

Published December 22nd, 2010

Decorating for the Holidays-Just Do It

By Andrea A. Firth

For Nikolene Isely, decorating for the holidays is a joy not a chore. "Making your home festive for the holidays is a creative process," says Isely, the owner of Staging by Design in Moraga. "It's important to be spontaneous and to try something new. That's what makes it fun." To get some fresh ideas for festive holiday décor, Isely took the Lamorinda Weekly on a tour of three area homes - her own, and the homes of her colleague Erin Mason and her friend Sue Cuneo.

All three women have backgrounds in design and staging, and they each have a unique holiday look that fits their home and style.

The holiday décor in Isely's home is traditional with some twists. "I like to combine things in an unexpected way, making new connections is the fun part," says Isely. For example, she pairs crystal goblets with spray-painted gourds, shiny silver balls, and a lime green fabric remnant to create an elegant and playful table centerpiece. Erin Mason's holiday home has a rustic, natural look, and there is a version of "Rudolph" (without the shiny red-nose) in almost every room. "I've collected the reindeer over the years," says Mason. "I also like organic materials. This year, I am using burlap and jute as accents." And the blues and

Nikolene Isely created 3 unique wreaths for these 3 different doors. Photos Doug Kohen Sue Cuneo used pine cones and a great bow to create a special entranceway welcome.

yellow in Sue Cuneo's cozy, country-style home provide a good backdrop for her Santas and snowmen and make her cherry-red ornaments pop.

Photographs of these homes are displayed on this page and page L3, and a more complete photo gallery can be accessed at www.lamorindaweekly.com/deco.html.

First Impressions

A wreath on the front door is the perfect place to start decorating for the holidays, and the look of the wreath can be easily changed or updated from year to year. Isely likes to use fresh wreaths but finds the faux wreaths available today very attractive as well. It's important to coordinate with the front door color, notes the designer, "The customary red and green colors of Christmas don't work on every door." When Isely shops for wreath decorations she keeps the front door color in mind and builds from there. "Less is more. You only need three or four decorative elements to make a special wreath," she says. "You want your brightest element to really bring some punch and not be overwhelmed. Sometimes a fabulous bow and a bit of ribbon is all you need."

Getting Started

When you start to plan your holiday décor there are a number of things to consider, says Isely, who also does home holiday decorating professionally. "You need to think about the style of the house, the family's lifestyle, and the colors that run through the home." There are a host of holiday decor color options available so that the decorations can be coordinated with the home's interior décor. "Right now there are a lot of copper-colored holiday decorations available," says Isely. She suggests mixing the copper with bronze and gold decorations for a home that has peach tones.

"I always start decorating right at the beginning of December, so we can enjoy the decorations through the season," says Mason, "But then I take it down really quickly once the holiday is over," she adds.

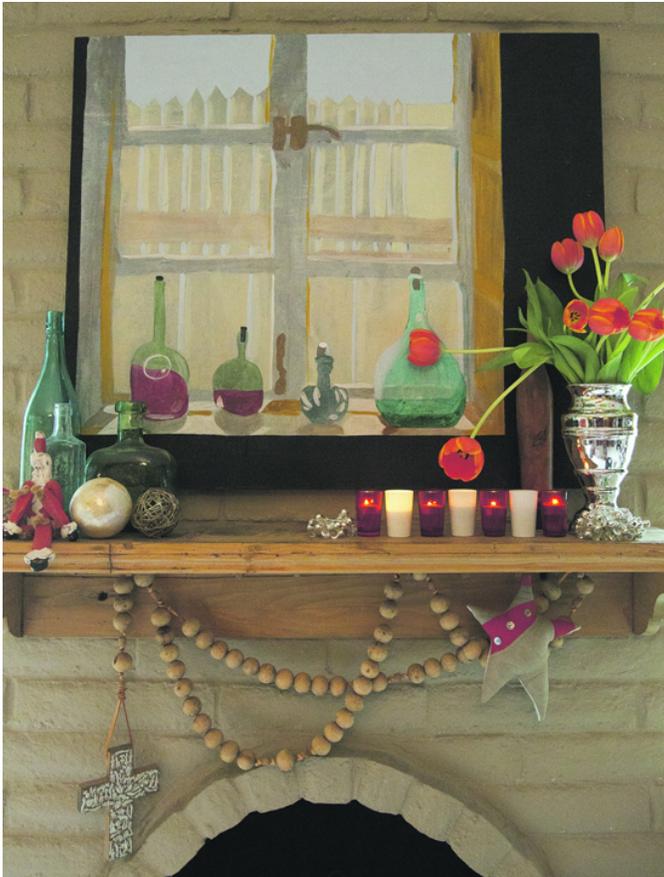
Vignettes and Accents

"Any surface can serve as a place for a holiday display, or vignette," says Isely. A tabletop, shelf, or stack of books with red bindings can be used as the platform for a mini-holiday scene. "Candles really warm up a room and you can turn almost anything into a candleholder," she adds. Isely uses cut-glass punch glasses to house votives and notes that old teacups can be used the same way. "I like to add some sparkle to every room. And if something breaks I don't throw it away." Isely repurposed two leaky Waterford crystal goblets to serve as candleholders and placed the broken top of a glass decanter on her table display for some added glitter.

Isely acknowledges that holiday decorating can be overwhelming for some. She has been collecting decorations for years and knows where to get to just what she needs. She encourages starting small. "Try something new. Don't over think it. Just do it."



Erin Mason in her living room surrounded by a holiday tree, table vignette, and wreath she designed. Photo Doug Kohlen



The mantel display in Nikolene Iseley's home mirrors the wall art-a painting by the designer. Photo Doug Kohlen



Table centerpiece display by Nikolene Isely. Photos Doug Kohlen



Isely places an antique porcelain doll tree-topper on her tree.



One of Erin Mason's many reindeer.



Table vignette by Erin Mason (on the left) and a table center piece by Sue Cuneo.

Holiday Decorating Tips from Nikolene

- Creativity comes from within, be spontaneous, make new connections.
- Decorate a month in advance, so you have time to enjoy it, then take it down fast.
- Think about placement. Temporarily take down a painting or move furniture to create space and avoid conflicts.
- Use everyday items in new ways-a colorful wool scarf can serve as a table runner.
- Use unscented candles, so there is no conflict with the aromas of cooking foods.

Look for long-burning votives, some last up to eight hours.

- Place mirrors beneath and behind holiday displays to enhance the sparkle of lights and candles.
- Always use odd numbers, e.g., 1 Santa, 3 snowmen, 5 votives, 7 decorative balls, in vignettes.
- Don't over think it, just do it.

Nikolene Isely owns Staging By Design: www.stagerbydesign.com, nikoleneisely@gmail.com, (925) 360-0947.

Erin Mason provides help with design, staging, and organization:
emason@me.com, (704) 904-3387.

Reach the reporter at: andrea@lamorindaweekly.com

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