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Stylish Solutions

By Ann McDonald



This photo shows layers: washed linen on the table, copper tray as charger, glass plate for main dish, blue vintage for first course, tea towel for napkin and same faux greenery we shared in last month's tip for using basics fall through New Year's. It is OK to layer and mix! Photos courtesy Couture Chateau IIc

has to do with setting the table. It is fun to host friends, but no one wants to fret over styles and if the table decoration works with what you already have going on at home, why not do it that way?

Here's a partial list of what we keep in our proverbial table-setting war chest:

- Chargers in all sizes and types

- Small, low rimmed trays for buffets, all sizes and types

- Good quality square glass plates and bowls

- Good quality stainless silverware

- Interesting tea towels, usually in some type of theme, bought in bulk and used only as napkins

- Five- to seven-yard remnants of good quality upholstery fabric to use as table coverings

- Mini battery-operated white or amber colored lights to weave into and under centerpieces

I love to host parties and think they are a beautiful way to share unique styles during different seasons. Homes, like people, have personalities. Embrace yours and host friends. During the fall, it is fun to have soup and chili parties or luncheon sit-downs with friends. We just wrapped our Stress Free Holiday Home live workshop (you can purchase the Workshop Course, see below) and one of the bonus sections I shared was on "Easy Elegant Entertaining: Bohemian to White Tie."

Here's a truth we forget: To create a great eating area, you don't even need a dining room table, or a dining room. You can use simple folding tables and cover with fabric, even desks and side tables, to create flat surfaces worthy of holding what's necessary. These can be set up anywhere in your home depending on how you want people to circulate.

Once you identify the table surfaces, consider good quality upholstery fabric. With five to seven yards, you can get enough coverage for about 12 people at a sit down rectangular table, up to 24 for a buffet table. To calculate needed yardage: measure your tables in length, add 12 to 15 inches to each end depending on how much overhang you want, and divide by 36.

Since one yard equals 36 inches you will know approximately how much material to buy.

We are so blessed to live in Lamorinda, in such natural beauty. As the weather shifts ever so slightly, do you have the fall table planned out? From Halloween parties to harvest brunches to Thanksgiving, thoughts of lavish parties can loom large. First, don't panic. Second, don't worry that you have not even thought about holiday cards, never mind next week's buffet at your house.

Last month we covered top tips for color coordinating your holiday décor for the upcoming months. That will help you make decisions at the decorating stores quickly. This month we will get specific on how to set your table and what you need to get a high-style look without breaking the bank or spending hours planning.

Setting up a quick buffet can work for large or small scale. You can switch the buffet out and set up for a sit-down party with the same materials. Because the items are flexible, you can have them on hand and switch last minute, if needed, from buffet to sit-down or vice versa.

One of the biggest stresses is transforming your year-round home into a space worthy of the holiday party, big or small, formal or informal. It all

Example: 132-inch table plus 24 inches for fabric overhang (12 inches each end) equals 156 inches; 156 divided by 36 (the length of one yard) equals approximately 4 1/3 yards.

By purchasing five to seven yards, you accommodate for shrinkage and can use extra fabric to cover pedestals for food or for visual interest around a centerpiece.

Where to get these fabrics? Everywhere! From discount stores to online fabric shops. Make sure to wash fabric ahead of use, especially if near food. The un-ironed look is nice for fall as it is more casual. If you have a round table or are using folding tables, consider using an under cloth in a solid color to hide the legs and then the upholstery fabric to sit on top, where most people see.

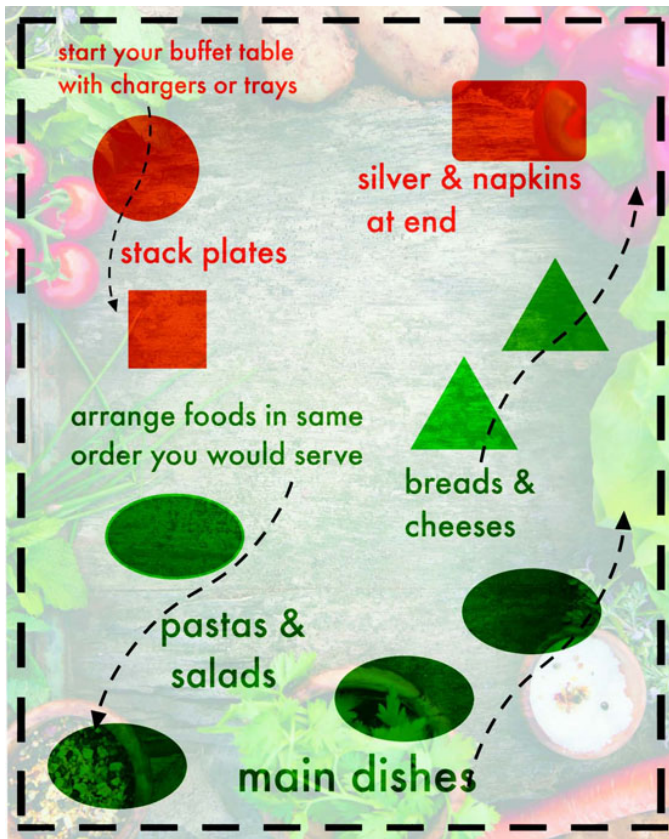
Now, to the setting. There are lots of ways to set tables these days, and the old rules have been thrown out for many. You are free to mix styles, textures, materials and even colors on the same table. It is very au courant to mix interesting chairs at a dining table, especially for larger groups. We've all seen the gorgeous clean-lined 60-foot-long table with matching chairs - which is lovely for an outdoor garden party - but for the indoor fall events, just like the mixing of colors with the leaves, I recommend mixing your colors and textures.

Don't try to force a look when it is not happening in nature. No guilt over not having 40 matching plates or chairs!

Let me know how your table setting goes. For the perfect holiday home join in on our Stress Free Holiday Workshop series. You can access it 24/7, 365 days a year and it includes the option of a printed workbook. I even include my infamous cookie bribery recipe, which works to keep family decorating help happy while hanging garland. For information, visit <http://couturechateau.com/holiday/>.



Think outside the box with napkins. Close-up of simple scrap leather strips as ties for decorative tea towel napkins. Great for buffets, they cover the whole lap.



The buffet table is easy to set up. Start with chargers or trays so guests aren't balancing just the plate on their lap. Lay out food just as you would serve it and finish with napkins (see tea towel suggestion) and serve-ware at end.



Use upholstery fabrics to cover your table instead of the standard cloth. Here are four we have set aside for harvest through Thanksgiving and into December. By switching out the centerpieces and table settings, the look is changed.



Ann McDonald, IIDA, NAPO, is the Founder/CEO of Couture Chateau, a luxury interior design firm in Orinda. For a complete blog post including other design ideas, visit www.couturechateau.com/blog

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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