

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Holiday Traditions, from Then Till Now

By Chris Lavin



Deb Potter of Moraga grew up on the East Coast with single candles in the windows during the holidays, so she continues the tradition at her home in Moraga each year. The neighbors now expect to see them.

Photo Chris Lavin

Deb Potter of Moraga remembers the event distinctly. It was after Thanksgiving, she was a little girl, and she'd been counting the days to Christmas. Finally it was Christmas Eve night, and her father urgently called her outside to see something special.

"He said, 'Debbie, come here!' and it was a red blinking light slowly moving across the sky," said Potter, who was growing up in Philadelphia and now lives on a cozy cul-de-sac at the edge of Moraga. "I climbed into his lap, leaned back and looked up, and there it was." Her father could sense her

wonder, and he wrapped his arms around her. "That," he said, "is Santa's sleigh, and he's coming tonight!" Potter was thrilled.

Fast forward to 2014, when Potter is, ironically, a flight attendant (she suspects now that what her father pointed out was a plane, but she will not testify to that in court), and the traditions continue. She keeps an eye on the sky for her relatives and neighbors. Her neighborhood has come to expect the single candles in the windows of her home, electric candles she has carefully arranged and put there for 19 years during the holiday season.

Growing up in Philadelphia, Potter loved the simple tradition on the East Coast of putting single candles in windows to signify the holidays, and she has continued it ever since. She is about 19 years before her time, according to holiday decorating aficionados – because throughout Lamorinda the holidays have taken on a more secular, simple feel. Fewer lights, less ... hoopla.

"I would say that it's more rustic, it's more natural," said Susan Marconi, a home goods buyer at Across the Way in Moraga. "There are lots of boughs, deer antlers – it's natural. It's foraging from the earth, and simple is better. Burlap is big, for instance. Burlap is everywhere this holiday season."

In other words, gone are the days when neighbors competed with neighbors for the most spectacular display, ala how Chevy Chase blew out the electricity in his neighborhood when he plugged in his lights in the movie "Christmas Vacation." That would never happen here, Marconi says.

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