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HOMES WITH SPARKLE

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HAND-PICKED GIFTS

SEASONAL SPLENDOUR

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WELCOME

The build-up to Christmas is a truly magical time of year filled with delight and anticipation of the festivities to come; whether this be sharing hearty winter meals with friends and family, fun-filled Christmas parties, or the simple pleasure of unwinding in front of a roaring fire with a mug of mulled wine.

Christmas Living **is your essential guide to making this year's celebration extra special, packed with stunning decorating inspiration (page 8), tasty recipes (page 45) and thoughtful gift ideas (page 68). Step inside warm and welcoming homes, from a fairytale manor house dressed to impress, to a cosy thatched cottage decorated in traditional style. Plus, discover fabulous days out perfect for getting you in the Christmas spirit from our round-up of festive events across the UK (page 78).**

Getting organised can be overwhelming, so take the stress out of it with our festive countdown (page 18), which is full of handy tips on how to make the most of every moment. Then, take time out to relax with a creative project from our Christmas Craft Handbook, which is filled with mindful makes ideal for creating personal gifts and decorations. However you spend this festive season, we hope it is a celebration to remember.

Merry Christmas!

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98 FESTIVE FILMS
Have your popcorn at the ready as we take you through the best Christmas movies to tune into with family and friends

Festive bedding from £25; child's bed, £169; Christmas cushions from £12.99; faux fur rugs from £59.99; 7ft tree, £150; tree decorations from £12.99, all Very

TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP

Create a cosy corner perfect for Christmas morning by layering festive red bed linen and cushions

NOSTALGIC NOEL

Rekindle happy memories of Christmases past by decking the halls in red, green and gold

Charcoal spot guinea fowl decoration, £6, Susie Watson Designs

Limited edition Winchester Cathedral bauble, £25, Tom Martin London

Berry and herb door wreath, £85, The Real Flower Company

Cast iron stag head Christmas stocking holder, £14, Dibor

Jingle bell cluster in aged red, £13.50, Petersham Nurseries

Jolly robin, £5.95, Poppy Treffry

Car decoration, £4, Marks & Spencer

Grandfather clock decoration, £2.50, Sainsbury's Home

Shiny red berry garland, £24, Gisela Graham

Felted Christmas pudding bauble, £8, Next

Matte glass baubles with leaf and berry band, £4.49 each, The Contemporary Home

Foliage hanging sleigh, £2, Tesco

Snuggled Up Together robin bauble, £10.50, Wrendale Designs

Ho ho ho miniature mug decoration, £13.95, Emma Bridgewater

Fanfare angel, £15, National Gallery Company

Gingerbread Village Christmas crackers, £35, Nancy & Betty

Hedgerow Berries botanical candle, £25, Sophie Allport

Highland Nutcracker tree decoration, £95, Amara

Feature Holly Reaney

Wooden Scandi tree, £175; flat rattan occasion chair, £275; star stocking holder, £14.50; velvet stocking in Blush, £40; baubles from £7.50; all Cox & Cox

TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP ·

Pared back is key when it comes to Scandi style, but inject pastels to liven up the palette

Glitter stars on twig wreath, £51, Gisela Graham

Harbour Stripe stocking in mushroom and ecru, £46, Tori Murphy

Winter reindeer ornament, £119, Steiff

Lit wooden star twigs, £18, Next

Christmas Noir wooden tree decoration, £2, Sainsbury's Home

Black metal advent candle holder, £38, Not on the High Street

Diamond Indian tan paper tree decorations, £8 for 2, Rose & Grey

SIMPLY SCANDI

Have a merry and mindful Christmas with calming neutrals and natural textures

Metal star bauble, £3, Debenhams

Southwold felt star garland, £12, Garden Trading

Delia ornament, £12.75, The Taylor

Personalised paper Christmas sack, £19.99, Getting Personal

Pink glass teardrop bauble, £2, Wilko

Christmas advent candle, £12, Idyll Home

Wooden ladder tree, £15, Graham & Green

Kraft tree crackers, £10 for 6, Paperchase

Double star tealight holder set, £9, JD Williams

Fluffy reindeer bauble, £8, George Home

Large Christmas micro light outdoor star, £59.99, Lights4fun

Glitter green mixed leaf wreath, £12, Tesco

Feature Ellen Finch

TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP

Inject animal magic with quirky decorations inspired by woodland creatures

Brunswick Spruce 7ft artificial tree, £199; Hendricks leather chair in Sellvagio Parchment, £749; Belsay rug in brick, £320; wrapping paper from £4; gift tags from £2; tree decorations from £5, all John Lewis & Partners

LET IT GLOW

Mix shimmering metallics with rich amber tones to create a warm, welcoming look with plenty of fireside twinkle

Glass bauble with gold confetti, £4, National Trust Shop

Binoculars, £8, John Lewis & Partners

Bronze rustic glass bauble, £38 for a set of 6 assorted, Marquis & Dawe

Berry wreath with cream cones, £37.99, Gisela Graham

Bristle Reindeer head decoration, £8.95, Graham & Green

Winter Fruits gel candle, £18, Laura Ashley

Metal flower candle holder in antique gold, £14.50, Petersham Nurseries

Winter's cabin wooden animals, £6 for 3 assorted, Sainsbury's Home

Lambswool cushion in Melburne Saffron, £49.95, Bronte by Moon

Tabwa mixed leaf garland, £33, Nkuku

Sequin copper bauble, £4, Next

Amber stripe glass bauble, £3.99 for a pair, Dobbies

Barnaby brass bell chime, £28, Rowen & Wren

Two-tone gold leaf branch with copper berries, £7.50, Gisela Graham

Roca plastic baubles, £8 for 6, Habitat

Crushed bead fruits decoration, £2.49 each, The Contemporary Home

Stag's Head Christmas decoration, £3.95, National Gallery Company

Luxury bronze crackers, £8 for 6, George Home

Fir cone decoration in vintage amber, £1.65, Grand Illusions

Squirrel decoration in copper, £12.50, Raj Tent Club

Feature Holly Reaney

From left: Forest green leaf design tableware, from £5 for a mini bowl; elegant engraved stripes wine glass, £7; elegant engraved stripes tumbler, £6; flower pot head vase, £26; faux eucalyptus stems, £12 each; Dachshund candle holder, £42; elegant vintage style clear glass decanter, £45, all Rockett St George

TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP ·

Mix green crockery, foraged foliage and fairy lights for a simple, rustic table setting

Large green glass bauble, £10, National Trust Shop

Flora mistletoe, £12.75, The Taylor

Potted faux Christmas tree, £18, Next

Say It With Ink Merry Christmas card, £2.95, Wendy Bell Designs

Forest green & gold sequin twigs glass bauble, £3.75, The Contemporary Home

Monstera fabric leaf decoration, £2.99, Dobbies

Frosted berry and pine cone garland, £29.99, Lights4fun

Christmas Holly & Berry gift tags, £3.50 for a set of 8, Sophie Allport

WINTER GARDEN

For a fresh take on Christmas decorating, combine the colour of the moment – botanical green – with plenty of natural textures and motifs

Mistletoe Christmas crackers, £24 for a set of 6, Idyll Home

Medium paper Christmas trees in green, £15.50 for a set of 3, Rose & Grey

Garden glass greenhouse, £8, John Lewis & Partners

Winter's Cabin glass bauble with leaf pattern, £2, Sainsbury's Home

Moss-covered place names, from £1.99 each, Rachel Emma Studio

Snow-covered tree decoration, £1, George Home

Succulent and eucalyptus wreath, £59, Marquis & Dawe

Gisela Graham glass sprout decoration, £6, Amara

Feature Pippa Blenkinsop

A by Amara Disco
Christmas decorations,
from £5, Amara

· TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP · TIP ·

Drape
garlands up
the bannister
and use stairs to
display ornaments
for a festive
hallway

FESTIVE FIESTA

Get the party started in style with all things carnival – think pom poms, sparkles and colour galore...

Mermaid mauve bauble, from £4, Next

Pink tassel and pom pom decorations, £6.50 each, Yonder Living

Paper straw baubles, £10 each, Raj Tent Club

Handmade felt camel decoration, £4.99, Sourced by Oxfam

Pom pom star tree topper, £9.50, M&S

Llama piñata, £14.95, Rex London

Glass rainbow decoration, £6.49, The Contemporary Home

Christmas table decoration, £25, Idyll Home

Carolle tassel decorations, £8 for 2, Habitat

Boho pom pom garland, £14, Talking Tables

Llama Christmas stocking, £9, Dibor

Half an avocado glass decoration, £10.50, Gisela Graham

Tequila decorations, £9.95, The Gifted Few

Cactus lights, £8, George Home

Zebra with crown decoration, £8.50, Graham & Green

DejaOoh tropical decorations, £12 for 3 assorted, Etsy

Feature Ellen Finch

18+

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Festive COUNTDOWN

With careful planning, your Christmas should be fun, joyous and memorable



It is never too soon to start preparing for the Yuletide celebrations. With plenty of advance organisation, you can relax and enjoy the Christmas cheer on the big day, knowing that everything is in hand.

OCTOBER

1 SEASONAL SHOP

As early as you can, start scouring the shops and online for gift ideas. Panic-buying on Christmas Eve is not the way to go! See our gift guides from page 68 for inspiration. Gather present wish lists from the little ones, and keep your ears finely tuned for any subtle suggestions that your nearest and dearest might drop into conversation. Jot down any ideas in a little notebook kept with you at all times, and tick off purchases on your recipient list as you go. If you want to give a little more this year, sign up to giveasyoulive.com – when you buy online at a listed store a percentage of your spend will be donated to your chosen charity.

2 DATES IN THE DIARY

Book your tickets for festive shows, pantos and events early to secure the best seats in the house and to avoid disappointment. Make a note of the dates of Christmas markets (see page 78), festive train rides, carol concerts and Santa's grottoes, and corral family and friends to join you for outings.

3 FEELING CRAFTY

Nothing quite beats receiving a thoughtful, handmade gift. If you want to try crafting some with your own fair hands, or making homemade decorations, crackers, cards, stencilled wrapping paper, gift tags… then start early. Get the whole family involved in your creative festive plans; set aside an evening each week from now when you can all enjoy merrymaking together. See your Christmas Craft Handbook for ideas.

NOVEMBER

4 GOBBLE GOBBLE

If you are ordering your prized turkey, or alternative roast of choice, from specialist suppliers then check the recommended order dates. Likewise, book those coveted supermarket delivery dates that are close to 25 December far in advance – they will soon be snapped up.

5 FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Start mulling over ideas for the festive feast. Give yourself plenty of time to practise recipes and test out new dishes, to avoid any last-minute kitchen disasters or disappointed diners. See page 45 for ideas for a whole host of festive recipes. Make sure your menu consists of a mix of oven-made and stove-top dishes; these will be easier to create simultaneously and you shouldn't then run out of oven space or pans.

6 HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Create a warm and welcoming environment for friends and family. Deal with those dastardly draughts now; apply draught seals around rattling windows or consider having secondary glazing installed, and use draught excluders for doors – there are many fun, whimsical designs



Create your own unique gift wrap by potato stamping. Use Annie Sloan's Chalk Paint in Athenian Black to create a Scandi look

Brewing up a warming tipple for visiting guests with a Christmas spice kit, starting from £1.99 at Dobbies



Deck the halls with some cute festive decorations like these, from £4.99 at The Contemporary Home

available, or make your own during one of your weekly creative family evenings. In advance of your guests arriving have your boiler checked and serviced, too. Much as it might encourage everyone to don their jolly festive jumpers, it's not ideal to be left without heating or hot water due to faulty flues. Other jobs to tick off the maintenance checklist include clearing the gutters and tidying up the garden – you don't want the gathered family gazing out at a hoar-frosted horticultural horror on Christmas morn.

7 STIR UP, WE BESEECH THEE O LORD

The last Sunday before Advent – this year falling on Sunday 24 November – Stir Up Sunday is traditionally the day that Christmas pudding or cake is prepared so that it can mature before Christmas Day. This allows time for the mixed fruit to fully absorb the aromatic spices and alcohol used – be this a dash of brandy, snifter of stout, shot of sherry, dram of whisky, tot of rum or nip of barley wine.

8 DISCOUNT DAY

Make a note in your diary of Black Friday – 29 November – when you can enjoy major discounts both online and on the high street. Give yourself a pat on the back if with your forward planning you manage to avoid battling the December Christmas crowds altogether.

9 MERRY MAIL

Check international last posting dates if sending gifts abroad – visit postoffice.co.uk – and compile your Christmas card list. What child – or even some adults – wouldn't be thrilled to receive a letter from Father Christmas? There are many options for creating personalised letters online. For the junior scribes who want to compose their own merry missive, make use of the Post Office's Write to Santa service, and if he has time between organising the elves, Santa will pen a reply.

10 SILVER SERVICE

Make an inventory of your crockery, silverware, glassware – do you have enough for your dinner guests? If not, head to the shops to buy extra supplies. Think, too, about how you will dress the festive table, and start to gather ideas.

11 NOEL NUMBERS

Give some thought as to how you will count down the days of Advent. A handmade Advent calendar (take a look in the Christmas Craft Handbook) is sure to delight, or for a twist on tradition, turn the daily countdown into a game. In the pockets or sections of a reusable Advent calendar, place a clue that the children have to solve to find a treat hidden around the home or garden. Enjoy the looks of glee on their faces as they discover the goodies from their clever detective work.



Check the last posting dates to ensure that all your cards and presents will arrive in time

Spread the festive baking cheer with these Gingerbread Delight deluxe crackers, £19.95 for six, Annabel James

Finally, no house should be without a wreath for the front door; see the Christmas Craft Handbook for how you could create your own from natural or recycled ingredients, or hang a ready-made version.

13 LIST LOVERS

Compile lists of everything you will need for the Christmas meal and order as many special ingredients and buy as many groceries as you can in advance. Decide on what you will prepare beforehand and what you will leave to the day: don't try to do it all on the 25th – allow yourself time out of the kitchen to enjoy the day with your family.

14 IT'S A WRAP

Stock up on ribbons, tape, string, scissors and tags at the beginning of the month and set aside times each week for gift wrapping, rather than doing it all in a rush. Enjoy the experience, adding your handmade embellishments and personal messages at a more leisurely pace. And take note: the trick to a beautifully wrapped present is less is more. You only need a small overlap of paper as this is easier to fold; if you use too much it will look bulky at the ends.

DECEMBER

12 DECK THE HALLS

It's time to bring out the decorations. Make an occasion of it: put on the festive tunes, heat up some mince pies and mulled wine, and enjoy filling your home with Christmas charm. See from page 8 for ideas for themed seasonal adornments. Forage for holly, ivy and berries to add natural festive embellishments to bannisters, mirrors, tables and mantelpieces, and hang up the stockings by the hearth. If you're opting for a real tree, see the advice on page 32 as to how to care for it and keep it looking its best until Twelfth Night.

15 HOSTS WITH THE MOST

Check that you have enough bedding and towels for guests staying over the festive period and get it all washed and ironed in preparation. A little festive trinket, or handmade tag with a short goodwill message, left on their folded towels will extend the warm welcome even further.

16 KNITTING PRETTY

They may be naff, but who doesn't secretly love a festive knit – especially when they feature a few flashing lights? Join in Christmas Jumper Day on Friday 13 December and help raise money for Save the

Children – christmasjumperday.org – make the world better with a sweater.

17 COOL OPERATORS

Clear out the fridge and freezer and condense items into smaller containers. Batch make pigs-in-blankets, mince pies, sausage rolls, soups and other elements that can be made and frozen in advance.

18 JOLLY BAKING

Bake homemade gifts, such as cakes, biscuits and chocolates, to give to friends, neighbours and teachers. Involve the children in making and decorating edible adornments for the tree – although there's a chance some may not make it as far as the spruce...

19 KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL

To cater for guests over the festive period, the heart of the home needs to be a place of order. Organise your kitchen in advance, clearing any clutter and making extra space on worktops – move the bulky items you won't need into a garage or shed until the visitors have left. In the week leading up to Christmas, pin up lists of what needs to be prepared, cooked, frozen, bought, defrosted or finished off on each day, and if enlisting helpers, note down who is responsible for what.

20 SCENTSATIONAL

Fill your home with the colours, flavours and spicy scents of Christmas. For a homemade idea, arrange some foraged pine cones in a bowl and spray with water mixed with cinnamon-scented essential oil. Or why not make orange pomanders? Cut a decorative design on oranges using a peeler, stud them with cloves, before rolling them in ground spices, such as cinnamon, nutmeg or ginger, for extra fragrance.

21 GAMES GALORE

Dig out the board games, packs of cards and other entertainment to keep all generations occupied over the festive season. You can't go wrong with the old favourites: anyone for charades, bingo, Ludo...?

22 TWINKLE TRACKS

Keep tabs on Santa as he sets off from the North Pole from midday on Christmas Eve. Visit noradsanta.org and enjoy the mounting excitement as his sleigh gets nearer. It's also a great lesson in geography for viewers young and old.

23 PARTY POP

Don't forget to chill the champagne for the traditional, celebratory Bucks Fizz on Christmas morning. If there isn't room in the fridge, submerge bottles in a bucket of iced water – it should only take about 15 minutes to achieve crisp, cool bubbles.

24 CREATING CHRISTMAS MAGIC...

On Christmas Eve, help the little ones put out a drink and snack for Santa and his reindeer, and then once they are tucked up in bed, get to work preparing for his arrival. Sprinkle reindeer dust (glitter) over the garden path, with Santa's boot prints made from dipping wellies in talc or fake snow. Maybe some of Rudolph's bells will have fallen off the sleigh outside for the children to find, or an elf or two might have forgotten their hats in all the rush...?



There's nothing cosier than snuggling up in front of the fire. The Future Kept's recycled wool throw, £18, also makes a perfect gift



Welcome guests with a festive wreath like this bespoke one from Daylesford

Image (background) Getty

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The Hebrides

ALL IN THE DETAILS

A traditional Cumbrian farm turns into a winter wonderland as Annabel Lewis fills it with decorative embellishments and fabulously festive frills

Words Karen Darlow | Photographs Brent Darby

The 'snug' lives up to its name in winter, with the fire lit and layers of throws, soft cushions and fluffy pom-poms. A Nordmann fir tree from Pines and Needles is laden with the family's favourite decorations, some made by the children. On the right of the fireplace is a Samburu tribal necklace; on the left, a quirky figure, a gift from Dutch relatives. Tea is served in Annabel's mother's silver teapot, with mince pies from Bettys

For the woman who made her name – and her business – in exquisite decorative trimmings, Christmas is an opportunity to really go to town. Whether it's bringing the hedgerow inside with faux garlands, branches, birds, and berries, or the glorious ribbons tied around every parcel – and in fact around every available space – Annabel Lewis, founder of V V Rouleaux, knows how to dress things up for a colourful celebration.

'Everyone's so safe with everything,' she says, glancing round her dining room, where at each setting a crisp linen napkin is topped with a plum-coloured ribbon; each antique dining chair is upholstered in a different shade of silk damask; each chair back has a wreath topped with a luscious moire red bow; and handpainted baubles in vibrant tones of orange, red, and gold are suspended in the air like vivid bubbles. 'I just love using colour and texture and making something different. We're not minimalist anymore. We want to be maximalist.' And it's true, her Cumbrian farmhouse is decorated to the max this Christmas.

It was a quirky tree decoration, worthy of V V Rouleaux, in the garden that attracted Annabel's curiosity, seven years ago, as she explains: 'Richard and I were fishing on the river here, and noticed a bicycle in one of the big oak trees. The couple living here told us it's an Italian tradition to put a bike in a tree when a new baby is born.'

They also told Annabel they were about to move back to Tuscany to be closer to their new grandchild and that the house was owned by the National Trust, who couldn't find a new tenant. It was a fortuitous discovery, as Annabel had decided to return to her Lake District roots when the lease on V V Rouleaux's London warehouse expired and the children had all left home for university. 'So I got in touch with the Trust and told them we wanted the house.' Sorted.

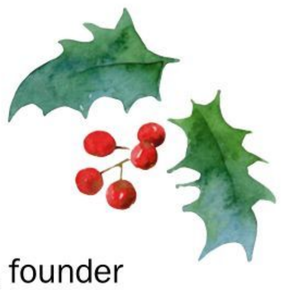
Not quite sorted. The vetting process lasted almost three years, as the National Trust grilled Annabel and Richard about how they would go about maintaining and restoring the property before they finally allowed them to be its custodians. 'By that time, ivy had spread all over it, the garden was overgrown and the house was almost derelict. We were very lucky to get it and I just couldn't wait to get in and rescue it,' recalls Annabel. 'We've done a lot to restore it. It was all quite dark, so we decorated and brightened the whole place up to give it a fresh, contemporary look. I worked with Kim Sisson, a fantastic decorative artist and muralist who does a lot of work with me at V V Rouleaux. Kim painted the panelling in the blue drawing room, and later helped me to give the snug a new look by painting colourful stripes on lining paper when we got tired of looking at blank walls.'

Apart from clearing the garden to restore the sweeping view of a 'brilliant trout and salmon stream' Annabel was free to concentrate on the interiors, with the National Trust responsible for any structural and exterior upkeep.

Everywhere you look Annabel has used ribbons, silks, pom-poms and feathers, trimmings of all kinds – the tools of her trade and her passion. Her furnishings and décor are often inspired by particular ribbons or fabrics. So a French ribbon pattern book from 1840 prompted a new look for a deep-buttoned sofa, and a collection of upholstered furniture was inspired by two original Louis XIV chairs that Annabel found in a Paris fleamarket. 'We carried them through Paris on our heads, then sat on them in the corridor on the Eurostar all the way back to London! They were so comfy.'

Like an expert chef, she mixes trimmings and decorative accessories in unexpected pairings, creating bold and exciting new flavours. 'People want to be different – people are making individual things themselves now and they want something unique, not just off the shelf.

'V V Rouleaux is an ingredients company,' she says, 'for everyone doing anything, for display, decoration, interiors, fashion and theatre.' And – as any expert chef will tell you – with the best quality ingredients, in the right combinations, the results can be delicious.



THE STORY

OWNERS Annabel Lewis, founder of V V Rouleaux (vvrouleaux.com), the ribbons and trimmings company, lives here with husband Richard, who also works in the business. The couple have four grown-up children

PROPERTY A Grade II-listed former farm near Cockermouth in Cumbria, with sections dating back to 1690, and Georgian and Victorian additions. The couple lease the house from the National Trust, who have owned it since 1947

WHAT THEY DID Annabel and Richard aimed to preserve the property rather than change it; their mission was to stop things crumbling and decaying. They added a luxurious shower room to the adjoining cottage and use the upper floor as extra accommodation for visitors



Above: Annabel hangs a selection of V V Rouleaux wreaths on the old barn wall
Below: Annabel always buys her Christmas trees a fraction taller than she needs and trims off the bottom branches to decorate the stone pediment above the door. Baubles and ribbons from a selection at V V Rouleaux
Right: Ribbons at the ready, Annabel puts the finishing touches to this year's Christmas look for the 'party barn'. In a space like this, decorative details are real statement pieces, with huge spheres of greenery inspired by the hedgerow, swags aplenty, and towers of flickering candles











Top: Annabel's signature ribbons add extra flourish to the festive bakes. The Champagne Christmas pudding is from Bettys
Above: A mini vintage suitcase makes a quirky container for some Christmas shortbread biscuits from Liz's Country Kitchen
Left: This treasured cupboard has moved with the Lewis family from house to house. The paper parrot with silver detailing is from V V Rouleaux and the unusual basket on the floor stored bullets during the war
Opposite: All the elements of a farmhouse kitchen are here: Aga, scrubbed pine table, Windsor carver chairs, window seat, and a solid flagstone floor. Faux berries from V V Rouleaux decorate the window and add a touch of fun to an Ankole cow skull from Nigeria. The Holly & Berry teatowel is from Sophie Allport


AGA

Right: The Chinese console table in the dining room is decked out for a celebration. Yellow gold ribbons around the Stilton pick up the colours of the painting by Alistair Banks, and piled high are handpainted fair trade baubles, made in Kashmir for V V Rouleaux
Below left: Annabel's fabulous Christmas table is brimming with festive styling ideas including napkins embellished with V V Rouleaux's purple wired ribbon and holly sprig decorations
Below right: A classic Chesterfield sofa has been reupholstered in a fabric inspired by one of Annabel's favourite ribbon designs, dating from 1840. Christmas cards are displayed, leaf-like, in V V Rouleaux's twig tree
Opposite: With baubles, birds and bells strung on fishing wire, and faux berries bunched on the table and above the fireplace, the dining room decorations are at once natural and supernatural. The red chair by the fire was copied from an original Louis XIV chair. Annabel covered a vintage lampshade frame with ribbon, adding crystals, feathers and a fringe. The portrait is of Richard's great-grandfather. The faux spruce tree and all decorations are by V V Rouleaux





Norway spruce tree (6ft), from £29.99; 360 warm white string lights, £34.99; tree decorations, from £3.99 each; rattan chair, £249; rattan stool, £99, all Dobbies

SPRUCE THINGS UP

Before rushing out to buy your Christmas tree, give a thought to sustainability, then follow our advice on how to choose the best variety, and caring for it through the festive season

The humble yet iconic Christmas tree is probably the most important decoration that you will buy over the festive season and should be the star of the show in any household.

SUSTAINABLE STOCK

The British Christmas Tree Growers Association (BCTGA) estimates that there are seven million real Christmas trees sold in the UK every year, which raises an important question of sustainability.

An eco-friendly Christmas tree should be farmed in such a way that it has a positive impact on the surrounding environment. Members of the BCTGA have strict guidelines to follow on where they buy their seeds, what pesticides and herbicides to use and when – to minimise the impact on wildlife – and how and when trees are harvested. Only a fairly small percentage of a Christmas tree farm is felled every year so that there is a constantly changing, but permanent eco-system in which British wildlife can thrive.

Real Christmas trees are a completely renewable resource. For every harvested tree, a new sapling is planted. All trees will have some level of carbon footprint as they need to be transported from farm to house, even if this is local; however, they have a 10 to 15-year lifespan, during which time they are absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen.

WHAT, WHERE AND WHEN TO BUY

★ Where possible, buy a Christmas tree direct from the grower. When buying from a seller, check that the tree comes from a member of the BCTGA to guarantee it is British grown.

★ A fresh tree will have a healthy, shiny green appearance, with needles that are flexible and do not fall easily. Drop it lightly on its stump to test: evergreens lose needles all year, but if it drops more than a few, it is not fresh.

★ Compare the weight of similar-sized trees that are on sale: fresh, good-quality trees will normally be heavier.

★ Avoid pre-wrapped stock as you cannot properly assess the shape, width or quality. Also measure exactly the ceiling height of the room where the tree will be placed – there may be an allowance of up to 15cm on the measurement shown on the tag.

★ Aim to buy, or collect, your tree no more than three weeks before Christmas Day, but leave it outdoors until at least two weeks before, in order to keep it at its maximum freshness.

ARBOREAL ATTENTION

Once you have the tree home, cut approximately 1–2cm off the stump using a handsaw, before standing it in a pail of fresh water, in a cool, shaded area. When it is brought indoors, mount the tree in a water-holding stand and place away from any heat source, such as a radiator.

Once it is unwrapped, allow the branches to settle before decorating them. Keep the container regularly topped up with water – this will help it to maintain its sheen and needles.

FOLLOWING THE FESTIVITIES

The most eco-friendly ways to dispose of your Christmas tree are to compost it, season it as firewood, or turn it into woodchip for your garden borders. Most local councils offer free recycling services, which are well regulated, or members of the BCTGA will also recycle trees free of charge (recyclenow.com; bctga.co.uk).

If you have a pot-grown variety with a good root system, you can replant it in your garden or leave it to grow on in the pot. If choosing the latter option, re-pot the tree into a larger pot in late winter, using a soil-based John Innes potting compost. This can be done annually, until the tree reaches the maximum size that it can be moved comfortably. If planting the tree in the ground, acclimatise it first in a sheltered spot and keep it well watered.

Most Christmas tree species ultimately grow to form very large specimens, frequently reaching a height of about 15 to 20m within 20 years.





From top: The non-drop Nordmann fir, from £39.99; ideal for smaller spaces, Fraser fir tree, from £49.99, both from Dobbies

PICK OF THE TREES

NORDMANN FIR (*ABIES NORDMANNIANA*)
The Nordmann fir, with its highly acclaimed 'non-drop' needles, is the UK's bestseller. It remains a more expensive option due to the time it takes to grow but, with its citrus smell and lovely soft needles, it is a great option for families with young children. The reliably triangular shape tends to be slightly more open and less dense than Norway spruce, so it is ideal for those who prefer baubles and other hanging decorations aplenty.

NORWAY SPRUCE (*PICEA ABIES*)
The Norway spruce remains the 'traditional' species for the British Christmas tree. Its triangular shape, dark green needles, gently drooping branches and distinctive 'pine' fragrance are the very essence of Christmas, and its dense bushy shape is excellent for decorating. It is also quite cheap when compared to other options. It does tend to shed its needles quite freely, however, particularly as the festive season progresses. Offset this by bringing it inside later than other varieties; keep it well watered and away from direct heat sources.

BLUE SPRUCE (*PICEA PUNGENS*)
Related to the Norway spruce, this is one of the most attractive Christmas trees, with a good natural shape, distinctive pine scent and striking blue-green – sometimes almost electric blue – needles. These are very sharp, however, so take care when handling it. Although its foliage is slower to drop than that of the Norway spruce, it is not by any means a non-drop option.

NOBLE FIR (*ABIES PROCERA*)
Introduced into Britain in 1830, Noble fir is a native of the US forests of Oregon and Washington, where it grows to a great height. Although it is thick stemmed, which can make it difficult to use with a tree stand, it has lovely, well-spaced foliage.

FRASER FIR (*ABIES FRASERI*)
With its narrower shape, the blue-green Fraser fir is ideal for smaller spaces. With dense foliage, it's perhaps not the best choice for bauble devotees, but with a minimalist approach, and plain lights, it can make a wonderful centrepiece.

Words Mick Lavelle and Jacob Ingram



JINGLE BELL ROCK

By banishing the beige, Roxanne Hudson and Michael Biagioni have transformed a bland semi-detached house into a bold, edgy space that's perfect for festive entertaining

Words Beth Murton | Photographs Rachael Smith | Styling Anna Morley and Amelia Smith

Walls painted in Dinner Jacket, Valspar. Kitchen units and bar stool, Ikea. Wall tiles, Walls & Floors
Opposite: Corner sofa, rug and picture shelves all Ikea. Pendant light, Habitat

THE STORY

OWNERS Roxanne Hudson (@ourgreyhaven), an operations manager for Cow Vintage, her partner Michael Biagioni, a buyer for Sainsbury's, and their dog, Monty
PROPERTY A three-bedroom, 1980s semi-detached house in Leicester
WHAT THEY DID
The couple stamped their unique style on the space by redecorating throughout

Buying a first home together is right up there as one of the most exciting (albeit expensive) things you'll do in your life, giving you the chance to make your mark on a space that is finally your own. For Roxanne and Michael, picking up the keys to their new home was the start of a whirlwind DIY adventure that's seen them completely transform the blank, beige walls of their 1980s semi into a dark grey haven that's full of drama and character.

Since getting her hands on the three-bedroom home, Roxanne has worked her magic to give the space a sense of personality. Although the couple fell in love with the kitchen extension and open-plan layout, the lacklustre colour schemes did little to fire their imagination, and Roxanne couldn't wait to whip out the paintbrushes. We're not just talking the odd feature wall here and there, though: she's gone all out with her edgy style, and now dark grey walls form the wow-factor backdrop to every room scheme.

Speaking to Roxanne, it's clear she's always been drawn to dark colours, and decorating the house in similar tones was a natural step. But don't be fooled into thinking that dark means cold and boring. There's a real warmth to the couple's home, with each room flowing effortlessly into the next. Plus Roxanne is a clever shopper, mixing Scandi-inspired designs from Ikea and great-value homeware from the likes of Matalan and H&M with vintage buys, showing that a modest budget doesn't have to limit your aspirations. If you're daring enough to try something, it's amazing what can be achieved with a can-do attitude and an eye for colour. As the couple gear up for Christmas, we couldn't wait to get Roxanne's advice for pulling together a successful scheme.



OVER TO ROXANNE...

‘The kitchen was the room that sold the house to us as soon as we saw it online. We were living in Michael’s two-bedroom Victorian terraced house, but wanted to buy a home together. This one ticked off lots of things on our wishlist, such as a garden for Monty and an open-plan entertaining space, plus it didn’t need huge amounts of work.

The previous owners added the extension and we love how the vaulted ceiling and rooflights create such a feeling of height and light. As soon as we walked in, we could imagine ourselves living here.

Although we’ve kept the original kitchen units, we’ve changed the look and feel of this room, painting the pale green walls dark grey to give it a more modern, funky edge. We also updated the tiling in the kitchen, opting for black grouting for added impact. With the new corner sofa in place, we now spend most of our time in this space in the evening after work, and we can’t wait to welcome family and friends here this Christmas.’



Even though we haven't changed the layout in the house or added any additional space, it feels like a completely different property to the one we bought. We painted four rooms within the first week of moving in – I was on a mission! I've learned a great deal in the last year, such as the importance of finding your core style, sticking to what you like and not getting distracted by what someone else has done.

I originally went for a navy and white scheme in the living room, but it didn't feel cosy enough so the white walls soon became grey in here too. This tends to be our quiet room, and it's also the space I escape to when Michael has his Lads' Tuesday nights in the kitchen.

When it comes to buying things for the house, Ikea is usually my first port of call. I'm always in there! Sometimes I pop in for a quick look round to get some new accessories to change up a room scheme, other times I'll make a long list and go on a big shopping spree, but I always find something I love.

Walls painted in Thunder Cloud and Silver Tarnish, both Valspar. Sofa, mirror, rug, all Ikea. Ladder, Søstrene Green. Vintage sideboard, local charity shop. Royal Blue Spruce Artificial pre-lit 6ft tree, Balsam Hill. Baubles, Homebase. Paper decorations, Talking Tables. For a similar gold disco ball try Amazon. Noel neon light, Lights4fun

“I originally joined Instagram to look for inspiration for my home, and I love that it’s a great source of ideas, whatever your budget. Seeing how other people decorated with dark colours gave me the confidence to really go for it in my own house.

I could see that it was possible to have a grey scheme without making the house feel dark and unwelcoming. I find it funny that I’ve ended up decorating how I dress, so a combination of grey, black and white with odd pops of bright colour to add interest.

It’s amazing how a couple of coats of paint can transform anything – even the wooden Ikea table has had a grey makeover. I primed the surface and then painted over the pale wood, and it now works better with the rest of the scheme.”

Walls painted in Pewter Medallion, Valspar. Table, pendant light, metal unit and plant stand, Ikea. Chairs, Ebay. Pendant (over table), Aldi. Sideboard, charity shop. Rug, H&M. I Never Read print, King & McGaw. Paper decorations and disco ball, Talking Tables. Fairy lights and neon star lights, Lights4fun


'I NEVER
READ,
I JUST
LOOK
AT
PICTURES'
WARHOL
ST-GERMAIN
ABER
FALLS
WELSH GIN



Our original plan was to gut this room and fit a brand new bathroom, but we soon realised it was going to be too expensive and we struggled to find someone who could do the work for us.

A downside to being one of the first in our group of friends to take on a project like this means that we don't have anyone to ask for recommendations on tradespeople they've used. For now, we've given the existing fittings a makeover until we feel confident enough to take on a bigger redesign. Painting the wall, toilet cistern and sink surround has updated the space, and we've covered the dark paint with a clear sealant to prevent it peeling in the humidity. We've also used a black grout pen on top of the white grouting to give the tiles a more modern, industrial vibe.

Bath bridge, Dunelm. Bath mat, monochrome shower curtain and baskets, H&M

“Our bedroom was the first room we tackled when we bought the house as we wanted to have one room finished where we could unwind at the end of a busy day. I originally went for a dark red wall, but it jarred with the rest of the house once I’d decorated the other rooms and it didn’t feel particularly restful. We’ve simply painted over the original wallpaper on the back wall and I quite like how in certain lights you can still see a hint of the pattern through the paint. We haven’t had a huge budget to update this house, so we’ve had to be clever with some of our furniture choices. I’d always wanted this Ikea bed, but it was no longer available and I couldn’t find anything similar for the same price. After an online search, however, I managed to find the Ikea one for even less than its original price. We’ve also updated basic wardrobes by painting them the same colour as the walls. Go for furniture in a shape and style that suits your room, and pretty much anything can be repainted to match the scheme.”

Walls painted in Dinner Jacket and Callisto, both Valspar. Ikea bed, Gumtree. Bedding, Ikea. Try Gisela Graham for a eucalyptus garland. Fairy lights, Lights4fun

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12 PARTY TREATS

Create a showstopping banquet with this array of festive finger food, from savoury bites to winter cocktails and Christmas-themed bakes

Clockwise from top left: Crostini with truffled mushrooms; leek and Parmesan filo tartlets; chestnuts and bacon

Crostini with truffled wild mushrooms

MAKES 40

- 40 crostini (see recipe below)
- 30g/1oz dried porcini mushrooms
- 200g/7oz baby chestnut mushrooms
- 100g/3½ oz chanterelle mushrooms
- ½ tbsp unsalted butter
- ½ tbsp olive oil
- 5 tsp truffle porcini paste
- 150ml/generous ½ cup double/heavy cream
- 1 tbsp freshly snipped chives
- salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 First, make the crostini (see below). This step can be done a week before and the crostini kept in an airtight container.
2 Soak the dried porcini mushrooms in boiling water for at least 20 minutes. Meanwhile, slice the fresh chestnut and chanterelle mushrooms, and then slice the soaked porcini.
3 Heat the butter and olive oil in a frying pan or skillet over a fairly high heat, and fry the mushrooms. After 10 minutes, add the truffled porcini and the cream. Reduce the cream a little, then season to taste.
4 Spread a teaspoon on each crostini and top with some chives. Serve.

Crostini

MAKES 60–70

- 2 part-baked baguettes, each sliced into 30-35 slices about 5mm/¼" thick (using part-baked baguettes allows you to slice thin, neat crostini)
- 100ml/scant ½ cup olive oil

1 Heat a grill pan on high and brush each side of the bread with olive oil.
2 Cook the bread in batches, for 1 minute on each side, until the bread is toasted and crisp. Remove and place onto a wire rack to cool.
3 Alternatively, you can bake the crostini on a baking sheet in the oven at 180˚C/350˚F/ Gas 4 for 8–10 minutes.

Leek and Parmesan filo tartlets

MAKES 25

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 400g/14oz leeks, thinly sliced
- 150ml/generous ½ cup double/heavy cream
- 50g/1¾ cup freshly grated Parmesan
- 25 filo/phyllo tartlet cases (see above right)
- salt and freshly ground white pepper

1 Heat the olive oil in a frying pan or skillet and sauté the leeks for 5 minutes, until soft.
2 Add the cream to the leek mixture and cook for 1 minute. Add the grated Parmesan, stir for 1 minute and turn off the heat. Season with white pepper and a touch of salt.
3 Fill each tartlet case with a heaped teaspoon of the leek mixture and serve.

Filo tartlets

MAKES 40 | PREHEAT OVEN TO 180°C/350°F/GAS 4

- 3 sheets of filo/phyllo pastry (about 135g/4¾oz)
- 100g/1 stick minus 1 tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- 12-hold muffin pan, buttered

1 Stack the filo/phyllo sheets in a pile and use a sharp knife to cut them into 40 x 6cm/2½" squared pieces, each of which will have 3 layers of pastry. Keeping all the other filo/phyllo squares covered with clingfilm/plastic wrap to prevent them from drying out, take one set of 3 squares.
2 Lay a square onto a chopping board and brush lightly with melted butter. Top with a second square, offset to allow corners to show. Brush lightly with melted butter and repeat with the final square.
3 Gently press the layered pastry into the hole of a muffin pan and repeat to fill the pan. Bake in a preheated over for 8–10 minutes, until golden brown. Cool and store in an airtight container until required. Repeat with the remaining pastry.

Chestnuts and bacon

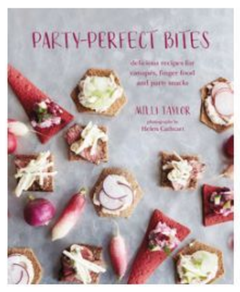
MAKES 30 | PREHEAT OVEN TO 190°C/375°F/GAS 5

- 30 cooked, canned chestnuts
- 10 rashers/strips of bacon, each cut into 3 pieces

FOR THE SAUCE

- 90g/½ cup brown sugar
- 115ml/½ cup mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp sriracha chilli/ hot pepper sauce
- 60ml/¼ cup sweet chilli sauce
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- Baking sheet, lined with baking parchment
- 30 wooden toothpicks or cocktail sticks

1 Wrap a chestnut in one strip of bacon and secure with a toothpick or cocktail stick. Place on a prepared baking sheet.
2 Mix all of the sauce ingredients together and drizzle over the chestnuts. Bake in a preheated oven for 20 minutes.
3 Remove from the oven, cool slightly and serve.



This is an edited extract from *Party-Perfect Bites* by Milli Taylor (£9.99, Ryland Peters & Small). Photographs by Helen Cathcart

Moroccan chicken puffs

MAKES 30–35 | PREHEAT OVEN TO 180°C/350°F/GAS 4

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- ½ tsp ground ginger
- ¼ tsp ground cinnamon
- small pinch of saffron
- ¼ tsp ground cumin
- 1 small preserved lemon, quartered, seeds and pith removed
- 4 chicken thighs (350g/12¼oz boned and skinned) diced very small
- ¼ tsp smoked paprika
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tbsp freshly chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 1 tbsp chopped coriander/cilantro
- 500g/1lb 2oz puff pastry
- 1 egg, beaten
- Sesame seeds, for sprinkling
- 7.5cm/3" pastry or cookie cutter
- Baking sheet, lined with baking parchment

1 For the chicken mix, heat the oil in a frying pan or skillet and sauté the onion and garlic for 5 minutes. Add all of the other chicken mix ingredients to the pan. When the chicken is cooked, cool for a few minutes before seasoning with black pepper and adding the fresh herbs.

2 Once completely cooled, roll out the puff pastry until 3mm/¼" thick and use the pastry or cookie cutter to cut it into rounds.

3 Place 1 teaspoon of the chicken mix in the middle of each disc and then pinch the edges together, like a dumpling. Place the puffs pinch-side down on the prepared baking sheet 2.5 cm/1" apart and brush the tops with the beaten egg. Sprinkle with sesame seeds and bake in the oven for 15–20 minutes until golden.

Rainbow chard tartlets with broad bean purée

This is a great vegan alternative to miniature quiches using nutritious gram/chickpea flour, and you can incorporate whatever seasonal vegetables you like. Rainbow chard provides a colourful alternative to spinach, and you can substitute the broad beans for peas.

MAKES 12 TARTLETS (OR 24 MINI TARTLETS)
PREHEAT OVEN TO 180°C/350°F/GAS 4

- 320g/11½oz ready-rolled shortcrust pastry (35x23cm/14x9")
- Flour, for dusting
- 120g/4½oz gram/chickpea flour
- ½ tsp black salt (or use any)
- ½ tsp turmeric powder (optional)
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp baking powder
- 120g/1 cup frozen baby broad beans, or substitute frozen peas
- ½ tsp stock powder
- ½ tsp mint sauce
- 6–7 medium stems of rainbow chard, trimmed and chopped into 3–4cm/1¼–1½" pieces
- Handful of freshly chopped thyme
- Handful of vegan bacon crispy bits, such as Schwartz or McCormicks (optional)
- 8-cm/3¼" cookie cutter (or 5-cm/2" cutter for mini tartlets)
- Non-stick 12-hole muffin pan (or 24-hole mini muffin pan), greased



1 Lay or roll out the pastry on a well-floured surface. Using an 8cm/3¼" cookie cutter (or 5cm/2" cutter for mini tartlets), cut out 12 (or 24) circles. Press the pastry gently into the holes of the prepared muffin pan, making sure of a snug fit. Put the pan in the preheated oven for 10–15 minutes until the pastry has started to cook.

2 Sift the gram/chickpea flour into a large bowl and add the black salt, turmeric powder (if using), salt, 380ml/13fl oz water and baking powder. Whisk to make a smooth batter. Set aside.

3 Put the broad beans, stock powder and 100ml/⅓ cup plus 1 tablespoon of water into a small pan and bring to a simmer over a medium heat for a few minutes. Add a little more water if needed, so that there is approximately 2 tablespoons of liquid in the pan after cooking. Remove from the heat, add the mint sauce and blend to a smooth, thick purée. Set aside to cool. This mixture can be frozen or made several days in advance and kept in the fridge.

4 Put the chard into a small pan and heat gently over a medium heat until it is just wilted, or microwave for 30 seconds to wilt quickly. Put the wilted chard onto paper towels to remove any excess water.

5 Remove the muffin pan from the oven. Put a small spoonful of wilted chard into the pastry cases and then pour over the batter until each pastry case is almost filled. Carefully put the muffin pan back into the oven and bake for a further 30–40 minutes until the pastry is just golden and the filling is firm. Remove from the oven. The tartlets can be served warm or set aside on a wire rack to cool.

6 When ready to serve, the tartlets can be gently reheated in a low oven if you like, then pipe or spoon a small swirl of the broad bean purée on top of each tartlet. Decorate with a light scattering of chopped thyme and some vegan bacon crispy bits if you like.

Sweet and sour popcorn tofu

For an impressive appetiser or sharing platter, put a little sauce in a Chinese soupspoon and top with a piece of tofu. To give tofu texture and flavour, there are quite a lot of processes involved, but you can save time by using a ready-made plum sauce.

SERVES 4–6

- 6 tbsp light soy sauce
- 2 tsp Chinese five-spice powder
- 400g/14oz firm tofu, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 150g/1 cup cornflour/cornstarch
- 100ml/⅓ cup plus 1 tbsp soya/soy cream
- 150g/2¾ cups panko breadcrumbs
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- vegetable oil, for deep-frying

FOR THE PLUM SAUCE

- 12 plums, stoned/pitted and roughly chopped
- 4–6 tbsp soft brown sugar
- 8 tbsp rice vinegar, or to taste
- 1 tbsp tomato purée/paste, or to taste
- ½ tsp salt

1 To make the plum sauce, put the plums in a pan over a medium heat and add 2 tablespoons of water and the sugar. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 15 minutes or until the fruit is completely softened. Add the remaining sauce ingredients and bring to a simmer again, adding a little water if necessary so that the sauce is not too thick.

2 Using a food processor or blender, blend the sauce until smooth. Check the seasoning and adjust the sugar, salt or vinegar to taste. The balance of sweet and sour flavours means one should not overpower the other. Set aside.

3 Mix the soy sauce and five-spice powder in a small bowl, then drizzle this marinade over the tofu pieces. Put the cornflour/cornstarch in one bowl, the soya/soy cream in another bowl and the panko breadcrumbs in a third bowl. Add the paprika to the panko breadcrumbs and mix well.

4 Heat 600ml/2½ cups of vegetable oil in a wok over a medium-high heat. Meanwhile, put a sheet of greaseproof paper on the work surface. Dip each piece of tofu in the cornflour/cornstarch, then in the soya/soy cream, and then in the breadcrumbs, shaping it a little to form a ball. Lay each coated ball on the greaseproof paper as you go.

5 Deep-fry the tofu balls in batches, until golden brown and crispy. Lift out using a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. You can keep the tofu balls warm in a low oven at 140˚C/275˚F/Gas 1, if you like, or reheat them later at 180˚C/350˚F/Gas 4 for 10–15 minutes. Serve with the plum sauce.





This is an edited extract from *Vegan Christmas Feasts* by Jackie Kearney (£9.99, Ryland Peters & Small). Photographs by Clare Winfield


Merry
Xmas

Mulled wine tartlets

MAKES ABOUT 12

FOR THE JAM (JELLY)
- 125ml/4fl oz/½ cup red wine
- 2 strips of orange peel
- 2 cloves
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 piece of star anise
- ¼ vanilla pod (bean)
- 125ml/4fl oz/½ cup grape juice
- 75g/2½oz/⅓ cup preserving sugar 3:1

FOR THE DOUGH
- 200g/7oz) butter
- 140g/5oz/⅔ cup) raw cane sugar
- Seeds of 1 vanilla pod (bean)
- Pinch of salt
- 1 egg
- 300g/10½oz/scant 2½ cups plain (all-purpose) flour, plus a little extra
- 100g/3½oz/1 cup) blanched ground almonds
- Star-shaped cookie cutters, in three sizes

FOR DECORATING
- Icing (confectioner's) sugar

1 For the jam, put the red wine with the orange peel, spices, scraped out vanilla pod and vanilla seeds into a saucepan. Bring to the boil on a medium heat. Immediately remove from the stove, cover and steep for at least 2 hours. Strain the wine mixture through a sieve and pour back into the pan. Mix in the juice and the preserving sugar. Bring to the boil and fast boil for 3 minutes. Pour into a sterilised jar and allow to set.

2 For the dough, cream the butter with the sugar, vanilla seeds and salt. Add the egg and beat in well. Add the flour and almonds, and work everything into a smooth dough. Wrap in clingfilm/plastic wrap and leave in a cool place for 1 hour.

3 Preheat the oven to 180˚C/350˚F/Gas 4. Roll out the dough to a thickness of 3–4mm/⅛" on a floured work surface, and press out stars in three sizes. Place on baking sheets lined with baking parchment and bake for 10–12 minutes (you might need to take the small ones out of the oven earlier). Remove from oven and allow to cool on a cooling rack.

4 Heat the jam in a saucepan and stir until smooth. Spread the jam on the large and medium-sized circles, before stacking them together with the small ones on top. Dust with icing sugar and add a final dab of jam. Store in a tin.

Coconut and almond sweets

MAKES 25

- 180g/6½oz white chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 30g/1oz coconut oil
- 80ml/3fl oz/⅓ cup coconut milk
- Seeds of ¼ vanilla pod/bean
- Grated zest and 1 tsp juice of 1 lime
- Pinch of salt
- About 25 blanched almonds
- 60g/2oz/1 cup dessicated (dried shredded) coconut
- Small paper cases

FOR DECORATING
- Sugar stars

1 The day before, preheat the oven to 120˚C/250˚F/Gas ½. Put the chocolate and oil in a small ovenproof dish and caramelise in the oven for 1 hour, stirring well every 15 minutes. Remove from the oven and leave to cool until lukewarm.

2 Put the coconut milk in a saucepan with the scraped out vanilla pod and the vanilla seeds, bring to the boil and simmer on a low heat for 10 minutes. Remove from the stove, allow to cool slightly and remove the vanilla pod. Pour the milk onto the caramelised chocolate, grated lime zest, lime juice and salt, mix everything together well, cover and leave in a cool place overnight.

3 The next day, briefly brown the almonds in a pan (without using any oil or butter). Press out small portions of dough using a teaspoon, press an almond into each one and shape the mixture into balls between your hands. Immediately roll them in coconut shavings. Place a sugar star on top of each sweet, and gently press in place. Put the sweets in small paper cases and store in the fridge until ready to use.





Apple gingerbread

MAKES ABOUT 30

FOR THE DOUGH
- 70g/2½oz dried apple rings, finely chopped
- 50g/2oz/scant ½ cup raisins, finely chopped
- 5 tbsp apple juice
- 300g/10½oz/scant 1 cup honey
- 50g/2oz/¼ cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda (baking soda)
- 200g/7oz/scant 1 cup plain (all-purpose) flour, plus a little extra
- 120g/4oz/1¼ cups wholemeal rye flour
- 40g/1½oz/¼ cup chopped almonds
- 30g/1oz/generous ¼ cup ground almonds
- 2 tsp gingerbread spice mix
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 egg yolk
- Circular and heart-shaped cookie cutters

FOR THE ICING (FROSTING)
- 100g/3½oz/generous ¾ cup icing (confectioner's) sugar
- 2 tbsp Calvados

TO ASSEMBLE
- About 200g/7oz plum jam
- 1 egg white
- Decorative wafers

1 For the dough, soak the apple rings and raisins in the apple juice. Warm up the honey and sugar on a low heat (don't boil) until the sugar has melted. Allow to cool until lukewarm and pour into a mixing bowl. Dissolve the bicarbonate of soda in 2 teaspoons water, fold into the flour and add to the honey and sugar.

2 Mix the rye flour, almonds and spices together. Add the egg to the dough with the rye flour mixture and the soaked dried fruits. Knead everything thoroughly, cover and allow to rest for 2 hours at room temperature.

3 Preheat the oven to 180˚C/350˚F/Gas 4. Roll out the dough on a floured work surface to a thickness of about 5mm/¼" and press out circles and hearts of about 4cm/1½". Coat half of the circles and hearts in the middle with plum jam and brush them at the edge with egg white, then cover each of them with a second circle or heart. Carefully press the edges together. Place on a baking sheet lined with baking parchment and bake for about 10 minutes.

4 For the icing, stir the icing sugar with the Calvados until smooth, if necessary adding Calvados drop by drop until the desired consistency is achieved. Take the gingerbread out of the oven, coat with icing while still warm and top with wafers. Allow to dry and store in a tin. Leave for at least 2 days before eating.



This is an edited extract from *Let it Snow* by Agnes Prus (£7.99, Hardie Grant). Photographs by Frauke Antholz

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Espresso Martini

Coffee cocktails are now very much a thing, and so they should be – they are absolutely delicious. Leading the charge is the Espresso Martini – although not a new idea it's only really found mainstream popularity in recent years and is now on every cocktail menu. Serve with marzipan-stuffed dates with orange blossom water and pistachios (recipe below).

MAKES 2 DRINKS

ESPRESSO MARTINI
- 50ml/2fl oz freshly made espresso coffee
- 50ml/2fl oz vodka
- 50ml/2fl oz coffee liqueur, such as Kalhua or Tia Maria
- ½ tbsp sugar syrup
- Ice cubes, to shake
- Coffee beans, to garnish (optional)
- 2 mini Martini glasses

Pour all the ingredients into a cocktail shaker filled with ice and shake until the outside of the shaker feels icy cold. Strain into small Martini glasses, garnish with a few coffee beans (if using) and serve.

Marzipan-stuffed dates with orange blossom water and pistachios

MAKES 24

- 24 large Medjool dates
- 180g/6oz white marzipan
- Orange blossom water
- Finely chopped pistachios, to garnish

Make a slit along each date and remove the pits. Knead the marzipan with a few drops of orange blossom water, to taste. Divide the mixture into 24 pieces and gently fill each date with a piece. Finish with a sprinkle of chopped pistachios. These will keep for 2 weeks in an airtight container.

Clementine Caipirinha

A classic Caipirinha is made with a whole lime cut into wedges and 'muddled' with sugar in a rocks glass to extract all the juice. A scoop of crushed iced then goes in, followed by a generous measure of neat spirit. The tangy clementine is perfect with a little cranberry sauce and creamy Brie (recipe below).

MAKES 2 DRINKS

CLEMENTINE CAIPIRINHA
- 1 whole clementine
- 1 fresh lime, cut into wedges
- 2 tsp demerara sugar
- 60ml/2fl oz cachaça (Brazilian sugar cane spirit)
- Ice cubes and crushed ice
- 2 small tumblers
- Drinking straws

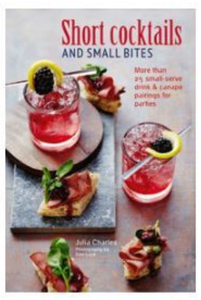
Remove the ends from the clementine and slice it into quarters, being sure to remove any of the white pith in the centre of the segments. Put into a cocktail shaker with a lime wedge and sugar and pound with a muddler or end of a wooden rolling pin to extract the juice. Add the cachaça with plenty of ice cubes and shake well. Strain into small crushed-ice-filled tumblers and serve with a short, wide straw. Garnish with lime wedges, if desired.

Brie and cranberry sauce puffs

MAKES 24

- 375g/12fl oz package ready-rolled puff pastry, chilled
- 200g/7oz Brie, cut into 2cm/¾" cubes
- 250ml/1 cup cranberry sauce
- Fresh thyme sprigs, to garnish
- 24-hole non-stick mini muffin pan, lightly greased

Preheat the oven to 200˚C/400˚F/Gas 6. Use a sharp knife to cut the puff pastry sheet into 7.5cm/3" squares. Press each square into the prepared muffin pan. Place a cube of Brie in each one and add about 2 teaspoons of cranberry sauce. Bake in the preheated oven for 15–10 minutes until golden and puffed and the cheese has melted. Garnish with a sprig of thyme and serve warm.



This is an edited extract from *Short Cocktails and Small Bites* by Julia Charles (£7.99, Ryland Peters & Small). Photographs by Alex Luck



SET THE

Ceramic Chalkboard bauble, £10, TwentySevenUK at Etsy

Snowy Christmas bauble, £3.99, Dobbies

MONOCHROME MAGIC

Team classic black and white with a hint of gold for a contemporary nordic look

Lismore chambray irish linen napkin in Smoke Grey, £10, Rebecca Udall

Spotty christmas crackers, £28 for a set of 6, Nancy & Betty Studio

16 piece cutlery set in gold and black, £29.99, JD Williams

Poppi dinner plate, £15.50 each, Abode Living

PRETTY IN PINK

Opt for sugar plum fairy pastels with a dose of sparkle for a soft, romantic scheme

Midnight rose garland, £24.99, Very

Pink champagne saucer, £4.99, TK Maxx

Tome 16-piece mirrored cutlery set in copper, £79, Made

Lace round bauble, £3.49, Dobbies

Denby quartz rose dinner plates, £64 for set of 4, John Lewis & Partners



Noir printed ceramic 12 piece boxset, £35; 12 piece glassware set, £13, all Argos Home



Grand Noel collection glass baubles, £11.99 for a set of 3, Lights4fun

Feature Pippa Blenkinsop and Holly Reaney

SCENE

Be inspired by the latest colour schemes and interior trends to create a stylish Christmas party table that is guaranteed to wow your dinner guests

KITSCHMAS

Create an eclectic look by combining soft shades and brights with pearlescent finishes

Sunbury 16 piece mirrored cutlery set, £30, Habitat

Sequin bauble, £18 for a set of 4, Amara

Pearlescent dinner plate, £3, Wilko

Polosa martini glasses, £22 for a set of 2, Oliver Bonas

WINTER BLUES

Break with tradition and embrace a midnight scheme with a side of twinkle

Capsule tumbler in navy, £4, Sainsbury's Home

Brass animal napkin rings, £56 for 6, Audenza

Gold glitter place card holder, £5.99, Ginger Ray

Star bauble in navy and gold, £3.99, Dobbies

Knightshayes Midnight Sky napkins, set of 20, £3.50, National Trust Shop

Romantic gold dessert plates in Sugar Paper, £85 for set of 6, Amara

Musical Rainbow crackers £25; ornaments from £8; Italian short stem wine glass £7; Georg Jensen Tunes candle holders from £35, all John Lewis & Partners

New Year's Eve Tray in Dark Gold and Dark Silver Gilding Wax, £6.95 Annie Sloan


Elan

SPIRITUAL HOME

Kay and Paul Cullen rescued a Victorian chapel, filling it with art and vintage pieces and adding earthy foraged greenery at Christmas to create a homely, curated look for the striking heritage building

Words Natalie Flaum | Photographs Colin Poole

Black granite worktops from Cardiff Marble Co perfectly contrast with the double-height chapel ceilings, and beautifully showcase Kay's pottery and accessories. For similar cabinetry, try Burbidge's Marlow range. The mixed-and-matched brass and glass pendants are from Cox & Cox. For similar copper chairs, try Cult Furniture



There are so many reasons for Kay and Paul Cullen to celebrate this Christmas. For a start, it's two years since they moved into their Welsh chapel and embarked on a labour-of-love renovation. They also have a smart new kitchen, two new bathrooms, an extra bedroom and – just in time for winter – a new central heating system. Now they're enjoying adding the festive finishing touches and have gone all out with earthy decorations, twinkling lights and candles.

'I love foraging on country walks, collecting twigs and greenery to decorate at Christmas,' says Kay. 'I've used the foliage to make a wreath, adding sprigs of mistletoe and gypsophila to the Christmas tree, like a dusting of snow. This year, after all our hard work renovating, we're looking forward to a glass or two of mulled wine by the log-burner.'

Built in 1880, the Welsh stone and redbrick chapel served the local mining community up until 2001, when it was sold and then converted into a home. 'Some people in the village were married here and the plumber remembers going to Sunday school here,' adds Kay. 'Opposite the chapel there's a beautiful garden created to honour the miners.'

The couple discovered the property two years ago on an estate agent's website, although Paul took some convincing to view it. 'We like to think this little chapel was waiting for us to find it and love it, which we did in a heartbeat. It was a very sad building but full of promise,' recalls Kay.

She and Paul planned to put back the character that had been lost with its conversion, but taking on so much DIY alongside full-time jobs proved a challenge. With so many things in need of attention, the logical approach was to work through the property, room by room. Kay and Paul managed a schedule of work using local builders.

Kay works with colour and trend predictions daily in her job as an interior designer at Laura Ashley, so she had a clear vision for the project. 'I wanted a traditional style with an emphasis on comfort, warmth and simplicity,' she adds. 'I spend most of my days off sourcing vintage pieces for my home and I love anything with an aged, worn look to it. The chapel is my home, my passion and my laboratory, where I'm constantly trying new ideas.'

The boiler room has been converted into a bathroom/utility and the large former bathroom into a third bedroom for their baby granddaughter, Evie. The double doors inside the porch were full of flaws, all bowed and buckled with a rotting wooden frame, 'but we loved the old chapel doors, so we're in the process of repairing and repainting them – with five coats of paint to date,' says Kay.

'Paul repaired the porch walls, leaving one brick wall exposed as a feature,' adds Kay, who painted the plastic interior window frames herself using a plastic primer. To add further character to the building, they also replaced the standard front door with an arched door and did all the decorating themselves. 'The chapel ceilings rise to almost 3.5m,' adds Kay. 'They make the space feel so much larger, but painting them was a mammoth task.'

Paul also did some of the plumbing himself. 'We stored a new cast-iron bath in our shed, and when we were ready to fit it, as it was too heavy to lift, we used an old quilt to drag it along the floor into position,' says Kay. To bring back some of the building's character, Kay added panelling, which makes a great backdrop for her vintage finds. 'I like to paint furniture with a chalk finish, and then mix it with some key modern pieces to give more of a contemporary twist and stop it feeling like my grandmother's house!' she laughs. 'Old mixed with new is a great philosophy to follow.'

To create cosy spaces full of interest, Kay has filled every room with eclectic vintage and antique bargains, including £2 earthenware pots and £30 vintage wardrobes in Evie's bedroom. 'My favourite is my grandmother's Welsh blanket – it has a rare geometric weave and is quite a sought-after item today,' she says. 'We also love the Singer sewing machine that belonged to Paul's mother – we gave it a new life as a basin stand in our shower room, and it's a poignant reminder of a much-loved lady.'

Kay and Paul are currently transforming the chapel car park into gardens, where Paul has built a garden path, planted box ball hedges along the side of the building and recycled scaffold boards to make an outdoor table – with chapel pew seats, of course! 'We're also hoping to change all the windows back to wood and create a new double door opening from the kitchen to the garden,' adds Kay. 'Giving up almost every holiday and weekend for the past 18 months has been tough but we're so proud of our achievements. Knowing that we've breathed new life into an unloved building is very rewarding. Our little chapel is so special – even on the gloomiest day it lifts your spirits.'

THE STORY

OWNERS Kay Cullen, interior designer at Laura Ashley, and her husband Paul, a mechanical engineer, live here with their dachshund Opry

PROPERTY A former Welsh chapel, built in 1880 in a Carmarthenshire village. The chapel served the local mining community until 2001

WHAT THEY DID Kay and Paul repaired the redbrick arch front porch, replaced the front door, added a new heating system, electrics and drainage, and converted a boiler room into a bathroom and utility. The couple added a third bedroom, two new bathrooms, a new kitchen and redecorated throughout

Left: Kay and Paul's future plans include rebuilding the front wall and transforming the rear garden, formerly the chapel car park
Below: Kay makes the most of the kitchen's high ceiling with her rustic, natural Christmas theme. Using fishing wire, Paul fixed up a branch from the garden and Kay has decorated it with mistletoe and her favourite baubles. Leather armchairs from Laura Ashley add a country feel by the Charnwood stove
Below left: Kay chose patterned Harlem Shuffle porcelain tiles from Mandarin Stone for her splashback, teamed with an Elan Rangemaster and black wall lights from Tinsmiths fitted by electrician Baden Carter

With the tree sparkling, candles flickering and presents wrapped, the scene is set for a cosy Christmas. The comfy Lynden leather sofa is from Laura Ashley, as is the faux-fur throw. The kilim cushions are from Baileys Home and Homes of Elegance. Kay found other pieces, including the coffee table and sideboard, in vintage shops



This image: Kay has created an earthy feel in the living room using soft textured faux fur, embroidered cushions and cow-hide rugs. She combines upcycled pieces, such as a vintage chest of drawers, with modern pieces like the round mirror, kilim cushions and a floor lamp from Artemide
Opposite: The chapel corridor was one of the features Kay loved the most. A row of pendant lights and framed art prints enhance the original detailing







Left: The master bedroom features one of Kay's favourite items, her grandmother's Welsh blanket. It looks perfectly at home alongside modern pieces, including an angled lamp and green table lamp from Pooky, and the vintage Sanderson fabric cushions
Above: Kay and Paul created a bedroom for their little granddaughter Evie – it looks particularly magical with a touch of festive sparkle
Below: The en suite bathroom features a mix of old and new, too, including an antique French kitchen utensil mould that Kay had adapted into a light fitting over her roll-top bath




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GIFTS FOR HER

Make her Christmas sparkle with a little help from our hand-picked guide

1 Vogue June 1977 unframed print by Barry Lategan, £65, Rockett St George **2** Desk calendar embroidery kit, £35, Not on the High Street **3** Small Hearts makeup bag, £16, Sophie Allport **4** S'well Painted Poppy 260ml bottle, £25, John Lewis & Partners **5** Vintage Bloom lace camisole set, £20, M&S **6** Diagonal Rick Rack notebook by Matilda Goad, £19.99, Papier **7** Ring handle handbag, £24.99, Bon Prix **8** Pendleton Somerby hybrid bike, £280, Halfords **9** Salted espressio martini truffles, £3.95, Hotel Chocolat **10** Skandinavisk BÆR scented candle, £29, Hus & Hem **11** Mug, £4, Sainsbury's Home **12** Rumi card case, £35, Bell & Fox **13** Velvet shelf with jewellery hooks, £69, Oliver Bonas **14** Mauli Rituals hand and body lotion, £29, Curious Egg **15** Laura Mercier Editorial eye palette, £38, Selfridges **16** Bosschaert Flowers watch, £28, National Gallery Company **17** Travel mug, £14.95, Joules **18** Rose Geranium gift set, £30, Soap Folk

GIFTS FOR HIM

Make the men in your life feel special with this selection of dapper treats

1 Stainless steel ice bucket and tongs in blue and brass, £39.99, BarCraft **2** Luxury Edwin Jagger three piece shaving set in blue, £82, Annabel James **3** Amber whisky glasses, £20 for set of 4, Curious Egg **4** Men's leather tote backpack, £155, Scaramanga **5** Nordés Atlantic Galician Gin, £35.95, Master Of Malt **6** Bee's Knees luxury matches, £6, Archivist Gallery **7** Kashmir journey silk bow tie, £20, Sarah Campbell Designs **8** Huxley candle, £37, Neptune **9** Kindle Oasis e-Reader, £229.99 for 8GB, Amazon **10** Revival iStream3 radio in Berry Red, £199.99, Roberts **11** London socks, £10, National Gallery Company **12** Tillman leather wallet in tan, £34.95, Joules **13** The Gentleman's Portrait fine china mug, £15, Chase & Wonder **14** *The Whisky Dictionary* by Ian Wisniewki, Octopus Publishing, £15, Waterstones **15** Fully charged all-over wash, £19, Malako **16** Survival of the fittest tin, £18, National Trust Shop **17** Anglepoise 1227 desk lamp in Ink/Brass, £250, John Lewis & Partners

GIFTS FOR FOOD LOVERS

Whether they have a passion for cooking or eating, find great gifts for the foodies in your life

1 Yogurt making starter pack, £16.99, EasiYo **2** Pasta kit, £29.99, Lakeland **3** Milanese panettone, £19, Petersham Nurseries **4** The Gateway hamper, £39.99, Willie's Cacao **5** Expert Prep Pro in midnight blue, £250, Cuisinart **6** Traditions cookbook decoration, £6, John Lewis & Partners **7** Pudding oven gloves, £23.95, Thornback & Peel **8** Pomegranate all-vegan chocolate gift box, £16.99, Chocolate & Love **9** Queen of Hearts stand mixer, £699, KitchenAid **10** Chocolates in a tin bauble, £1, Flying Tiger **11** DIY gingerbread house kit, £35, The Biscuiteers **12** Christmas pudding preserve, £7.95, Fortnum & Mason **13** The Fairy Tale dark chocolate advent calendar, £19.50, Prestat **14** White Heron British Cassis blackcurrant liqueur, £19.45, Master of Malt **15** Red personalised 'Top Cook' mug, £18.50, Cornishware **16** Chocolate lolly trees, £3, Waitrose & Partners **17** Fondue set in Cherry, 20cm, £199, Staub

GIFTS FOR GARDENERS

Spoil green-fingered friends and family with these goodies

1 Mini greenhouse terrarium, £36, Red Candy **2** 60 warm white festoon lights, £49.99, Lights4fun **3** London Transport Kew foxgloves deck chair, £99, We Love Cushions **4** Slate plant tags with soapstone pencil, £12 for a set of 6, Garden Trading **5** Gardening hand rake, £16.95, Annabel James **6** Ferm Living Bau large watering can, £59, Cloudberry Living **7** Green glazed terracotta bird bath, £18, National Trust Shop **8** Winter Flowers mug, £39.95 for a set of 2 assorted, Emma Bridgewater **9** Wooden trug, £24.99, Dobbies **10** Spade bottle opener, £17.50, Joanna Wood **11** Gisela Graham Garden Birds gardening gloves, £14.95, Hurn & Hurn **12** Brass mist sprayer, £14.99, Haws **13** V&A Leicester fork and trowel, £25, Wild & Wolf **14** Cast iron bird twine string dispenser with scissors, £14, Dibor **15** Bee Friendly tea towel, £9.95, The Ethical Shop **16** Dew drop bee home by Peter Lanyon, £24, Made by Hand Online **17** Kneelo Flora and Fauna kneeler, £19.99, Burgon & Ball

GIFTS FOR HOME LOVERS

Help them jazz up their interiors with this stylish selection of accessories

1 Snuggle pink throw, £45, Ross & Brown **2** Bloomingville macramé wall hanging, £32.95, Scandiborn **3** Woven pink spot tassel basket, £34, The Find Store **4** Faux string of pearls, £35, Audenza **5** Handcrafted stem vases, £30 each, Rowen & Wren **6** Pink and brushed gold cutlery set, £16, George Home **7** Iko scalloped cocktail shaker, £24, Oliver Bonas **8** Handy Hands bookends, £40, Rockett St George **9** Mountains art print, £44, The Gifted Few **10** Fox & Ivy planter, £12, Tesco **11** Angelo glasses, £25 for 2, Made.com **12** Luminous pomegranate and patchouli scent set, £20, Sunnylife **13** Riya bar cart, £299, John Lewis & Partners **14** Kapka enamel platter, £17, Smallable **15** Pink glitter pineapple bauble, £4, Paperchase **16** *Rockett St George: Extraordinary Interiors in Colour* by Lucy St George and Jane Rockett, £19.99, Ryland Peters & Small, Amazon **17** Frond by Lucy Tiffney cushion, £55, Sofa.com **18** Mini pot, £30, An Artful Life

GIFTS FOR CRAFTERS

Inspire merry makers with these creative presents

1 *The Mindful Maker* by Claire Youngs, £12.99, Ryland Peters & Small **2** Sloane Stationery tape measure in Royal Blue, £20, Amara **3** Limited Edition The Artist paint-your-own keepsake box, £49.95, Annie Sloan **4** Singer Simple 3223 sewing machine, £145, Hobbycraft **5** Ralph the Dog print rectangular knitting bag in blue, £18, John Lewis & Partners **6** Jordan HDR yellow boxes, £100, Habitat **7** Sewing machine decoration, £2, George Home **8** Sew Heart Felt Birds on a Bobbin, £19.95 each, Hurn & Hurn **9** Astrid Ruby washi craft tape, £2.95, Rex London **10** Risdon & Risdon full length denim apron, £75, Sir Gordon Bennett **11** Knit-your-own advent calendar, £56, Not on the High Street **12** Palomino Blackwing colouring pencils, £12, London Graphic Centre **13** Ho ho ho embroidery kit, £25, Cotton Clare at Etsy **14** Theodora print fabric scissors, £10.95, Liberty London **15** Baskets, £39 for a set of 3, Mustard Made

GIFTS FOR KIDS

Give them a Christmas they'll never forget with this adorable selection of toys and treats

1 Grow Your Own Jungle 3D puzzle, £14.99, Not on the High Street **2** Flexa play shop, £161, Nubie **3** Wedgwood Peter Rabbit egg cup and spoon, £85, John Lewis & Partners **4** Cosy up socks, £12, Frugi **5** Arc en ciel rainbow print, from £15, Squidgearoo **6** Kids on the Go penguin lunch bag, £25, Sunnylife **7** Catapult toy with four foam bullets, £2.95, Rex London **8** Green Scoot Around bike, £58.91, Hape **9** Soft Cuddly Friends giraffe, £16.90, Steiff **10** Planet purse, £6, Sainsbury's Home **11** Wooden doll house, £30, George Home **12** My RSPB Nature Clipboard, £9.99, RSPB **13** Rabbit cushion, £25, Hibou Home **14** The Very Hungry Caterpillar money box, £13.50, Portmeirion **15** Nico Tall Stories giraffe sweater, £29, Sugarhill Brighton **16** T-rex toy in Christmas jumper, £18, Natural History Museum Shop

GIFTS FOR ANIMAL LOVERS

Choose a thoughtful gift for enthusiasts of all creatures great and small

1 *Cats of the National Trust* by Amy Feldman, £9.99, National Trust Shop **2** Handmade sari doorstop, £22.99, Oxfam **3** Hound Christmas crackers, £15.50, Annabel James **4** Owl vase, £11, George Home **5** Hedgehog mug, £19.95, Emma Bridgewater **6** Little painted birdies, £14 each, Sarah Campbell Designs **7** Dog and Daisy cosmetic bag, £21.95, Thornback & Peel **8** Tweed dog collar, from £10, Pet Pooch Boutique **9** Wild Wood 2020 calendar, £9.99, Perkins & Morley **10** Spaniel door stop, £34.50, Joanna Wood **11** Wax-cotton dog bed, £59.95, Barbour **12** Make your own cat treats, £6.95, Rex London **13** Terrier jumper, £59.95, Joules **14** Zebra ornament, £7, Debenhams **15** Scottie dog door mat in natural, £10, John Lewis & Partners **16** Bone dog tag, £3, Scaramanga **17** Macaroon tweed dog carrier, £123, Mutts & Hounds **18** Herkules Yorkshire Terrier, £45, Steiff **19** Quail Ceramics giraffe face egg cup, £11, Hurn & Hurn

STOCKING FILLERS

Little treats for family and friends, all for £15 and under

1 Festive holiday quiz, £9.95, Annabel James **2** Elf Jolly Ginger, £6.95, Biscuiteers Baking **3** Coffee pot enamelled pin, £7, Chase & Wonder **4** Gentlemen's hardware credit card tool, £10, Wild & Wolf **5** Electric Bloom metal cocktail straws, £14 for 4, Sunnylife **6** Yoga notebook, £7.95, Lily King **7** Leather luggage tag, £14, Snakehive **8** Liqueur mince pie medley, £14.95, Fortnum & Mason **9** Jevington Jigg's moustache wax, Black Pepper & Grapefruit, £14, The Brighton Beard Company **10** Home for Christmas mug, £11.50, Sophie Allport **11** Pretty Useful Tools hideaway flashlight, £15, Hurn & Hurn **12** Blooming Marvellous organic soap, jasmine and orange, £4.95, Arthouse Unlimited **13** Caci al Cacao, £9.95, Carluccio's **14** Spiced Orange candle, £8.95, Beefayre **15** Flamingo cosmetic mirror, £12, Sara Miller **16** Moroccan Rose & Agarwood hand cream, £9.50, Oliver Bonas **17** Glitz & Glam Gin Infusion bags, £10, Debenhams

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CHRISTMAS DAYS OUT 2019

Wrap up warm, grab a mug of mulled wine, and explore these fabulous seasonal events

Bedecked in boughs of holly and glazed with a thin layer of frost, our country is transformed into a magical place throughout the festive season. With wooden chalets bringing roast chestnuts and handcrafted Christmas gifts to our streets, stately homes and castles decorated with awe-inspiring Christmas trees, and various places hosting a wide variety of themed events and workshops, there are plenty of opportunities to help you get in the festive mood.

SCOTLAND

1 EDINBURGH CHRISTMAS MARKETS

FRI 17 NOV – SAT 5 JAN 2020

With a range of rides, attractions and traditional market stalls, Christmas in Edinburgh promises to be a winter wonderland. Spreading across George Street and Princes Street Gardens, the romantic festive market offers a unique shopping experience with crafts, gifts and gastronomic surprises. (edinburghschristmas.com)

SANTA AND THE SNOW, GLASGOW

SAT 16 NOV – TUES 24 DEC

Hop aboard the Polar Express Snow Train and take children on the magical Santa and the Snow experience. Attend Elf School and learn how to craft a Christmas decoration with help from the Chief Elves. Then venture into Santa's Story Room to hear one of his favourite tales before heading out into the Snow Play Area to build snow castles, dress a snowman and play in the real snow. Adult £9.95, child £19.95. (snowfactor.com)



2


5


4


3

THE MIDLANDS

5 BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET PRESENTS THE NUTCRACKER

FRI 22 NOV – SAT 14 DEC

The Nutcracker has been part of Birmingham's Christmas tradition since 1990 and this year is no exception. Returning for a second year, this production, directed by Sir Peter Wright, is considered to be one of the best performances in the world. Prepare to be swept away by Tchaikovsky's enchanting score, along with gorgeous costumes, vast sets and delicate dancers. Tickets start at £21.(brb.org.uk)

NOTTINGHAM CHRISTMAS MARKET

THUR 14 NOV – TUES 31 DEC

Meander through the market stalls, pull on some ice skates, check out the double-decker winter bar and head to the helter-skelter for a fun-packed festive extravaganza this Christmas. (nottinghamwinterwonderland.co.uk)

STOKE ON TRENT WINTER WONDERLAND

FRI 15 NOV – MON 6 JAN 2020

Adopting a traditional Bavarian style, Stoke's Winter Wonderland promises fun for all the family. Have a drink at the Bavarian bar and discover traditional chalets selling gifts, fresh coffee and seasonal sweet treats. Later, head to the huge ice rink, ride the roller coaster and 60m sky swing and even take the opportunity to meet Santa. (winterwonderlandstoke.com)

THE NORTH

2 YORK'S ST NICHOLAS FAIR

THURS 14 NOV – SUN 22 DEC

The magical cobbled streets of York are brought to life with the scent of spiced mulled wine and twinkling fairy lights. Meander through the streets and explore 100 traditional-style chalets packed full with Christmas gifts, decorations and festive delights. (yorkshire.com)

CHRISTMAS AT CHATSWORTH

SAT 9 NOV – SUN 5 JAN 2020

Imaginations run wild as Chatsworth is once again transformed into a festive wonderland. The creative team has produced a Christmas experience that draws on the talents of the staff from across the estate to make costumes, props and sets. It promises to enchant young and old alike. Adult, £25, child £15. (chatsworth.org)

3 ENCHANTED BELSAY HALL

THURS 19 – SUN 22 DEC

With trails of fairy lights, mirror balls in the trees, and scenes illuminated by coloured lights, Belsay Hall promises to be a magical wonderland this Christmas. Enjoy further festivities in the Stable Yard, with mulled wine and mince pies, before browsing in the Christmas gift shop. Adult £12, child £7.50. (english-heritage.org.uk)

4 CHRISTMAS AT DUNHAM MASSEY

FRI 22 NOV – MON 30 DEC

See Dunham Massey's deer park in a whole new light with its dazzling festive installation. The Georgian house is the backdrop for colourful projections, and there will be a mile-long winter trail through tunnels and fields of light. Pause for hot drinks and to toast marshmallows on fire pits. Adults, £17.50, child, £11, (advance). (nationaltrust.org.uk/dunham-massey)

Feature Holly Reaney and Michelle Guy. Photographs (1) Ian Cameron (2) Visit York (3) English Heritage (4) ©National Trust Images/Chris Lacey (5) ©National Trust Images/Derek Hatton









LONDON, THE SOUTH & EAST

6 SKATE AT SOMERSET HOUSE

WED 13 NOV – SUN 12 JAN 2020

The grounds at Somerset House will again be transformed into a huge ice-skating rink as Skate returns this November. Glide around the rink against the backdrop of a sparkling 40ft Christmas tree, and explore food and drink stalls. Tickets on sale from September. (somersethouse.org.uk)

BLENHEIM PALACE: ALICE IN THE PALACE

FRI 22 NOV – SUN 5 JAN 2020

Step between the pages of a larger-than-life storybook and enter into a wonderland like no other. This festive family adventure will be filled with hidden surprises and familiar faces, including the mischievous Cheshire Cat. Decked with sparkling giant peacocks, the palace's famous Long Library will host the iconic and truly fantastic Mad Hatter's Tea Party. Adult £27, child £16. (blenheimpalace.com)

7 CHRISTMAS AT WINDSOR CASTLE

DATES THROUGHOUT DEC

Windsor Castle opens its doors to visitors through the festive season. At the heart is the magnificent 20-foot-high Nordmann fir Christmas tree in St George's Hall, which is dressed in beautiful gold decorations, while decadent wreaths and garlands also decorate the gorgeous State Apartments. On selected dates in December, visitors can enjoy a private evening tour of the castle, which is led by an expert guide and offers a special behind-the-ropes experience. Included is a complimentary glass of champagne. Adult £22.50, child £13. (royalcollection.org.uk)

VEGAN WINTER FESTIVAL, ESSEX

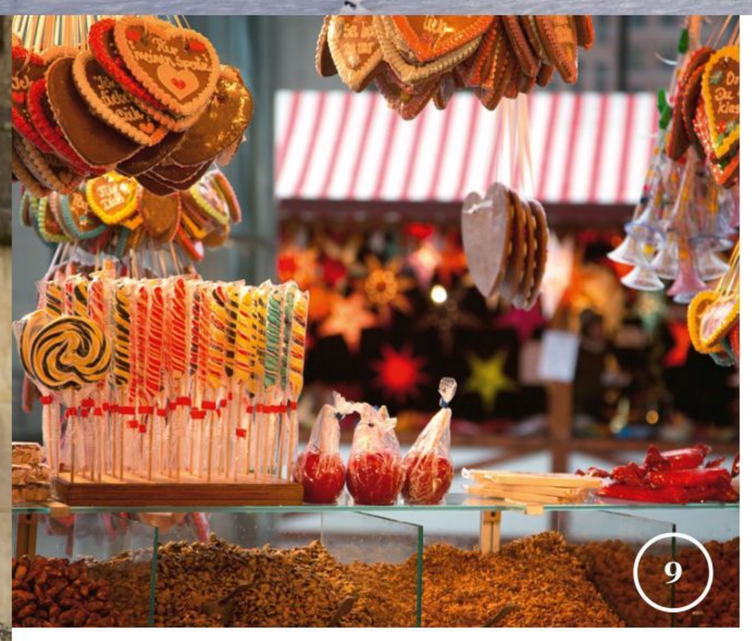
SAT 14 DEC

Discover the Christmas festival with an ethical difference. Browse over 80 fantastic stalls selling Christmas food and gifts, plus enjoy exciting cookery demonstrations, inspirational talks, interactive workshops, yoga, a wide range of free food samples to try, and children's activities running throughout the day. Entry £3. (veganeventsuk.co.uk)









a glass of mulled wine and a visit to see Father Christmas (visits are ticketed so booking is essential). Adult £14.50, child £7.20. (nationaltrust.org.uk/lacock-abbey-fox-talbot-museum-and-village)

WALES

9 SOUTHAMPTON CHRISTMAS MARKET

THURS 14 NOV – SUN 23 DEC

One of the Christmas market highlights is 'Flying Santa', who takes to the skies over the city centre. There's also an ice rink and 40 independent stallholders offering delights like sweet gingerbread hearts, candied fruit and handmade gifts. (visitsouthampton.co.uk)

10 LACOCK ABBEY, FOX TALBOT MUSEUM AND VILLAGE, WILTSHIRE

SUN 1 DEC – FRI 20 DEC

Community is at the heart of Christmas at Lacock Abbey. Bursting with festivities, follow the fun family trail around the quintessential English village and the woodland grounds before venturing inside the 13th-century abbey. Enjoy the beautiful trees that fill the cloisters, decorated in a wide array of colours and styles by members of the community, then complete the festive experience with

CARDIFF CHRISTMAS MARKET

THURS 14 NOV – MON 23 DEC

For over 20 years, Cardiff Christmas Market has wound its way through the main pedestrian streets of the city centre. Warm your hands around a hot mulled wine as you discover the delights of more than 200 eclectic exhibitors, including local artists and craftspeople offering original pieces from jewellery to woodwork, as well as seasonal food and drink stalls. (cardiffchristmasmarket.com)

11 CAROL CONCERT AT POWIS CASTLE

THURS 5 DEC

There is nothing better to get you in the Christmas spirit than a spot of carol singing. Held in the beautiful ballroom of Powis Castle, join the Chester Saint Cecilia Singers for an evening filled with festive harmony. Turn the event into a whole experience by booking a delicious meal in the elegant Courtyard Restaurant – the perfect pre-Christmas treat. Adult £10, child £5. (nationaltrust.org.uk/powis-castle-and-garden)

8 BATH CHRISTMAS MARKET

THURS 28 NOV – SUN 15 DEC

Set against the stunning Bath Abbey, the popular market returns with more than 200 chalets winding through the Georgian streets. The market prides itself on locally produced, handcrafted gifts and festive foods – ideal for a spot of Christmas shopping. (bathchristmasmarket.co.uk)

Photographs (6) © Luke Dyson (7) Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019 (9) Getty Images (10) ©National Trust Images/David Levenson (11) ©National Trust Images/John Millar



THE COLOURS OF CHRISTMAS

Buying a pocket-size thatched cottage in need of major repairs was a brave move for Alison and Carl Cooper, but one they've turned into a big success

Words Karen Darlow | Styling Pippa Blenkinsop | Photographs Brent Darby

With the Franco Belge stove lit, and the Laura Ashley chairs and footstool pulled up close, the living room is all set for a comfy winter evening. French limestone flooring from White Hall is topped with a sisal rug from KC Carpets. On the tree are red and gold baubles from Fortnum & Mason, and gold and cream baubles and a star from Cox & Cox. The gift wrap is from Hobbycraft. Alison's mother Judith made the garland. The panelling is painted in Farrow & Ball's Mole's Breath. The wall lights are from Jim Lawrence

For the new owners of Cobweb Cottage, spiders were the least of their problems. Crumbling timbers and limited space were far bigger concerns. The tiny cottage, measuring just 16 square feet, had belonged to the same people since the early 1950s and little had been done since. A galley kitchen and basic bathroom were shoehorned into the sole downstairs room, while the bedrooms were part open to the Worcestershire skies through a thatch that was long overdue attention. When the two elderly owners passed away, the cottage was put up for auction. Carl and Alison viewed it and were smitten. 'It was completely charming even though it was falling apart,' says Alison. 'It was tiny, beautiful and totally unspoilt, with an old cottage garden. One of the things we loved is that there's nothing in the surroundings from this century, apart from the occasional telegraph pole.'

Straight after their winning bid the couple went to see exactly what they had bought. 'In the middle of all this land, with sheep in the next field and views of the Malvern Hills, we knew it was a special place and that we could do something good with it,' recalls Carl. 'We bought it without even knowing whether we'd get planning permission. It was a real leap of faith – but then we've always been a bit gung ho, or at least I have,' he laughs.

The couple rented a house nearby and began to plan how to turn the cottage into a liveable home. 'The first architect told us we wouldn't get permission for anything,' says Carl. 'But then we called in Alan Simcox from Nick Joyce Architects, who the surrounding Spetchley Estate uses, thinking that he would know what was possible in the area. I'd done my own drawings of exactly what we wanted so his finished plans were an architect's translation of my ideas,' he adds. They submitted the plans and prepared to do battle.

There was no battle, just a long wait, but finally Carl and Alison heard that their application was successful and geared up for the build. Carl took 'gearing up' literally, buying a digger on Ebay and bringing it home on a trailer. 'The first time I used it I cut through a water pipe and got so much stick from the builders!' Carl project managed the build, and helped out, but admits that he 'tended to get the duff jobs!' At the Homebuilding & Renovating Show when they told thatcher Grant Batchelor that their build involved three thatches – the original house, the kitchen extension, and a guest annexe – he said: 'You're my new best friends.' And after 12 weeks with Grant on site, Alison and Carl do consider him a friend. One day a severe reaction to a wasp sting while up on the roof caused Grant to be rushed to hospital. 'By the time I got back from the chemist's with antihistamine he'd been carted off in an ambulance,' says Carl. 'Four hours later and full of adrenaline, he was back here discussing the next stage of the job. We sent him home!'

There was plenty of drama early on, too. 'On day two, Paul Wood, our builder, phoned to say the cottage needed underpinning. The timbers were rotten up to one and a half metres, so it all had to be acropropped and the sole plate replaced,' says Carl. 'Days later he asked me for a weather forecast before he started work as the cottage was going to be so heavily propped up that if the wind blew the wrong way, the whole thing would come down, as it was exposed on two sides and would act like a sail.'

The Coopers were keen to preserve as much of the original building as they could – 'without being silly about it,' explains Carl. 'Anything we replaced, we used like for like, using traditional methods. A new sole plate was constructed from air-dried English oak, hand cut on our driveway, with the pegs to secure the timbers created from the offcuts.'

Alison and Carl's home slowly took shape: the cottage first, then the kitchen extension, and finally the guest annexe. Carl had been collecting inspiration for the interiors since the auction in August 2012. 'The living room dictated its own décor,' he says, and the deep red paint and grey panelled walls complement the old timbers perfectly. The room lends itself well to chilly winter evenings in front of the wood-burner.

Christmas Day will start with a dog walk and leisurely preparations for a late dinner with family and friends. 'We'll set up the table in the living room, where it's so atmospheric with the tree, and move the armchairs into the kitchen to create a sociable space for the day,' says Alison. No doubt the festive guests will be full of admiration for both rooms – the airy kitchen and the cosy living room, with all the colours of Christmas.

THE STORY

OWNERS Alison Cooper, a family support practitioner at St Richard's Hospice, Worcester, and her husband Carl, a helicopter pilot, live here with their dogs Diego, a giant schnauzer, and Minnie, a standard schnauzer

PROPERTY A Grade II-listed timber-frame home built between 1530 and 1550. It is in a Conservation Area, on the site of a designated ancient monument on the Spetchley Estate, near Worcester

WHAT THEY DID The couple had to rebuild the original cottage as the timbers were rotten. They rethatched it and added a ground-floor bathroom and kitchen extension, and built a separate guest annexe in the garden

Carl and Alison's Tudor cottage is set in a Conservation Area with views of the Malvern Hills. The couple chose local firm TPW Construction, who had to rebuild it from the ground up as the timbers were rotten. Master thatcher Grant Batchelor rethatched the roof and created the thatch pheasant



Above: Leading straight into the living room, the front door, like all the doors in the cottage, was made from the old floorboards, which were salvaged when the cottage was rebuilt. The sideboard is an antique and the framed canvas is by Roy Fairchild-Woodard. The walls are painted in Laura Ashley's Summer Pudding. For a similar curtain fabric, try Ian Mankin

Opposite: In the kitchen extension, glass panels give a view of the garden and Malvern Hills beyond. All the windows and doors were made by Prospect Joinery. The guest annexe is just visible through the window. A faux European Silver Fir Candlelit LED 6ft tree from Balsam Hill is decorated with baubles from Cox & Cox. Two Lancaster chairs from Laura Ashley flank the Franco Belge stove, and above is a luxury Cornish wreath, from Dobbies. The dining table is from a Ludlow antiques shop. For similar rattan chairs, try Maisons du Monde. A Bosch induction hob and single oven are set into the granite-topped island; on top is a handmade Christmas pudding from Figgy's





Above: The couple brought the Aga from their previous home. Across the mantelpiece is a luxury Cornish garland from Dobbies. The pendant lights are from Jim Lawrence

Below: The Albion Bath Company's Tubby Too in a burnished gold finish is the focal point of the new bathroom. Carl chose Farrow & Ball's Olive for the tongue-and-groove panelling, a vintage Laura Ashley fabric for the blind, and a shower and screen from Matki
Opposite: The original timber framework makes a characterful feature in the bedroom. For the unusually shaped windows between the beautiful timbers, Carl crafted blackout boards covered in Laura Ashley's Geranium fabric. The quilt cover is from Dunelm and the leather upholstered bed is from And So To Bed





CHRISTMAS THROUGH THE AGES

From 16th-century masked balls and Victorian traditions, through to present day, discover how the festive season has been celebrated over the centuries

Many of the traditions that we celebrate at Christmas time today, both religious and secular, have evolved from customs and beliefs originating centuries ago. Midwinter festivities have long been celebrated – the pagans observed the winter solstice from 21 December to honour light and birth, while in Rome, Saturnalia was celebrated in December and was a plentiful time of food, drink and merriment. There is no certain date for the birth of Jesus and it wasn't until the 4th century that 25 December was chosen as Christmas Day to mark his birth. It is thought Pope Julius I declared this date, observed in pagan traditions, to ease the transition into the Christian religion.

Throughout the centuries, Christmas has been given different prominence. In 1066 William the Conqueror was crowned king on Christmas Day because of its importance, but in medieval Britain, carols were banned from the church and sung on the streets, and in the 17th century festive celebrations were outlawed by the Puritans. The season's intriguing past is captured in this stunning collection of images showing Christmas through the ages.



1500S

Men dressed as women, music and masked balls – all the revelry of misrule at an Elizabethan festival on the Twelfth Night after Christmas. It was a period of licensed anarchy when rules were overturned and rowdy behaviour ensued. This drawing (right) depicts a troupe of actors in animal costumes performing in a medieval baronial hall at Christmas, circa 1500.

1400S

In the early Middle Ages, New Year and Epiphany – which celebrates the Three Wise Men visiting Jesus – was celebrated more than Christmas, and was when people often exchanged gifts. *The month of giving New Year's gifts* (opposite) by the Limbourg brothers, depicts Jean de France, Duc de Berry, a French medieval prince and patron of the arts, at a gift giving ceremony, circa 1413.



1600S

While the English Civil War raged between the Parliamentarians and the Royalists, Long Parliament issued a decree in 1644 to ban festive celebrations. Puritans believed they were too 'carnal and sensual' and called for people to remember the religious significance of Christmas. Oliver Cromwell, a Puritan at heart, is often regarded as the man behind the ban, but it is thought Parliament had already begun their plan to clamp down on 'festive days' in the 1640s. The ban lasted until the 1660s; Christmas Day celebrations were reinstated when the monarchy was restored with Charles II at the helm. This picture of Oliver Cromwell (left), who was Lord Protector of Great Britain and Ireland from 1653–1658, also shows a scene depicting a Puritan family saying grace before dinner. Illustration by Rosalind Thornycroft, from *Kings and Queens,* poems by Eleanor and Herbert Farjeon, 1932.

Feature Michelle Guy Images (top right) Original Publication: from *Christmas in Olden Times* by Walter Scott, Getty Images; others Getty Images



1683

Severe winters had frozen the River Thames many times, but in early December 1683 the great frost froze the river like never before. The ice on the river was so thick that booths were set up, games were played and entertainment was put on for people to enjoy. In this oil on canvas painting by Abraham Hondius, on display at the Museum of London, you can see people skating, playing games and even galloping across the thick ice on their horses. The river remained frozen until February 1684.

1760S

Fairfax House in York is a prime example of the rich, resplendent interior synonymous with grand Georgian townhouses. Originally the home of Viscount Fairfax and his daughter Anne, they would stay at Fairfax during the winter season and entertain ‘polite society’. This typical festive breakfast, which is laid out in the Library at Fairfax, consisted of boiled eggs, a Yorkshire bird pie, Cheddar cheese and tea and coffee. The house is decorated for a Georgian Christmas every year for the public to visit and enjoy.





1800S

At the beginning of the Victorian era the celebration of Christmas wasn’t particularly prevalent, and most people didn’t observe it as a holiday. Charles Dickens’ much-loved *A Christmas Carol,* penned in 1843, is often credited with popularising the traditions of Christmas during the Victorian era, especially the focus on family and charity, and paved the way for many of the customs we celebrate today.

Left: Dickens’ drawing room at 48 Doughty Street, where he lived from 1837–1839

Images (top) Museum of London; (middle) Fairfax House; (left and opposite) Getty Images

1840S

In 1800, it is believed that Queen Charlotte, wife of King George III, put up a Christmas tree at Queen's Lodge, Windsor, but it was a yew, not a fir tree. The traditional fir tree became popular thanks to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. A family picture of them gathered around the tree (similar to the one on this page) was published in 1848, and the decorated Christmas tree went from being something for the upper classes to a tradition that took hold up and down the country.

1910

This beautiful postcard with a coloured photograph of a family group around a large Christmas tree, circa 1900–1920, carries the same sentiment as the family images of Queen Victoria years before



1914

Right: This moving image shows a family reunited as a soldier visits his home and family to celebrate Christmas during World War I



1935

Below: Dated 14 December 1935, this wonderful, down-to-earth image shows a young mother pushing her children and her Christmas tree home in a wheelbarrow





1940S

Left: A group of soldiers from the Pioneer Corps photographed having a break from clearing London's air raid sites to have some Christmas pudding, on 28 December 1940

1950S

In 1957, the Queen's Speech was historically televised for the first time. It was still a period of austerity after the end of World War II so decorations weren't lavish.

Right: A Christmas tree takes pride of place in a living room, circa 1952



Images (opposite) © The Geffrye Museum of the Home; (this page) all Getty Images



1960S

Above: In the early 1960s, decorations were still quite modest, like the tree seen in this image. As the decade progressed, decorations became more vivid and we see the vibrant colours slide into the 1970s.

1970S

Below: Dripping in tinsel, garish and loud, Christmas trees in the 1970s and 1980s were decorated to be seen. Rooms, too, were decked out with large paper decorations. Turning a house into a Christmas home was a family affair to get excited about.





TODAY

Families gathered together, opening presents, sat by the tree – this is still a prevailing image we associate with Christmas today. However you choose to celebrate this festive season, we wish you a happy one, full of love, laughter and goodwill.

Images Getty Images



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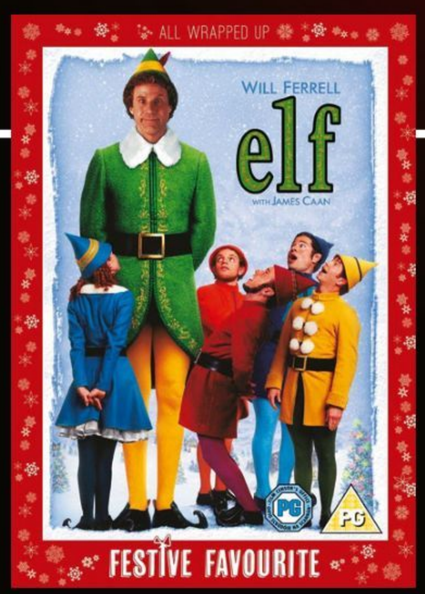
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NOW SHOWING

THIS CHRISTMAS

We've rounded up the best festive films, perfect for watching on a cold winter's night

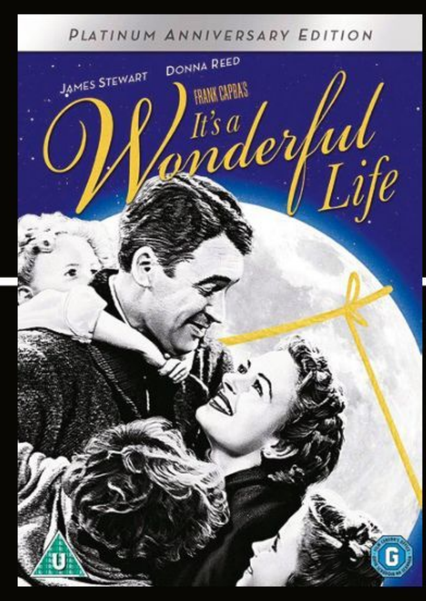


1

THE ONE FOR KIDS
Elf (2003)
With so many brilliant children's Christmas films, it's hard to pick just one, but *Elf*'s a stand out. Buddy the (adopted) Elf goes to New York to find his real family, facing the challenge of navigating the hostile world beyond the North Pole. Brimming with fun and Christmas cheer, even the adults will enjoy this.

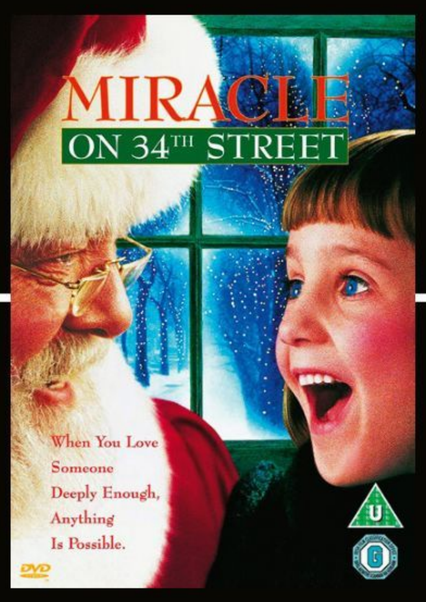
2

THE CLASSIC
It's a Wonderful Life (1946)
When a distressed businessman finds no reason to carry on, his guardian angel reveals what life would be like without him. Number 11 on the American Film Institute's 100 greatest American movies of all time list, it's become a seasonal must-see.



3

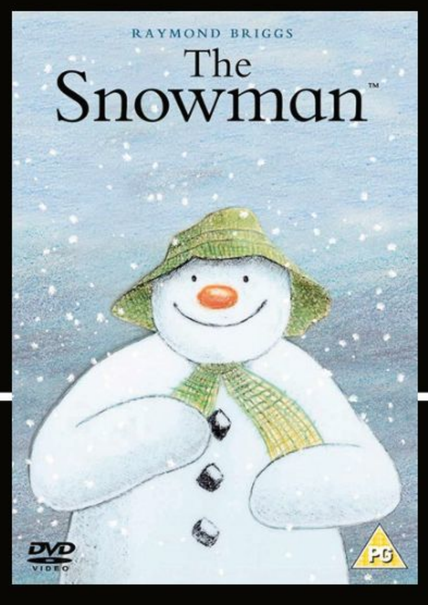
BELIEVE IN SANTA
Miracle on 34th Street (1994)
The 1994 remake is as heart-warming as the original. When Kris Kringle takes over as Santa Claus at the Cole's Department Store, he must convince six-year-old Susan Walker that he's the real deal. Full of childlike wonder and magic, it's a festive charmer.





4

FAMILY FAVOURITE
Home Alone (1990)
Eight-year-old Kevin McCallister is accidentally left behind when his family leaves for a Christmas vacation, then has to defend the house from particularly clumsy burglars. Featuring slapstick comedy, dangerous high jinks and lots of inventive booby traps, *Home Alone* has been a holiday staple since its release.



5

THE ANIMATION
The Snowman (1982)
Raymond Briggs' children's story is brought to life in this short film. A young boy builds a snowman who comes to life and whisks him away to the North Pole to meet Father Christmas. A visual treat with a haunting soundtrack, it evokes the true magic of Christmas.

Words Ellen Finch Images Amazon, Getty

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