



Design a
FUN & FESTIVE TABLETOP
by Carrie Bui



Party hosts everywhere are taking a deep breath, breaking out the holiday items and good china from their closets, and madly brainstorming this year's big event(s). One of the best ways to set a festive atmosphere for a party is to design a tabletop that reflects the spirit of the event and the season.

"They're absolutely essential to making it feel festive," said Christina Haynes, Interior Architectural Consultant of Christina Haynes Design. She believes that a beautifully arranged tabletop adds warmth and character to a space.

Haynes recommends starting with seasonal foods such as fruits and nuts. For example, she especially enjoys employing cranberries within a centerpiece. One way to incorporate them is to add a handful of cranberries at the base of a vase, then fill with flowers, branches and water. "It really gives it a nice, beautiful vibrant color that's very festive," she said.

It's not unusual to think about adding a vase of fresh flowers to your dining table, but what about choosing plants that are more regionally appropriate? Arizona has no shortage of succulents, and Haynes called these desert plants "wonderfully holiday-oriented."

Another element for tabletop settings is light. Haynes said numerous lighting options are available, from candles to short strand, battery-operated twinkling Christmas lights. For a creative display idea, Haynes suggested placing tapered candles in old wine bottles. The bottles can be spread across the table or arranged together on a tray and dressed up with ribbon.

Haynes stressed that your tabletop arrangement can be created from items already around your home. Flowers, branches and plants from the yard, vases and glass bowls already on your shelf, tablecloths and cloth napkins sitting in your linen closet. Build off of these pieces, and then purchase small items to round out the scene.

Not satisfied with what you have at home and feeling the need to refresh your table décor this year? Zócalo offers an extensive selection of imported goods for the home. Owners Karri and Robert Stowe travel to Mexico and beyond multiple times a year to find items for the store, favoring handmade, artisan pieces.

Karri suggested that the most important thing for hosts to remember is to have fun, with the tabletop and with the party. She recommends pulling out your favorite pieces. One of her favorite items to use as a centerpiece is a barro verde—a green ceramic bowl to symbolize welcome and hospitality.

If you're feeling bored with your dinnerware, or in need of something more special-occasion appropriate, Zócalo sells a wide

selection of handmade ceramic ware. One especially popular artist with customers, said Karri, is Gorky Gonzalez, a ceramicist listed in the text *Great Masters of Mexican Folk Art* and credited with reviving the Majolica pottery technique. According to the book, Gonzalez uses traditional formulas for his pottery and special ceramic enamels that are mineral-based. Zócalo's collection of Gonzalez pieces includes dinnerware settings as well as serveware pieces.

Layering your table can add an element of depth. Add a charger, and then layer the place settings on top of it. Handmade tin and pewter chargers from Zócalo create a pleasant, contrasting textural effect against traditional ceramic and chinaware.

In keeping with the thought of applying texture to your tabletop, don't forget to include textiles on the table, such as runners, tablecloths and linen napkins. Haynes likes to use tablecloths and fabric napkins for an added touch of elegance, and encourages people to not be afraid of mixing and matching pieces or colors, such as silver and gold.

For another home décor source of inspiration, make a visit to the eastside store, Embellish Home Etc. Owners Dawn Scully and Kim Samuels would be happy to help you find the perfect accessories for your holiday table. The store carries a large selection of holiday-themed décor, including metal angels, reindeer, small tabletop trees and ornaments.

Scully likes to encourage customers to think out of the box when it comes to setting the table for a holiday party, be it casual or formal. She recommends a gingerbread house centerpiece for a casual event and a centerpiece of angels of varying heights for a more formal party. And, in the spirit of giving, she suggests adding an ornament to each place setting for your guests.

The most important thing to remember is to have fun and not stress too much, said Haynes and Karri. They emphasized that entertaining and the holidays are about enjoying yourself and being with people.

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