

# Deck THE HALLS, AND YOUR Table

By Kedra Pal & Mike VanMoorlegem



Hosting family and friends for a holiday meal can be an incredibly rewarding experience. For many families, taking the hosting reigns is a rite of passage. For others, it's a matter of drawing the short straw. Regardless of how you were elevated to this position, you are sure to focus all efforts on measuring up to holiday meals of previous years' hosts or your own historical culinary triumphs.

We understand the conflict; holiday gatherings are often all about the food.

We would never dare suggest a toned-down approach to the main event. After all, it's hard to forget a bad meal or get excited about an OK one.

What we are recommending is that you elevate your game this year by creating a more balanced holiday experience for your guests. How do you pull it off? The answer may be right in front of your face. Well, under your plate maybe.

Think about it; we spend back-breaking hours deliberating our menus, preparing ingredients, and standing (Oh, the standing!) in front of hot ovens or boiling pots all day long. Then, as the meal nears its point of perfection we delegate setting the table

to one of the kids, or worse, Aunt fill-in-the-blank who has apparently grown impatient waiting on your meal. Ugh, the proverbial missing water glass and single fork! In all seriousness, how well does your table setting communicate the time and care you put into this year's event? We would bet it fails to do it justice. But don't fret, a few minor tweaks and we will have your guests complimenting you on the entire evening, not just your famous green bean casserole.

Let's start with the centerpiece and work our way out. Centerpieces that are too tall or too full can interfere with guest interaction and distract from your meal presentation. Pull together a few lower centerpiece options and build out from there. Employ a layering approach with different looks and heights to create a sense of depth. If you are choosing between runners or table clothes, go with the runner as it creates natural depth and versatility in color schemes.

This year holiday-rustic is taking center stage. If rustic is your fancy, try using wicker chargers and leaves to decorate your table. Add large rustic candle holders with thick, neutral candles to bring it all together. To add a festive boost, try adding cranberries or holly to small vases in a complimentary finish.

If you like rustic but need a touch of elegance, use silver or gold chargers instead of the wicker variety. Be careful when choosing your silverware finishes. A rustic approach may provide more flexibility, but for those leaning toward a more elegant look we recommend matching your charger and silverware finishes. So, for many of us, that means sticking with silver finishes. Intermingle your other accessories with touches of silver to boast its reflective properties and to maintain continuity in your design. We suggest using small silver bowls for flower arrangements or to fill with decorative fruit. For an uptick in elegance, especially for evening meals, consider intermingling high and low candles with holders finished in crystal or silver leaf.

Now that you've gone to all this trouble, don't forget to use proper etiquette when setting the table. We won't bore you with a complete tutorial since a simple Google search will provide a multitude of visual diagrams. However, we will emphasize the importance of a geometrically spaced table setting. It may sound nitpicky, but it shows an attention to detail that will have your guests talking.

To complete your holiday experience, hand out party agendas that include a cocktail hour with festive, hand-selected spirits, and don't forget the holiday board games. Life-size board games are all the rage right now. Check out Restoration Hardware for more designer-friendly party favors and games. Yay, the days of having your guests stare at you while you work is finally over!

We hope you have a wonderful holiday season with your friends and family! Cheers to 2017!