foliage intertwined with ornate decorations along the centre, and finish with burgundy velvet bows on everything from curtains to napkins and glasses.

Tartan **tablecloth**, from £18; woven **charger plate**, £12; small burgundy **bow with clip**, £4

Scalloped **placemats**, £6/two; gold stag **salt and pepper shaker**, £12

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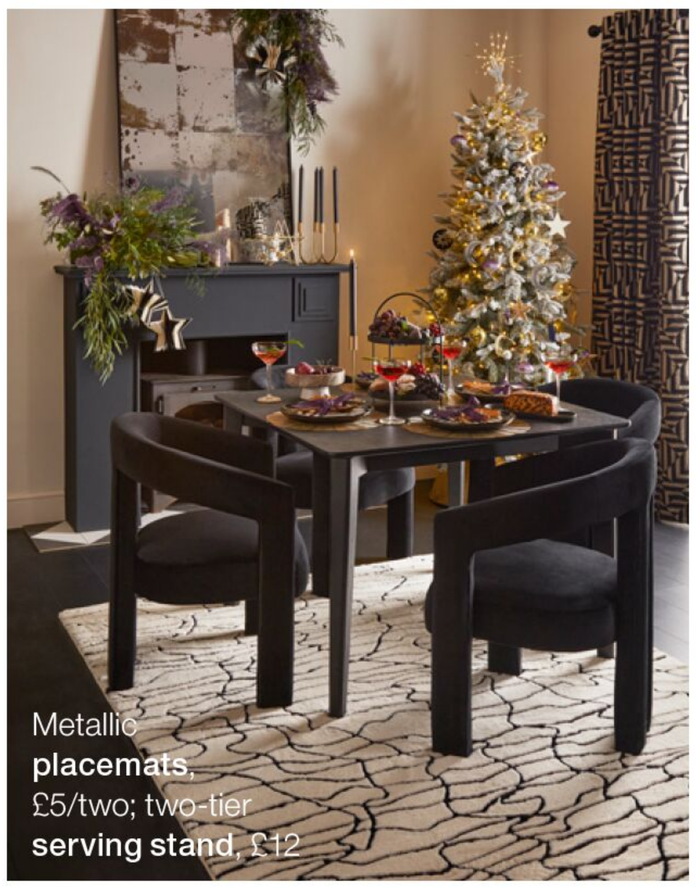
HO HO HOMEMADE

Set the stage for comfort and joy this season with characterful tableware and playful decorations inspired by childhood and Christmases past. Even a 'grown-up' table can evoke a sense of nostalgia when a crisp white linen tablecloth and similarly neutral crockery is layered with the colourful pieces from Dunelm's Crafted Christmas range. Whimsical touches, such as the red and white striped table runner and napkins; and gingerbread gravy boat and saucer, bring the whole thing to life – delighting guests of every age. For even more fun, add real mini gingerbread houses to place settings, iced with the names of your friends and family, so not only does everyone know where they're meant to be sitting, they all get an extra treat to take home too.

Candy cane **napkins**, £6/four; gingerbread **gravy boat and saucer**, £14; nutcracker **candlestick holders**, £10/two

Camille 12-piece **dinner set**, £40; Allegra **flute**, £2



Metallic **placemats**, £5/two; two-tier **serving stand**, £12

STARS OF THE SHOW

After years embracing the 'quiet luxury' aesthetic – think subdued colours and restrained patterns – a 'more is more' approach is firmly back on the agenda this Christmas. Tap into the trend by laying your table with the luxurious pieces in Dunelm's Celestial Glamour collection, inspired by the Art Deco era. Think sparkling textures, bold patterns, statement metallics, plush velvets and stellar motifs that dial up the drama and get everyone talking. To really lean into the look, team decadent place settings comprising the likes of black dinner plates and gold-band coupe glasses with a statement garland centrepiece dripping in a variety of glitzy and starry decorations. Against the dark green backdrop, they'll look like a constellation twinkling in the night sky.

Lovato **dining chair**, £149; gold band **coupe**, £3; LED star candle **centrepiece**, £12

Discover the full festive range online at dunelm.com or in-store, where you can Click & Collect in as little as two hours

Dunelm

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THE PLANTS THAT MAKE A

WINTER GARDEN

The days might be cold and grey but your outside space can still bring you joy – there are sturdy, vigorous plants that will fill it with beauty and heart-lifting colour…

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Boundary planting at John's Garden, Ashwood Nurseries

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FESTIVE FAVOURITES

✱ Cotoneaster
Easy to grow, this makes a good feature shrub for its coloured berries in winter. *Cotoneaster* 'Cornubia' is a semi-evergreen small tree with leaves that stay green through all but the coldest of winters. Some species can be used for hedging and covering awkward corners and slopes.

✱ Grevillea
These shrubs produce pretty, spidery blooms from late November through to spring. *Grevillea rosmarinifolia* has needles that resemble rosemary, albeit unscented. In a pot, they will stop visitors in their tracks because they put on such a good show throughout the winter.

✱ Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)
The most Christmassy of all plants, holly makes an excellent hedge – look out for little birds resting on the branches and gorging on the berries. Holly prefers partial shade and fairly well-drained soil.

Grevillea

Cotoneaster

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Spanish fir

Weymouth pine

Bhutan pine

PERFECT PINES

✱ **Spanish fir (*Abies pinsapo* 'Aurea')**
Happy in most soils, this beautiful conifer has sausage-shaped shoots that radiate out from the central stem, bearing golden-yellow new foliage that turns green in winter. It looks good in a mixed shrubbery but is equally attractive in a container.

✱ **Weymouth pine (*Pinus strobus* 'Green Twist')**
This has attractive needles that are twisted as if it's had a 'bad hair day'. It would make a lovely addition to a sunny border or at the front of a conifer border. Alternatively, let it shine in a large container in sun or light shade.

✱ **Bhutan pine (*Pinus wallichiana*)**
Large, spreading branches that swoop elegantly to the ground hold long, blue-grey needles and elongated cones. It makes an eye-catching specimen plant or could provide a bold statement at the edge of a large garden.

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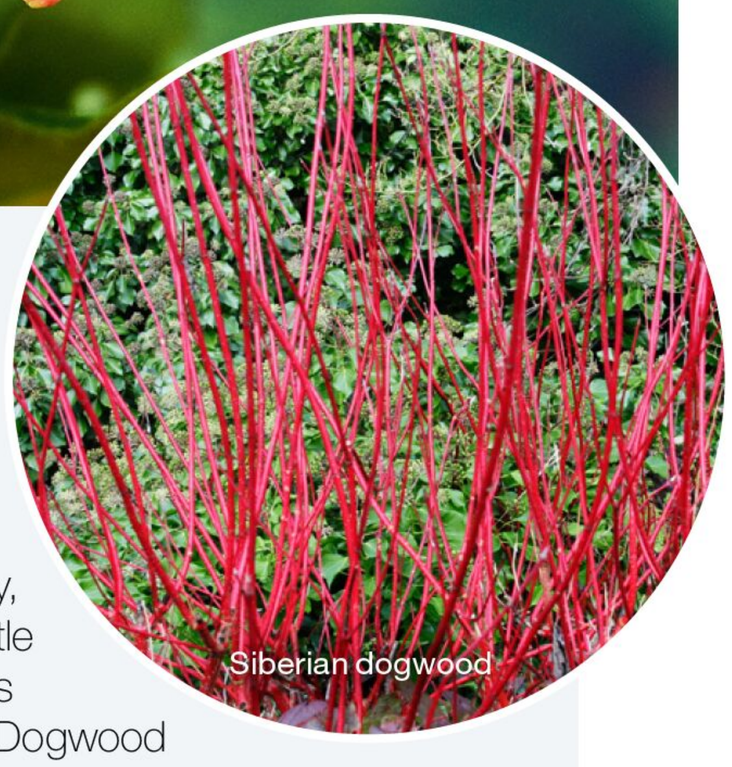
Viburnum tinus
'Eve Price'

FIRE & ICE

✱ Siberian dogwood
(*Cornus alba* 'Sibirica')
Grown for its coloured stems, this thrives in heavy, damp conditions where little else grows well and makes a vibrant display in winter. Dogwood looks best when grown in groups of a single colour, such as this stunning fiery red.



Siberian dogwood

✱ *Viburnum tinus* 'Eve Price'
This variety has a small, dense habit, with neat evergreen leaves and lots of white flowers that would suit a cottage garden style of planting. It can be used for informal hedging, as part of windbreak planting and evergreen screening.

✱ Coral bark willow
(*Salix alba vitellina* var. 'Britzensis')
With its bright orange young stems, this would be a brilliant centrepiece in a winter garden. It will tolerate windy conditions and any aspect though, as with most willows, it needs moist but draining soil.

NATURE'S BAUBLES

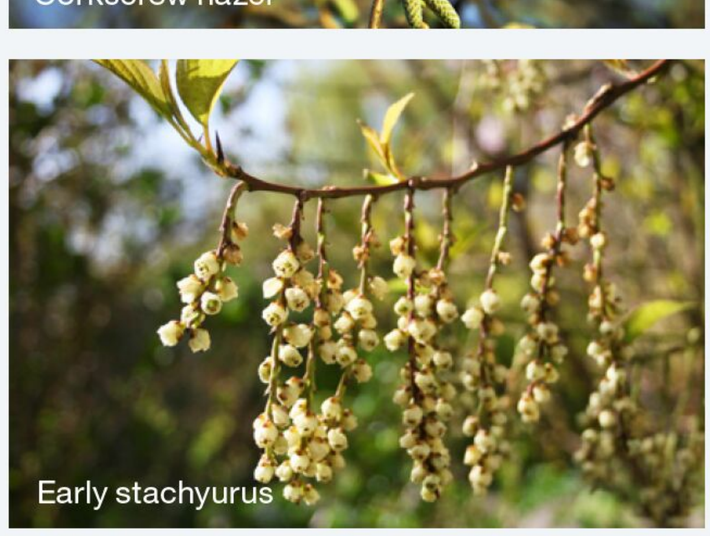
✱ Fern-leaved clematis
(*Clematis cirrhosa* var. *balearica*)
One of a handful of winter-flowering clematis, this produces its bell-shaped flowers at Christmastime. It's great for a warm garden wall or it can work well in a large container in a sheltered spot.

✱ Corkscrew hazel
(*Corylus avellana* 'Contorta')
Ideal in an informal border underplanted with woodland primroses, anemones and pulmonaria. As spring advances, the twisted stems push out green buds and extend dancing catkins along the branches.

✱ Early stachyurus
(*Stachyurus praecox*)
An outstanding shrub, this deserves a place in the winter garden or general shrubbery. Tall branches have stiff spikes of lemon-yellow, bell-shaped flowers that appear in late winter and early spring.

Fern-leaved clematis

Corkscrew hazel



Early stachyurus

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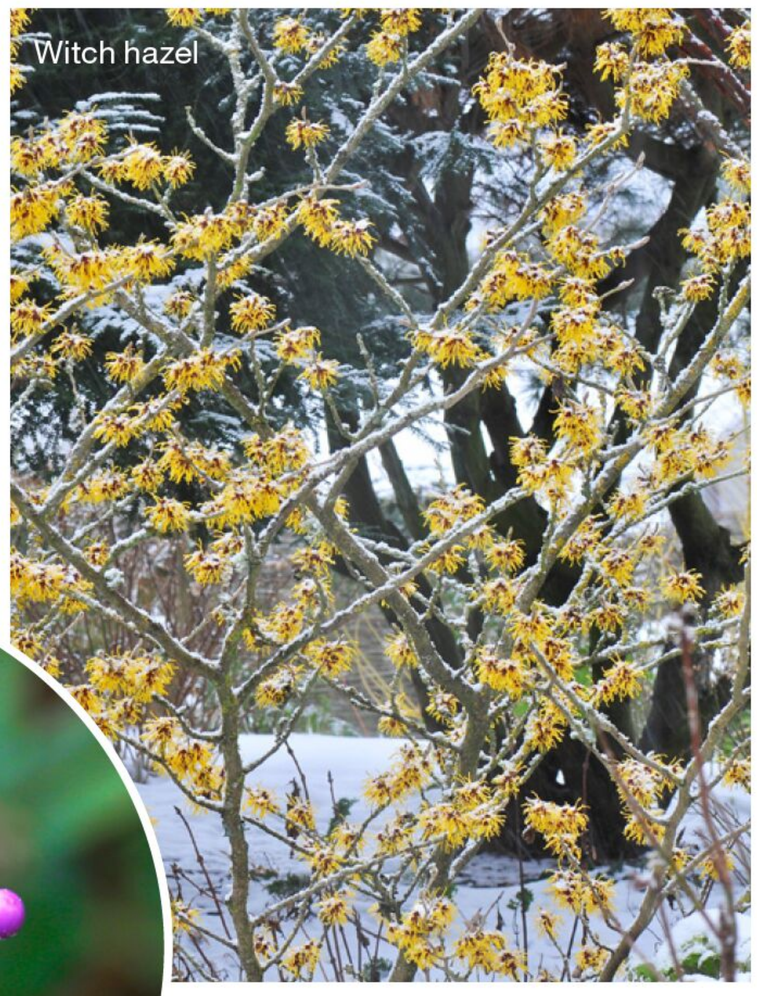
HELLEBORES WILL BRING COLOUR AND INTEREST'

Hellebores


Witch hazel

Callicarpa

THE MOST VIBRANT STARS

✱ Hellebore (*Christmas rose, Lenten rose*)
A great option for bringing colour and interest to the winter garden. Whereas the Christmas rose (*Helleborus niger*) has white flowers with markedly yellow stamens, the flowers of the hybrids (*Helleborus* x *hybridus*) have been bred to include pink, red, white, green, yellow and near-black. Hellebores prefer rich soil in shade.

✱ Witch hazel (*Hamamelis mollis*)
This makes an outstanding winter shrub. Popular for its scent as well as its appearance, it takes its moment in the spotlight, then retreats to the background. Witch hazel needs a little shelter and shade, although it will grow in full sun if the soil is moist enough.

✱ Callicarpa (*Callicarpa bodinieri* var. *giraldii* 'Profusion')
With dazzling purple berries that follow pink-flushed white flowers, callicarpa really steals the show in autumn and winter. It likes fertile, draining soil in sun or light shade. Place it near other shrubs such as sarcococca and choisya for contrasting foliage that allows the berries to shine.

Extracted from *Designing and Creating a Winter Garden* by Sally Gregson (£20, The Crowood Press)

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How green is your Christmas?

The tree is the centrepiece of our celebrations – in fact, it's estimated that 85 per cent* of UK homes put one up. But when it comes to sustainability, which is better – real or fake? Let's crunch the numbers…

The annual ritual of buying the perfect tree, the evocative scent of pine that hits you in unexpected moments… Surely natural is best? The answer is, it depends – with factors such as how long you use your faux fir for and how you dispose of your real tree being key.

* Most real trees are grown commercially and take around 10-12 years to mature to the most popular height – 6ft (about 2 metres). During that time, they provide a habitat for wildlife and capture carbon from the atmosphere. In short, growing trees to be sold can be a good thing, according to the Soil Association.
* Most artificial trees are made in China, with the double environmental whammy of being made from plastic, PVC and metal, then shipped overseas. Also, they aren't recyclable, so end up in landfill, contributing further to carbon emissions.
* According to the Carbon Trust, a two-metre artificial tree has a carbon footprint of around 40kg, more than 10 times that of a real tree that is burnt after Christmas. This means an artificial tree would need to be used for 10 years to offset its carbon footprint; however, it's estimated that most fake trees are used only four times.

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IF YOU'RE BUYING A REAL TREE...

GO LOCAL This helps support local farmers and reduces transportation emissions.

LOOK OUT FOR FSC-CERTIFIED TREES (Forest Stewardship Council), as they're grown in a responsibly managed way.

DISPOSE RESPONSIBLY Real trees can be composted or recycled. If they end up in landfill, they give off methane gas as they decompose.

CONSIDER A POT-GROWN TREE This will extend its life and carbon-absorbing capacity long after the holidays are over.

RENT OR 'ADOPT' A TREE This preserves its life and you may even get the same one back the following year. You can find a local service online.

EXPERT VIEW Dr Stuart Walker of the University of Sheffield says: 'Real trees are often the most sustainable choice, but only if disposed of thoughtfully.'

IF YOU'RE BUYING A FAUX TREE...

CHOOSE ONE WITH STAYING POWER Opt for a style that you know you'll love for the long term. Using the same model year after year is the most sustainable approach.

THINK ECO There are lots of options to consider, from trees made from recycled plastics to sustainable wooden and even minimalist metal ones – all of which will provide a long-lasting hit of Christmas spirit.

CONSIDER A PRE-LIT TREE This will eliminate the need to add lights, potentially reducing energy consumption (to say nothing of stress-inducing tangles).

EXPERT VIEW Dr Stuart Walker says: 'Often the most sustainable choice is something you already own, so reusing an artificial tree as many times as possible reduces its environmental impact.'

WHAT'S THE MOST ECO-FRIENDLY WAY TO DISPOSE OF A REAL CHRISTMAS TREE?

✱ Firstly, don't drive too far to dispose of it! Most local authorities will either have a collection service or drop-off point. The tree will be transformed into chippings or compost to benefit the soil in local parks. If your garden is big enough, consider chopping up your tree and stacking the pieces in a secluded spot – a simple way to create a bit of a refuge for wildlife.

✱ If your council offers a garden-waste service, you can chop up your tree and place it in the green bin.

✱ Many charities run recycling schemes in exchange for a donation.

WORDS ELAINE GRIFFITHS **PHOTOGRAPHS** BRENT DARBY; DAN DUCHARS; THE WHITE COMPANY
*THE BRITISH CHRISTMAS TREE GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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THE HouseBeautiful COLLECTION *

WHAT'S HOT RIGHT NOW AT **DFS, SPLASHBACK** AND **HILLARYS**

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, so why not add a little sparkle and joy to your home for when family and friends come to visit? We'll get the party started with the divine Maura sofa and stylish Cosma dining set from DFS, then sashay into a fabulous starry number from Splashback before rounding off the show with a bright and beautiful bamboo Venetian blind from Hillarys. Enjoy…→

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THE HouseBeautiful COLLECTION AT dfs

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS...

This festive season, entertain your guests in comfort and style with Maura and Cosma from the **House Beautiful Collection** at **DFS**

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL MAURA
RIGHT-HAND FACING SMALL CHAISE SOFA, £1,599

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HOUSE BEAUTIFUL COSMA **DINING TABLE**, £799; COSMA **DINING CHAIRS**, £229 EACH

You might not be hearing the jingle of sleigh bells just yet, but there's no denying that Christmas is fast approaching. And that usually means friends and family descending, looking to be fed, watered and entertained. So this year, why not welcome them in fine festive style with a new sofa to relax on while watching *The Sound of Music* and somewhere stylish to dine on the big day? Say hello to House Beautiful Maura and Cosma. Upholstered in a thick, luxurious short pile fabric with a subtle diamond pattern in the weave, Maura comes in 10 on-trend colours including Denim (left), with fully reversible back cushions, deep profiled seat cushions and an enviable chaise end that might just start an argument or two over who gets to sit there! Cosma, available in three shades including oak veneer (above), with its contemporary ribbing and stylish curves, seats six comfortably and makes a real statement paired with the minimalist curved chairs and tactile woven seats. With House Beautiful and DFS, this really is the most wonderful time of the year.

FIND MORE INSPIRATION AT **DFS.CO.UK**

dfs

DISCOVER THE FULL HOUSE BEAUTIFUL COLLECTION AT **DFS.CO.UK**

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THE HouseBeautiful COLLECTION AT SPLASH|BACK

OH, LITTLE STARS

Add some Christmas sparkle to your kitchen with the **House Beautiful Collection** at **Splashback**

Here at *House Beautiful*, we believe the magic of Christmas should be everywhere in your home… and that includes the kitchen! So why not treat yourself (and your stove) to a festive starry glass backdrop from our exclusive collection? A brilliant alternative to tiles or paint, these chic splashbacks are crafted from 6mm toughened glass for strength, durability and easy cleanability. Heat-resistant, they are perfect for use behind hobs, ranges and sinks, protecting walls from splashes, stains and steam.

Every splashback in the House Beautiful Collection is quick and easy to install – simply peel off the super-strong, self-adhesive backing before sticking to the wall and sealing with clear silicone. It's as easy as that!

SCAN HERE TO SEE THE FULL **HOUSE BEAUTIFUL SPLASHBACK COLLECTION**

FIND MORE INSPIRATION AT **SPLASHBACK.CO.UK**

SPLASH|BACK

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL GLASS **SPLASHBACK** IN JASPER INDIGO, FROM £119

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BAMBOO BLINDS AT HILLARYS

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HOUSE BEAUTIFUL
NATURAL BAMBOO
VENETIAN **BLINDS**
IN MARBLE

THE HouseBeautiful COLLECTION AT HILLARYS
For the **window wise**

BYE BYE, BLEAK MIDWINTER

Brighten up your home for the dark months ahead with a natural bamboo Venetian blind from the **House Beautiful Collection** at **Hillarys**

Wouldn't it be good if you could pull the blinds on the cold, dark outdoors at this time of year? Well, thanks to *House Beautiful*, you literally can! Made from FSC®-certified, fast-growing bamboo, these contemporary blinds have a subtle woodgrain texture and come in six on-trend shades, including crisp Marble (above). You can also choose between a brushed or painted finish, and 15 tape colours and eight metal pulls that can be mixed and matched. Like every blind in the collection, they'll be made to measure and fitted by an expert local advisor for the perfect fit first time. Blinds that not only look good but also help take care of the world's forests… that's a Christmas present we'd be happy with!

DISCOVER THE FULL HOUSE BEAUTIFUL COLLECTION AT **HILLARYS.CO.UK**

FIND MORE INSPIRATION AT **HILLARYS.CO.UK**

HILLARYS
For the **window wise**

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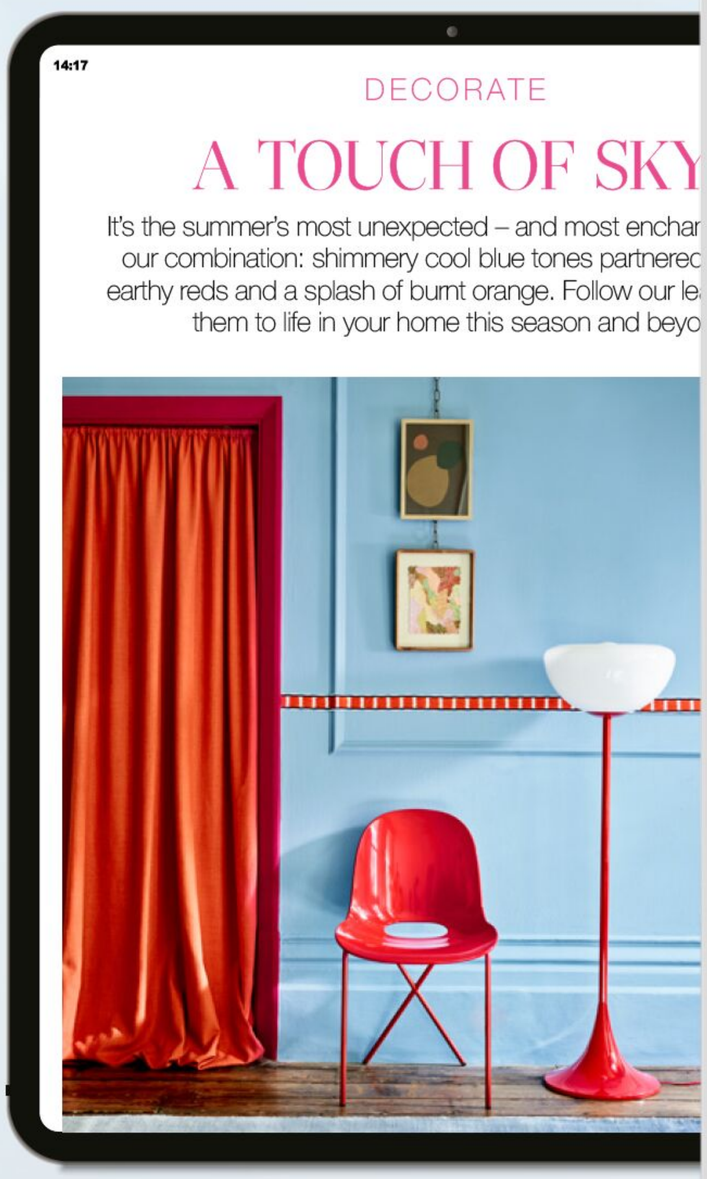

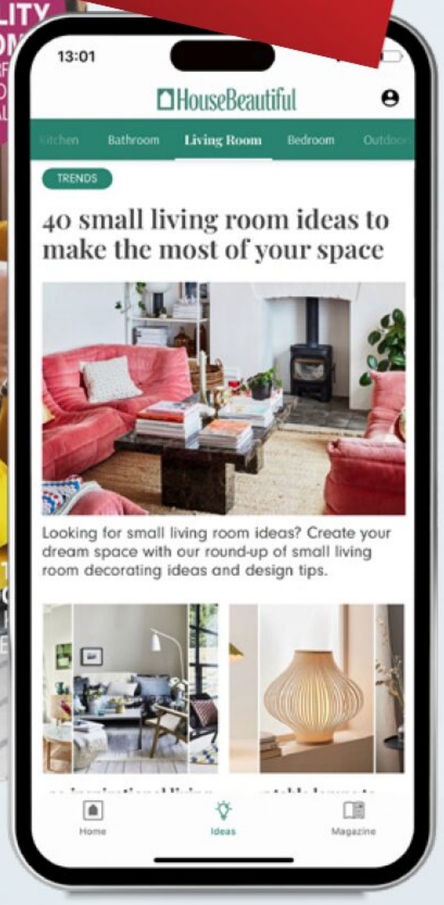

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Ms Khumalo, House Beautiful member

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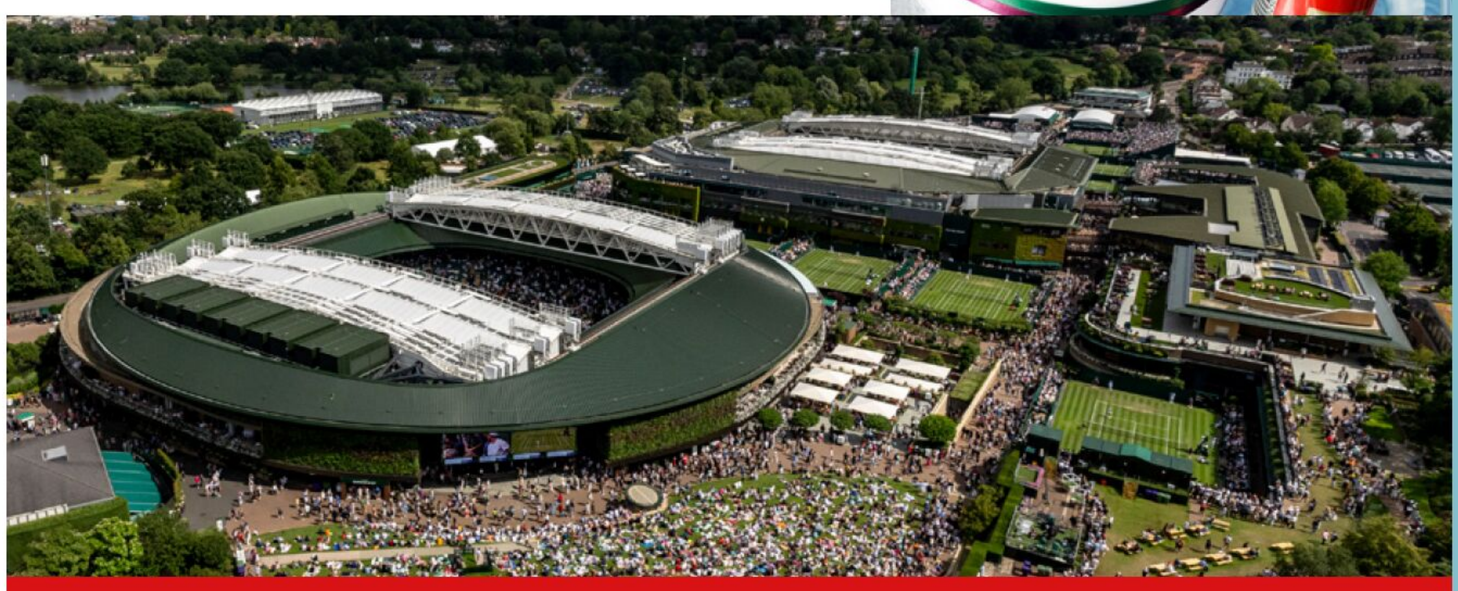

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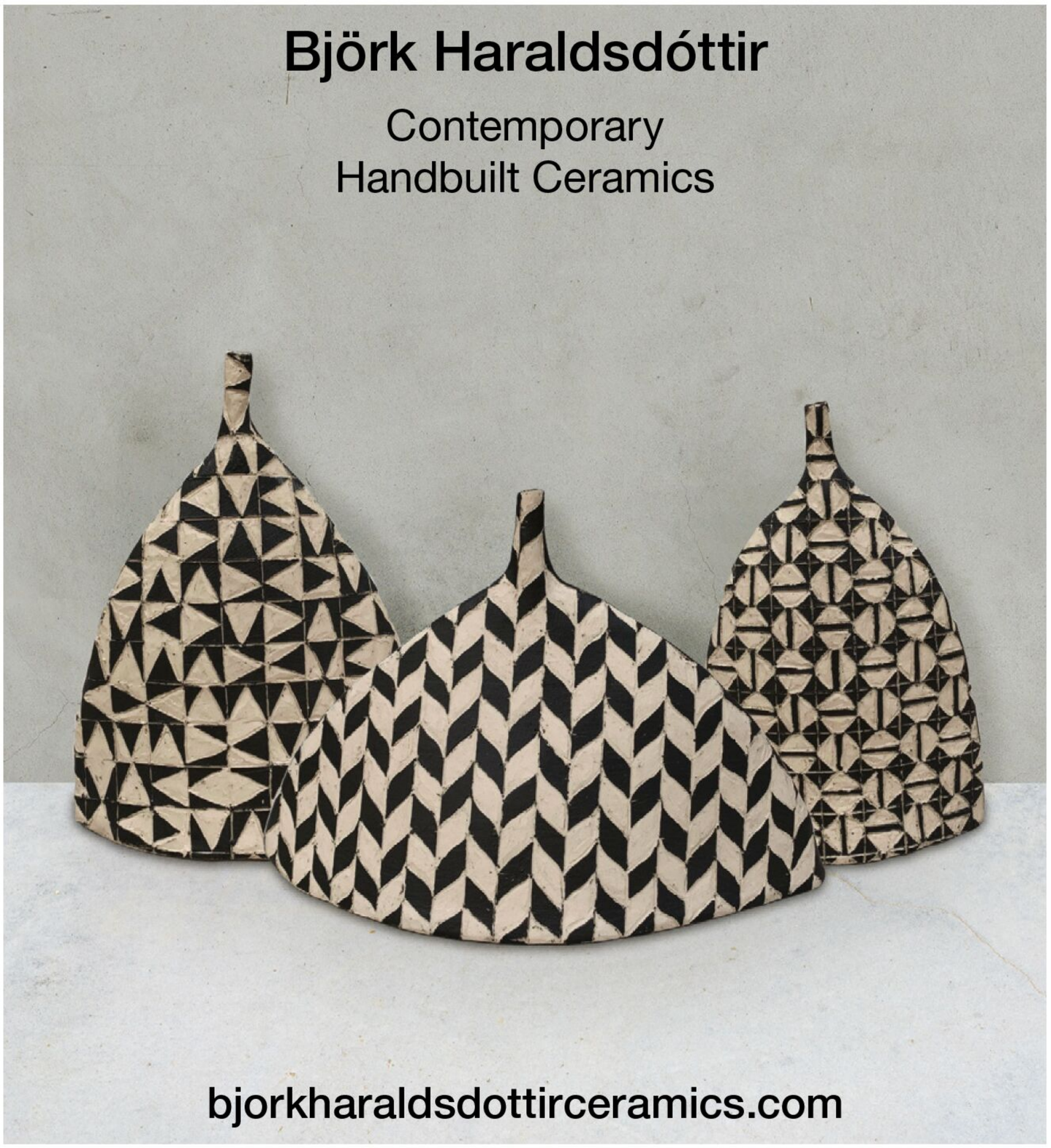

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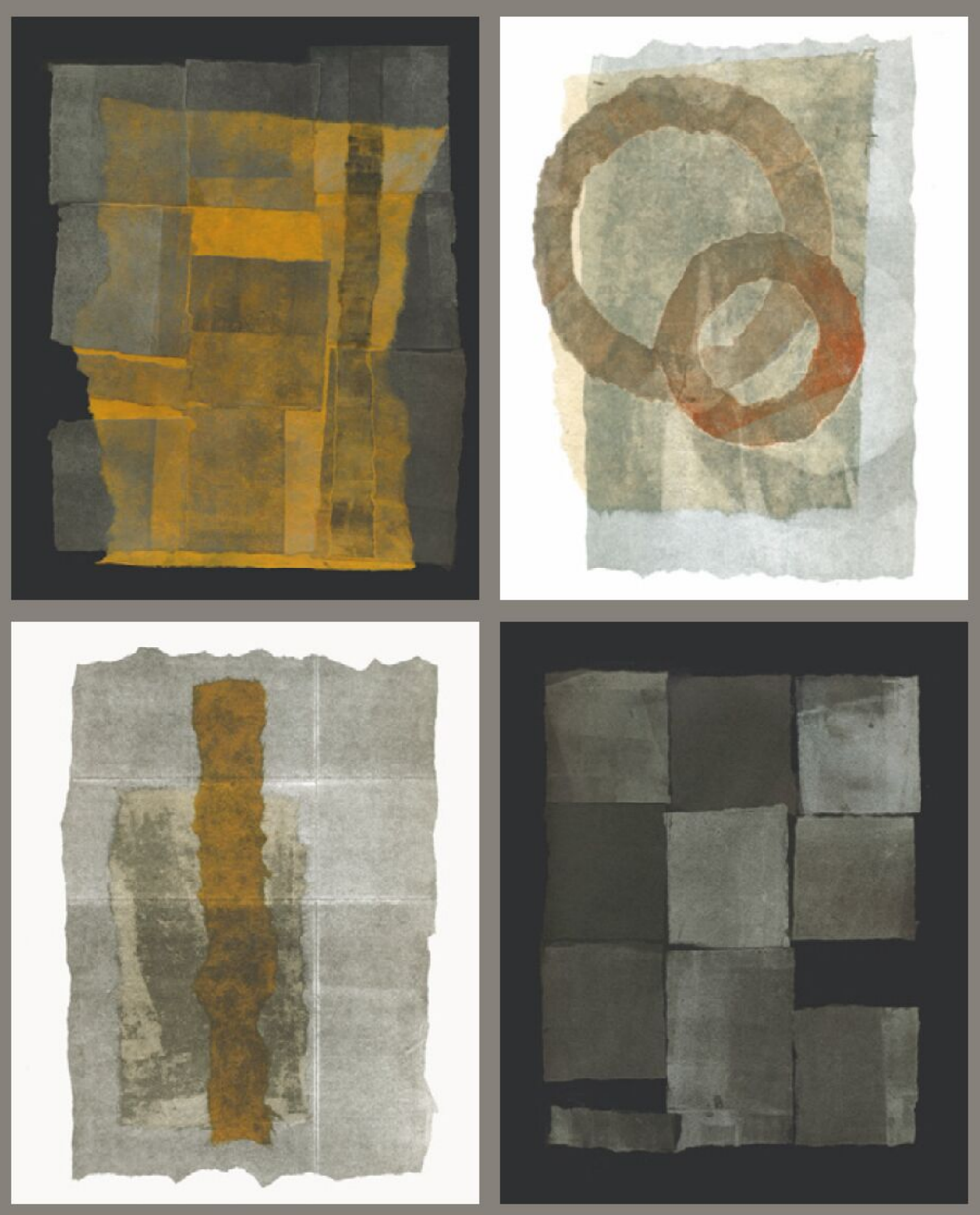

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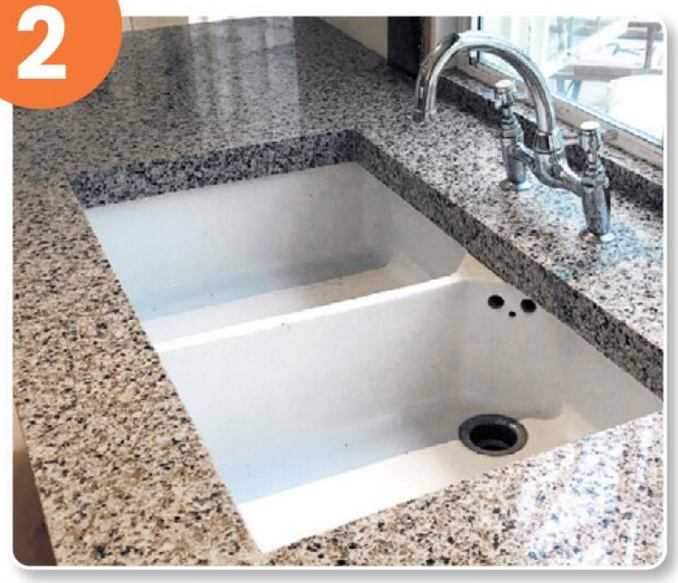

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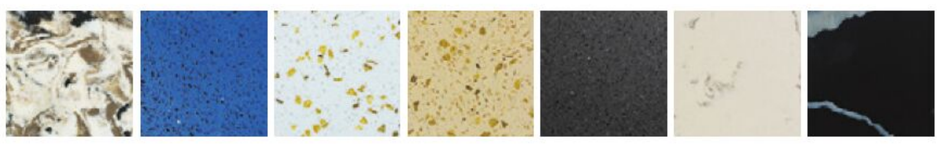

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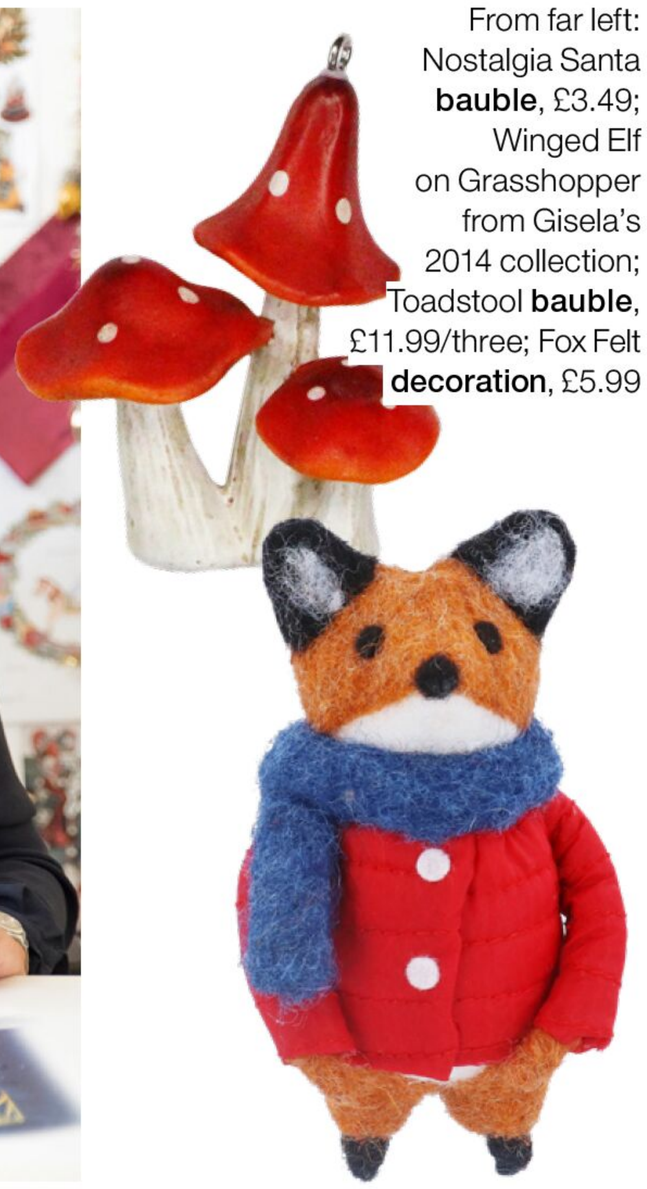
‘Even now, I still get excited about decorating’

It really is Christmas every day for **Gisela Graham**, the founder of one of the UK’s leading festive brands. She shares why it’s such a nostalgic time of year – and reveals her favourite bauble of all time



From far left: Nostalgia Santa **bauble**, £3.49; Winged Elf on Grasshopper from Gisela’s 2014 collection; Toadstool **bauble**, £11.99/three; Fox Felt **decoration**, £5.99

What are your happiest Christmas memories?
I was fortunate to grow up in a family where Christmas was hugely important. It was a wonderfully magical time of family, food, laughter, tradition and lots and lots of decorations. My mother and I used to make stars from straw and, as a consequence, stars – in all their various forms – have always been an integral part of every collection I design.

When do you feel that the season has really started?
It’s the change of November into December. This is when I start to get excited about decorations, guests and preparations. When you work on Christmas all year round though, you never really come out of the season – there’s always a new theme to discuss or a bauble to design.

And your favourite bauble of all time?
A winged elf astride a smiling grasshopper from our 2014 collection – it’s now a collectors’ piece!

What are the trends you’re seeing in festive decorating?
Our Nostalgia range is outselling every other category this year. Over the 40 years I’ve been in business, I’ve noticed that when the world is in a particularly challenging place, people want a Christmas that reminds them either of their own childhood or an idealised version of how a Christmas past might have looked.

How would you describe your own seasonal decoration style?
At home, I have a preference for a simple Scandi look, with plenty of white and green, and natural elements such as wood. This, I’m sure, ties back into my childhood memories of Christmases in Germany.

Do you have any cherished seasonal rituals?
Many of them are rooted in my upbringing, including giving presents on Christmas Eve. In Germany, the evening before the day itself is when we have our main festive meal and exchange gifts, and my husband and I stuck to that when our children were small. Now, it’s embedded in our family Christmas, even though sadly my husband is no longer with us. It brings me great joy and comfort, plus we also still give some gifts the next day too – so we have the best of both traditions!

‘THERE’S ROOM FOR “BAD TASTE” AND FUN AT CHRISTMAS’

The best present you’ve ever received?
A gold rough mini-bead necklace designed by my sister.

What do you think really brings the Christmas spirit into a home?
I believe it’s family traditions. It could be attending a carol concert, baking mince pies or simply reusing some much-loved decorations. For me, it’s spending those very special few days with the ones I love, watching old movies, playing games and doing the same things we’ve always done, year after year.

Is there ever room for ‘bad taste’ at Christmas?
Yes! The season is about fun and feeling contentment. It doesn’t matter how you decorate, so long as you’re happy with the result.

Do you feel sad or relieved when it’s all over?
Christmas is never over when you work with it all year round! We already know precisely what Christmas 2026 will look like and are working on 2027. When I pack away my own decorations at home, my mind is already racing on to the next two years ahead, so there’s never sadness – always a kernel of excitement.

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