



ANTIQUES IN STYLE

HOLIDAY TABLESCAPES

By Inessa Stewart



We live in a fast-paced age where our communications travel across the world in seconds. Our face-to-face gatherings with family and friends carry even more meaning than ever. The holidays will soon be upon us, and what better way to entertain your loved ones than to create an unforgettable table setting? It's the perfect time of year to reconnect with old friends and cultivate new ones while lingering over lovely, delicious meals served on a beautifully decorated table.

The reason I love - truly love - designing enchanting table and holiday displays is because it gives me a chance to use my diverse antique collection to make the events unique, extraordinary and treasured. The china, glassware, flatware and the antiques I use to dress the table provide so much pleasure. The whole process is a joy from the moment I start planning until the last guests have left.

As a young girl growing up in Europe, I remember being fascinated by the traditions of entertaining and creating visually stimulating table settings. I'm sure this fascination is what started my fondness for antique china, porcelain and silver. Using incredible antique objects inspires the imagination, and a blend of both refined and rustic items produces a beautiful impact.

Here are a few simple steps to assist you when creating enchanting antique arrangements and displays this season.

First, we start with the antique furniture's foundation, which will determine the shape and the scale of your venue. Whether you are working with a round table or a rectangular one, the configuration of your centerpiece should reflect the style, structure and scale of your room.

Next, find an element of inspiration. This could be anything from an object to a favorite color scheme. Once inspired, assemble the elements of your table plan: vases, plates, silver, linens, glassware and other elements for a complete design. These decorative components will make the first impression and set the tone for the event. I love the mixture of antique and new pieces, and the holidays are the perfect time to bring out your silver and fine china to indulge in a little opulence.

Now you're ready to decide on a centerpiece. At this time of year, our stores and farmers' markets are bursting with seasonal abundance, so a beautiful antique container is sometimes all you need to create a momentous display. In the past, I have used antique birdcages filled with foliage, small shrines, statues and sometimes simply groupings of transferware pitchers to create a splendid setting.

Lastly, it's time to set the table. I like to create a special layered look using glass, pewter or silver chargers, various plates (not always matching, but coordinating) for our color scheme. Holiday entertaining is a terrific opportunity to use antique or inherited fine china and silver. It is the perfect time to make treasured family heirlooms part of your memorable setting - and create new special memories with friends and loved ones.

However, if you prefer the more casual buffet style decorating rather than the sit-down formal gathering, the guidelines above can just as easily be used to set up dramatic displays using seasonal hues with antique copper, pewter or Country French confit pots, for example. Gather fresh branches of leaves and berries from the yard, and repeat elements in trios to create interest and visual mass for maximum impact - bringing the beauty of the outdoors inside. I often use potted plants, topiaries and small boxwoods placed in antique pails for added structure and texture.

It is my hope that these tips help you start new holiday traditions with renewed vigor, inspiration and enthusiasm to celebrate this magical season!