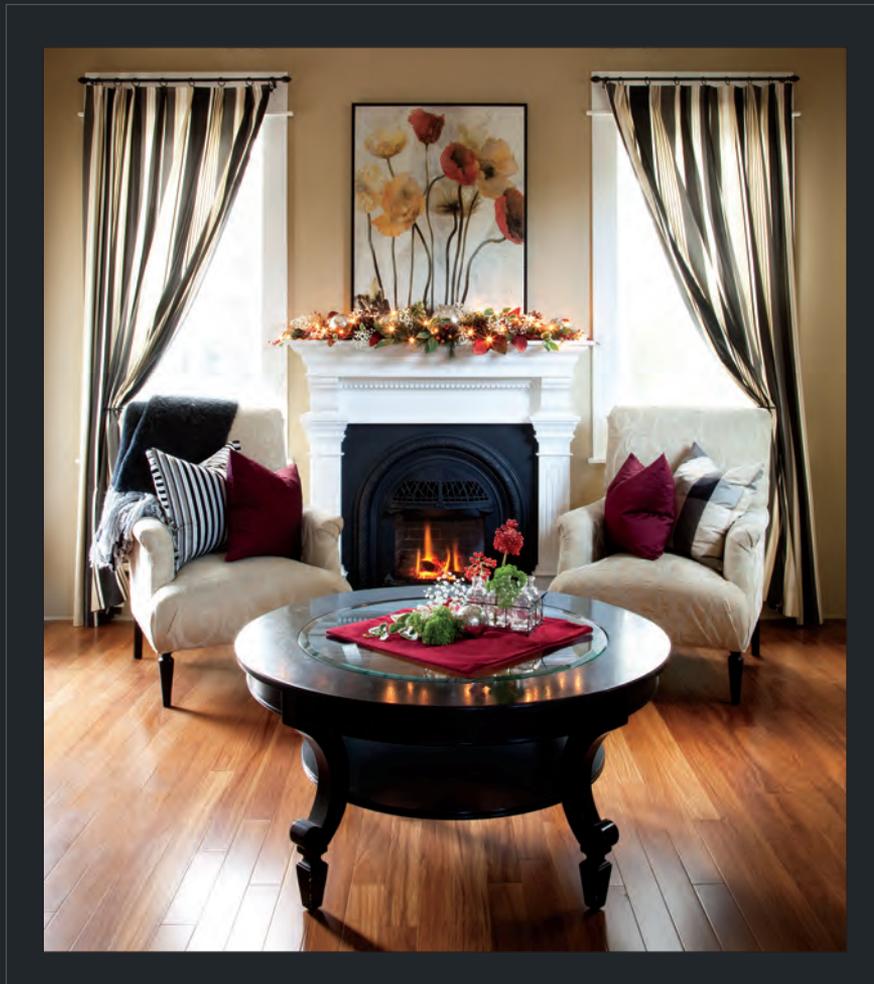




One room, two looks! This James Bay home goes from everyday-gorgeous to festively fabulous thanks to some simple but very effective decorating touches.

HOME DÉCOR IN THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT



Whether your home is modern, traditional, or a blend of styles, you'll love showing it off this season thanks to these brilliant and easy holiday décor ideas from local designers.



By Shannon Moneo
Interiors by Bespoke Design

Having a crowd over for Christmas dinner? Maybe hosting a staff soirée or a New Year's Eve shindig? Or perhaps visitors are coming from colder climes to rejoice in the season and the weather. Whatever the reason, this is when the face of your home — what everyone sees — gets specially made up. Out come the rich colours, metallics, ribbons, and bows.

Getting a home holiday-ready most often involves minor changes such as shifting furniture, adding seasonal pillows, or picking up a quart or two — no, not gallons — of paint. This isn't the time for a full-on, down-and-dirty reno.

"Never renovate before Christmas," advises Kimberly Williams of Kimberly Williams Interiors. Designer and interior architect Ines Hanl, owner of The Sky is the Limit Interior Design Concepts, agrees. "I do not really recommend adding unnecessary stress to your life," she says.

Both Hanl and Ivan Meade of Meade Design Group agree there is one quick, quasi-renovation that's easily brushed into holiday schedules. Both say a room can be painted or wallpapered within one week. Options include painting an accent wall, colour blocking, or perhaps, as Meade suggests, painting the fireplace a shade of red.

PAINT BY COLOUR

Terri Heal, who manages the Keating Cross Road location of Pacific Paint Centre, says holiday paint purchasers have already been streaming in, looking to buy paint to juice up a dining room or spruce up a guest room before discerning guests arrive.

Nowadays, says Heal, there's a product that allows you to paint the dining room in the morning and sit down for supper in that room the same night. Benjamin Moore's line of Natura Zero-VOC (volatile organic compounds) interior paints produce very little odour when applied. That's particularly important in the winter when air circulates less easily than in summer's open-window environment. "There's way less of the traditional paint scent," Heal says.

Another advance is that paint can be bought by the quart or in tiny two-ounce bottles, rather than by the gallon. The quart

(about \$27) is the ideal size to paint about an 11-foot-wide wall. The test bottles (about \$5) cover an 18- by 18-inch space and are geared to touch-ups or to confirm a colour beyond the paper strip. "It's like auditioning the colour," Heal says.

As for the Santa's wish list of colours, people often think back to their childhood, Heal notes, so traditional colours may figure in their choices.

This year, greys are king at Benjamin Moore's paint castle, with the blue-grey and charcoal tones holding court, often punctuated by apple-green and turquoise tones, Heal says.

But there's a caveat to using greys. On southern Vancouver Island in the winter, applying grey can be tricky in this sun-deprived locale. Greys can be cool, and without sunlight the colour can appear blue on cloudy days, Heal warns.

When it comes to colour schemes, be it for paint or Christmas slipcovers, Meade's rule of thumb is to not use more than three colours (this includes the room's existing predominant colours). Based on a home's colour scheme, usually silver, white, or gold can be added. One of 2011's most trendy colours — cobalt blue — pairs well with bright red or white.

Last year, in his own home, Meade

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created a shimmery, classic effect throughout his living areas using mostly silver and white with touches of red. One of his favourite items is mercury glass, served up in the form of silver table and tree ornaments. Using silver is a “no brainer” when it comes to design, he says. Yet, whatever the colour scheme, it’s best to repeat it on the tree decorations, table linens, pillows, slipcovers, and other ornaments, says Meade.

At Bespoke Design, co-owner and designer Ben Brannen has encountered homes where bold, ethnic colours, such as pink and lime green, can still be harnessed for Christmas by adding white or silver. “You don’t always have to use red and green,” Brannen says.

Hanl, who came to Canada from Germany in 2000, says an eye-catching Christmas look revolves around sumptuous colours like rich golds, silvers, and jewel tones.

“I could see adding animal prints to this look, fur throws, rich brocade pillows, layers of fabric,” she says. But it’s a look that begs for heavy greenery in the form of swags around doorways, down the stairway railing, and with classic, fairy-lit topiary urns at the entrance, she says.

While white and silver can be enticing

in their simplicity, Hanl offers the super-elegant challenge of black and gold. “You will need to be very consistent, even in your interior, and it’s not everybody’s cup of tea,” she says. “This look might be the most versatile for a contemporary interior. You could add hot pink and lime green ornaments, or you try some aqua and blue. It can go from young, whimsical, and girly to very sophisticated and elegant. The black accents could help to ground this look.”

Williams is a “cream” person. “It’s classic, fresh, and inviting,” she says. She prefers this neutral colour over white because of cream’s added warmth. For Christmas, a home with burgundy walls and cream furniture can easily be paired with silver or gold accents. Neutral earth-tone furniture is another match for silver or gold.

THE LUMINOUS TOUCH

Once colours have been chosen, lighting must be considered. “Christmas is all about illumination,” Hanl notes.

Distributing fairy lights throughout the house adds mystery and sparkle during the darkest time of the year, she says. Well-positioned table lamps will create globes of light. One inexpensive way to transform a space is to temporarily replace your lampshades with shades that add seasonal



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An artful way to showcase your beautiful holiday ornaments and knick-knacks is to follow Bespoke Design's lead and arrange them in vignettes with touches of greenery and delicately curling branches.

flair. Instead of harsh ceiling lighting, a beautiful floor lamp could be chosen, Hanl says. Wreaths can be wrapped around light fixtures. Ornaments, such as glittery snowflakes and stars, can be hung from lighting fixtures.

Regular bulbs can also be exchanged for flickering bulbs that resemble candles. And a new chandelier for the dining room can be a crowning touch, but do use a reliable electrician, says Hanl.

Clusters of large candles remain a

traditional holiday decoration. Williams, who loves to use candles, has discovered a very safe solution to what can be a fire worry: battery-operated candles, which come in cream and white, that she leaves on for extended periods. Williams places these around her home, including the powder room. Because there isn't a real flame to worry about, she is able to arrange greenery around her pillar candles — and they look hot!

MORE APPEAL, LESS CLUTTER

As for overall decorating, Brannen says not to let trendiness dictate Christmas decor because it can be hard to pull off effectively. "My motto? If influenced by current trends, do it in the classic sense."

Hanl likes the natural look: a platter holding large pine cones, a row of small, white porcelain bowls brimming with moss, dried branches in a large ornamental vase and garnished with tiny fairy lights.

"I am also a big fan of feathers of all sorts, and you can create a beautiful and unusual bouquet," she says.

And remember, less is more, so decluttering is important. "That is true for each room in your house," Hanl says. Williams has an effective system. She uses Rubbermaid containers to store her

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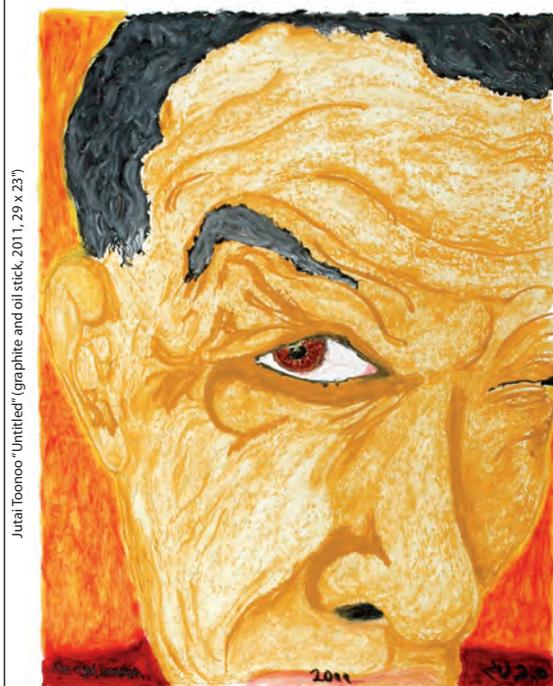
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Christmas decorations. After she's taken out seasonal items, Williams fills the empty containers with the bric-a-brac she's removed for the holiday season. Some clients who did the pre-Christmas decluttering call Williams after the Christmas items have been taken down because they don't want to resurrect the clutter.

Related to clutter is the common practice of scattering Christmas knick-knacks throughout a house. Instead, concentrate your efforts on a few large vignettes, sticking to an overall theme, says Hanl.

"You can add to this approach over time. First make your main display more ornate and then slowly spread across the room. It's always better to do one thing really well and grand instead of distributing many mediocre things. Your eye gets lost while looking for them. Start in the room you use the most, then do something in the entrance and at the front door, and then take it from there," she advises.

Meade, born and raised in central Mexico and a Canadian resident for the past decade, agrees that Canadians have a tendency to put Christmas "stuff" all over the house. Bombarding your home with what can be tacky items isn't effective, he says. He also favours real flowers and greenery over the fake variety.

WHIMSICAL ELEMENTS

There is a place for whimsy. Meade has noticed that fanciful sentiment is winnowing its way into Christmas, shown by decorations that draw from feelings of nostalgia and melancholy, perhaps a sign of our times. That lust for the past has extended to people either buying antique or secondhand items to use for Christmas decor or taking on do-it-yourself projects.



Christmas ornaments aren't just for the big tree — use them as part of whimsical centerpieces or hang them from light fixtures.

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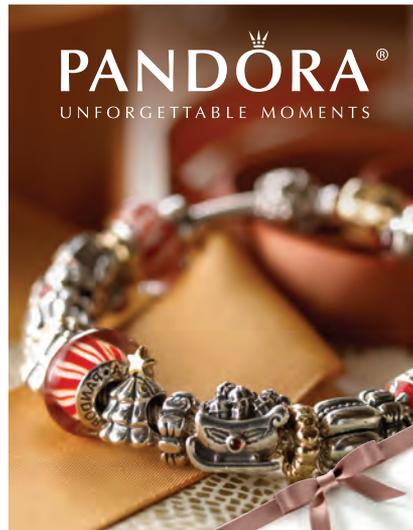
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“How about replacing that typical painting above the mantel with some antlers and dressing them up in dripping garlands and ornaments?” asks Hanl.

Meade's connection to the past is his cherished and stunningly realistic nativity scene made by his great-grandmother and which he inherited. Every year it gets centre stage in his home.

Some of Meade's other favourites include cranberries in a bowl of water topped with a white hydrangea, perfect for the kitchen or the living or dining room. He has also displayed a vase of red flowers set behind white bowls. Nary a sign of Santa's workshop/bargain store collectables sprayed around the house like bad cologne.

TREE AND TRIMMINGS

The Christmas tree itself is where most effort should be directed, Meade believes. Last year, the nine-foot tree at Meade Design's office boasted more than 1,000 lights and 350 ornaments. Don't let the tree clash with the rest of the decor, as in buying a silver tree when your colours are gold, red, and white. And remember, the tree is kind of like a mannequin, waiting to be outfitted.

“Think about other ideas,” Hanl says. “In Germany, we used several yards of tulle one year that we wrapped around the tree, with white fairy lights underneath and a huge feather plume as the topper. It was a very effective yet inexpensive way to create a Christmas tree.”

FURNITURE ARRANGEMENTS

Because the tree dominates the room, its placement is crucial, which in turn affects how existing furniture is placed, says Brannen. Often called in to stage the room, he finds it fun to figure out where furniture should go once the tree has been given centre stage. Sometimes whole pieces, such as the coffee table, are temporarily moved out. Occasional tables are used to create small seating areas, or sofas are moved with their backs to the window.

Williams uses seasonal throws, pillows, and area rugs in her Christmas colour scheme. Changing slipcovers is also an effective facelift. Brannen has a client with slipcovers in three colours — at Christmastime the red ones rule.

A nifty pillow pick-me-up used at Meade Design's office was the creation of “cheater pillows.” Take an existing pillow, and with ribbon, double-sided tape, and Chinese silk buttons, you can create some seasonal dash. For draperies, use festive tiebacks or bows.



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Don't forget your home's entrance! Try using fresh greenery highlighted by colourful berries.

GREENERY AND OTHER GARNISHES

No escaping from tradition: if your home has a fireplace mantel, then greenery is a must. Meade favours pine, laurel, and eucalyptus.

Beyond the living room, there's the home's entrance, a spot which Williams says should be enveloped in natural but not overpowering fragrance. Strategically placed cedar boughs or a china cup filled with cinnamon sticks can do the job. Take care not to use strongly scented products because a growing number of people are scent-sensitive.

The use of scented items extends to the bathroom. Meade always changes his soap to one that "smells of the season." Cranberry or cinnamon scents are favourites. "They wake up all the senses," he says. He also uses seasonal towels, based on colour themes. He'll often add poinsettias: red for traditional homes, white for contemporary spaces.

Finally, consider your home's entrance, which, as Williams says, is the first thing guests see. Exterior lighting is practically mandatory, as is some sort of greenery. Meade likes a natural wreath, with holly and mistletoe, because of the scent. "Don't buy plastic," he stresses.

Williams is a fan of large pots filled with greenery, highlighted by a hint of berries.

Getting that greenery is relatively easy here in Victoria, compared, say, to someone living in Winnipeg. Head out to the forest or visit a friend who lives in a rural area. You can also visit a nursery that sells boughs by the foot, Williams says.

Another bonus of Christmas decorating is that it's forgiving. In 11 months, you can start anew. "There is always another Christmas. It's not about your perfect décor," says Hanl. "It should be all about family and friends, good food, good conversation, inspiration, and being grateful for a year 'well done.'" ::

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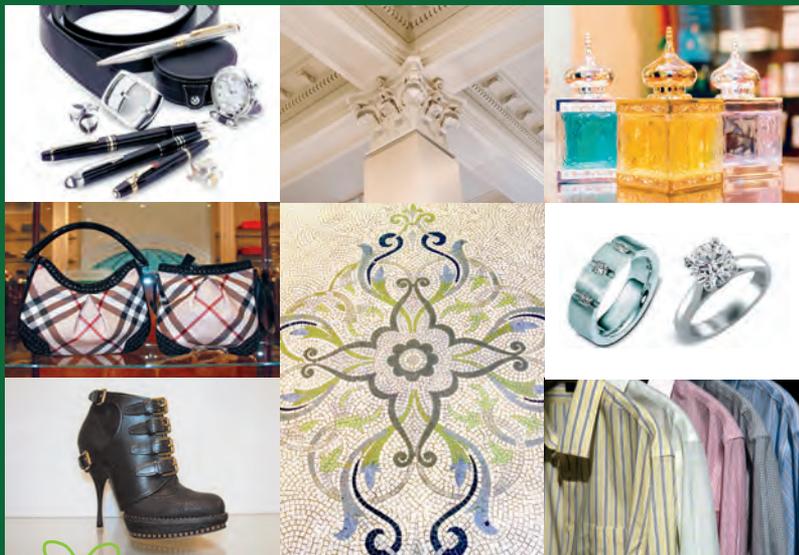


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