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## Stylish Solutions

By Ann McDonald



Removing two portions of this dining room table makes it smaller and provides more room for several stations in adjacent areas. Varied height and stations accommodates diverse food and drink. A simple pop of green breaks the blue and white color palate. Don't forget whimsy for interest. Give your guests something to discover. Photo Ashleigh Hodges

breakfast table or favored gathering area will serve as inspiration for this post. That said, what are we planning? Is it a buffet? A formal sit down? Don't sell your entertaining self short by always defaulting to chilled drinks in an ice bucket on the kitchen counter and buffet trays by others on the island.

It's quite easy to set a holiday table in the dining room. All you need are time honored tips and an infusion of confidence! My hope is to give you both. Consider these three things: type, transitions and topography.

You may be wondering why I use odd words when putting together holiday dining rooms. Honestly, these words come out of the discussions we have around the design table when planning and implementing design events. We use them because the diversity gets our creative juices flowing. It is way more interesting to come up with topography than simple floral arrangements. The word itself opens up ceilings, balconies and all manner of arrangements. You'd be surprised how creative you can get with this.

The type of event you will plan in your dining room refers to basics: number of people, buffet or sit down, formal or informal. It could be as simple as having a plan for breakfast for those overnight guests who will be staying in November or as complicated as a sit down dinner for 150 covering a few rooms in your home.

Second is transition. This single item is key to a great gathering in your holiday dining room. In order for even a small gathering to flow properly, you must plan and provide for transition. Remember your conversation, your eyes, your feet, your food, your drink. All of these need forms of transition. If you have ever been to a seriously dull party, poorly executed transition is likely one of the problems.

The weather has finally shifted a bit and we are enjoying some cooler temperatures. As the holiday season is close at hand, we have been sharing some stylish solutions for dining rooms with our clients. I have a love affair with the dining table and dining room, and delight to set buffets, formal sit down dinners and glorious breakfasts. Finding and executing different designs on a short time frame and reasonable budget can seem impossible, but it's really not. This week I want to share how my team and I consistently come up with unique settings and ideas, especially if you are hosting friends these next few months in varied formats.

It is really important to me as a designer that you use every part of your home consistently. There should be no abandoned space or portion that is off limits. You are more precious than even the most expensive item in your home, so I encourage you to consider using every inch of it this holiday season. Honor those among you with the beauty sitting in your china cabinet and silver chest.

Let's get started!

The first thing we do is consider the type of gathering. Even if you don't have a formal dining room, let's assume for argument's sake that your

It can be simple transition space for conversations which means low centerpieces for easy sight lines and flow or intentional traffic patterns through a larger dining room at different stations for different types of food and beverages to keep guest moving and the party humming.

This is one of the most overlooked planning components. It also provides for one of the most interesting, from a décor standpoint.

Topography: Look up, look down, look around. I have this 'thing' my assistants joke about - watch what she does with the ceiling! I love using varied heights and unexpected ingredients to draw the eye up, down, into and out of various spaces. You'd be shocked what you can do with a bolt of fabric. For one featured event we used 35 yards of navy sheer fabric. Up on a ladder, we literally threw the bolt over the beam, tacked it and then carefully placed magnolias from the Dollar Store in Moraga to give it interest. We used the draping in four areas of the event. This draping (topography) lent itself to transition from one area to another while providing fun visuals during the buffet (type).

A great holiday dining room doesn't need to be over the top, but simple consideration of type, transition and topography make a world of difference. Your home is a unique expression of you. Take the time to honor those around you by planning some décor updates for the holiday season, even if it's just simple florals. One of my favorite holiday dining room parties is a casual evening of soup and designer coffees for 12 at Christmastime. Gather simple soup bowls of all kinds, set out varied toppings and enjoy the mix.

Enjoy the holidays, and live a custom life!

Want to learn more?

Join me at our upcoming 3-hour Holiday Home Workshop Nov. 6, which will include coffee and treats. Cost is \$197. Take away includes a personalized binder of resources and checklists, hands-on teaching. Location TBD depending on number of attendees. Visit <http://www.couturechateau.com/workshop> or give us a call at (925) 386-0720.



A favorite trick is to match flowers to a signature drink. Sparkling cider looks fantastic in champagne glasses and gorgeous with white flowers. It's one of those design details people can't quite pinpoint but is registered by the mind's eye. Photos by Ashleigh Hodges



Dining room floral for a recent event. Notice the reflection in the mirror of the topiary.



Use theme colors in diverse textures to look more upscale, less 'party in a box.'



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