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# INTO THE WOODS

*Holiday glitz according to Laurie Ann Ray*



Glitz is not new to Christmas. Gilt and glitter, and silvery elements that recall stars, frost and icicles have been associated with the Christmas tree tradition since at least the 16th century. Decorated Christmas trees of German origin came to England with Prince Albert, who brought his own traditions from Germany in the 19th century to Queen Victoria's sitting room at Windsor Castle.

This and other stories fill a wonderful book of Christmas history, *The Christmas Tree Book* by Phillip V. Snyder.

OPPOSITE: Laurie Ann Ray's Poway dining room table includes plenty of woody elements and crystal. Table settings are mix-and-match combinations. LEFT: Vignette near the staircase features lots of glitter.



Another story tells of an American couple in London for the holiday whose innovation produced a Christmas tree decorated with his cuff links and her bracelets, earrings and colored gloves. There's also the Swedish immigrant family that dangled the family silver, knives, forks and spoons from the branches of an evergreen and another couple whose \$70,000 worth of gold-rush nuggets festooned their New York hotel-room tree.

LEFT: A folksy look welcomes guests to the Poway home. BELOW: Fireside, the home's largest tree features lots of snowy white tulle and ornaments stuffed into the branches. OPPOSITE: At the Ray beach house in Del Mar, the table settings are more casual.

Interior designer Laurie Ann Ray has her own take on Christmas, too. She describes her style of decorating as "woody, elegant and rustic," but confesses to an obsession with glitz while collecting for Christmas, which she does all year-round. "I like a folksy tradition for the holidays, but with plenty of high-end glitz," she says.





Wish the Mom





With homes in the Poway countryside and coastal Del Mar, Ray has the holiday both ways. Color and materials define each locale.

The Del Mar location, with an ocean view, is cabin style set in a stand of pine trees. It's best described as a dollhouse for both grown-ups and children. Ray has kept it light and bright with all the furniture in either distressed blue or white finishes. Everything in sight, from the mantel to lamps, is covered with lots of shells.

"There's never too many seashells," says Ray. Because it's a vacation house, a place to chill out and rest, table settings are very casual.





There are never too many seashells for Laurie Ann Ray at the Del Mar house. Shown, the mantel and a side table with lamp. Decor is primarily blue and white.



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In the country house, the family's main residence, traditional red and green reign. For openers, Ray put nine coats of her favorite *Hunting Coat Red* paint on the front door. Vignettes around the door, on the porch and even in the yard utilize lots of traditional red poinsettias, birdhouses, life-size Santas and folksy signs like "Reindeer Parking."

The four Bs — beads, berries, birds and birch — work their way into all other room and table décor. There's also lots of C, as in crystal. The multitude of birdhouses, used for Christmas scenes will be recycled for February for her Valentine-themed vignettes. No holiday goes un-celebrated in Ray's life. It is just this penchant for commemorating seasons and holidays all over the house that provoked the writing of a book of visual ideas, due out next year.

Kitchen trees can be themed with candy, cookies and ice-cream cones. For a rooster and reindeer tree, baskets of red and green apples are snuggled underneath the branches.

In the dining room, the silver flute vases that held dried hydrangeas for fall have had eucalyptus and crystal-tipped pine added for Christmas. Birdhouses, birds, feathers and birch logs (in *Styrofoam*) fill the long dining table's center. Place settings are a mix-and-match variety of place mats and Christmas plates.

For the main Christmas tree fireside in the living room, Ray's decorating advice is strong — "don't hang it, stuff it." She takes lengths of white tulle — "it looks like snow" — and tucks it into the tree branches with twigs and berries. Then she tucks in shiny balls and hangs others, layering from the inside of the tree out for depth. At the end she makes sure she pokes some more red in where needed. "Anything goes ... even dried hydrangeas," she says.

'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, everything was decorated, including a mouse. ■

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