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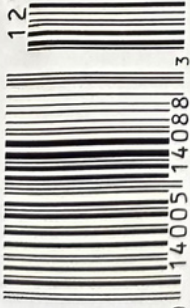
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Lynne Rossetto Kasper
DINNER PARTY SECRETS



A home for t



Each Christmas, Jay and Heather Strommens' cozy Cape Cod-style home in Deephaven, Minnesota, swells with cheer, handmade Italian pasta and family. Lots of it. Seventeen members of Heather's far-flung Italian family join the Strommens and their four kids for four days of festivities and joyful meals. "It's like a big campout," Heather says. To make her warm and welcoming home even merrier, she brings Yuletide elegance to every room, pairing natural materials with holiday decor in calming, muted tones. Share in their treasured Christmas traditions and delightful decorating.

WRITER CHRISTINE HOFMANN-BOURQUE • PHOTOGRAPHER GREG SCHEIDEMANN
FIELD EDITOR BONNIE BROTEN

for the holidays



Homeowners Jay and Heather Strommen, with Rosie, welcome family for the holidays. (Opposite top) The home's ruby red exterior adds to its quintessential Christmas character. (Opposite, far left) Heather's brother Jon rolls pasta for their authentic Italian Christmas Eve dinner. (Opposite left) Sprigs of pine and berries dress up framed photos. (Right) Clipped greens bring a wintry touch to roses.



Dried hydrangeas and pheasant feathers dress up a faux pine wreath encircling the wooden deer head in the living room.



To kick off the holiday season, Heather decorates the house for Christmas the day before Thanksgiving. Though she dresses the exterior with bright, old-fashioned colored lights, inside she favors a muted palette of rosy pinks mixed with natural greens. The refined hues suit her home's English cottage style.

Natural materials take center stage against the calming colors. Pomegranates and pinecones fill bowls, vases show off branches with berries, and burlap ribbons dance across a mantel. In addition to the fir tree in the living room, Heather places fresh greens by the sleighful: on mantels, behind picture frames in a hallway and at place settings on the dinner table. "I get into Christmas and really go to town," says Heather, who used to own an antiques business.

The cozy home, with its festive flourishes, sets the mood for celebrating traditions. Each year, Heather hosts a spirited ornament exchange party for neighbors. The family usually goes caroling in the neighborhood and ice-skating at a nearby park. When Heather and Jay's oldest son, Jack, 16, comes home from hockey boarding school in Canada, they set up a rink in the yard for family and neighbors to enjoy pickup games.



A HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

(Above) Molly, a corgi, trots through the front hallway made seasonal garlands and festive reindeer.

(Left) Ornaments on the living room tree have special meaning: horses for Emmie; robots for Miles; hockey sticks for Jack; and ballerinas for Ruby. "They are all about certain times in their lives," Heather says.





A wreath made of antique ornaments hangs in front of the dining room's mirror, adding subtle glitz. For Christmas dinner, the big group overflows from this elegant dining table to the living room and kitchen.



A HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS



(Left) Nephew Julian enjoys a holiday treat at the kitchen island. (Right) Heather enlists Ruby (middle) and Emmie to finish some last-minute wrapping.





“We are Italians, and we all get in the kitchen and cook and cook.”
Heather Strommen



(Left) Nephew Elijah breaks for a snack while helping his dad, Jon, roll pasta. (Right) Cabinets in the newly remodeled kitchen wear a mix of paints and stains for a done-over-decades look. Sprigs of pine add a seasonal touch.



(Above left) The kitchen gets its vintage style from counter-to-ceiling cabinets, soapstone countertops and subway tile. (Above) Heather designed the glass-front pantry with sliding doors. “It looks like a little grocery store,” she says.



(Left) Heather fills vintage lanterns with pinecones, canopies, greens and a doll of Santa, and dresses them as gifts for the kids. She kept this as a memento.

The celebration culminates with Christmas Eve dinner, a tradition that has its roots in Italy, where Heather's grandfather was born. "We are Italians, and we all get in the kitchen and cook and cook," she says. The evening's designated chef is Heather's brother Jon. Using his grandmother Dorothy's recipes (which he has tweaked through the years), he makes meatballs, sausages, and hand-rolled spaghetti and ravioli. The whole gang helps assemble the pasta and bake Grandma's favorite dessert, chocolate pie. "Just spending time together is what makes it so special," Heather says.

After a day of cooking and playing in the snow, Heather pulls out holiday pillows and blankets. "I want everyone to feel like they can wrap up with a blanket and snuggle by the fire," she says. And curl up they do: All out-of-town guests sleep at the house. Adults lay their heads in the "garrottage" (a detached garage converted into a guest house cottage); kids roll out sleeping bags in the basement. They don't mind that space is tight; all the better for embracing the best tradition of all: togetherness. ■

For buying guide, see page 94.

A HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

(Above left) Pickup hockey games are a favorite family event. Jay practices with (from left) Emmie, Ruby and Miles.

(Below left) The S on the master bedroom's white pillow stands for Santa and Strommen. Grass-cloth wallpaper adds texture and a hint of color behind the built-in nightstand and headboard.



See more home decorating ideas on page 94 and download the Tag Reader and scan to midwest



Heather filled
lanterns with
cones, candles,
and a drawing
of Santa, then gave
them as gifts last year.
She kept this one as
a memento.

White hand-
knitted stockings suit
the festive but
neutral Christmas color
choices. Boxwood trees
and Hypericum berries
are tucked into the
mantel.



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In the back entry, a mix of faux and real evergreens brings holiday spirit. Ice skates with red pom-poms make an easy entry table arrangement; an apothecary jar filled with twigs adds an unexpected accent.