

The Simple Things

Resist the temptation to go all-out to show off your home during the holidays. These celebrity designers say that the simplest solution is often the best



Reused décor: Repurpose tree trimmings like branches, ribbon and mini stockings to dress up the table.

Sandra Espinet

BY BETTINA CHANG
CTW Features

It's hard not to feel the pressure when the in-laws are coming or a judgmental aunt says she's "curious" to see how you handle the pressure of playing host. But an over-the-top holiday celebration isn't the answer. Even designers known for their luxurious, elegant styles suggest shortcuts and easy tricks to decorate without too much stress.

Candice Olson, star designer on HGTV, is known for her well-balanced designs and attention to detail. She and her husband used to collect delicate blown-glass ornaments for display at Christmastime, until reality set in.

"I remember hearing a big smash in the middle of the night, and the whole Christmas tree fell down. Every one of those beautiful, precious ornaments was smashed to bits," says Olson, who is appearing in

the third season of "Candice Tells All" this year. "It must have been the dog that knocked over the tree."

This wake-up call prompted Olson to focus on collecting memories rather than objects. Nowadays, her family opts for talking ornaments that will record a message, which they can get at the local convenience store. Her kids will sing "Jingle Bells" or answer "Have you been a good boy or girl this year?" and listen to their messages over the years.

"It's tacky, but they mean so much," Olson says.

Besides these sentimental decorations, she relies on the reflections of candles and crystal to create an inti-



Candice Olson

Brandon Barre

CELEBRATIONS 2012

mate, happy vibe that lasts all year round.

Year-round décor is a great way to keep the decorating process simple, says Sandra Espinet, a designer with a luxurious style who has worked with celebrities like Allie Sweeney of “Days of our Lives” and Eva La Rue of “CSI: Miami.” For La Rue’s holiday home, Espinet says she was able to create a beautiful tablescape with a simple white tablecloth and leftover decorations from the tree.

“We had extra ornaments for the tree that we hung from the chandeliers,” Espinet says. “The napkins were tied with extra pieces from the tree. The only things we bought were a Christmas dish set ... but even plain



white dishes can serve the purpose.”

The rest of the table can be dressed with an inexpensive – and delicious – decoration: candy canes. “The kids can make napkin rings out of the candy canes – you put the napkin with the candy and wrap it with a big bow,” she suggests.

Don’t be afraid of the “cheesy” traditions of getting an uncle to dress up as Santa Claus, or putting an inflatable snow globe on your front lawn. “It’s all about the kids, and the kids love it,” Olson says.

“Whether you’re celebrating Christmas or Hannukah, especially for a working mom, don’t stress it,” she says. “We beat ourselves up that every last thing has got to be perfect. The year that my Christmas tree full of sentimental glass ornaments smashed, that’s the end of perfection. You’re just left with the dog sitting there wagging his tail.”