

Decking the Halls



Some interior design firms go into holiday overdrive helping their clients prepare for the winter season — and creating a unique revenue stream in the process.

BY SUZANNE MORRISSEY

It may be the season to be jolly, but not all homeowners delight in untangling tree lights. For those clients, some interior designers have found a new calling in relieving this holiday stress. The result is a natural offshoot of their year-round business and another layer to their portfolio of work.

Whether a client wants to breathe easy and let a professional completely take over the decorating process or collaborate with them on mixing new looks with well-loved family treasures, the rewarding work can begin as early as October. After that, designers in this field prep themselves for an intense few weeks of installation. Though most designers refer to their work as holiday decorating, they find that most clients ask for Christmas displays.

Interior designer Shayla Copas of Shayla Copas Interiors in Little Rock, AR, offers her full holiday decorating service to clients with whom she already has relationships. “The first thing I do is sit down with the client and ask them what their ideal holiday will look like,” she says. “Holidays are a time to get outside of the box with color or theme. Some people are willing to go whimsical when they aren’t the rest of the year. It’s a magical time of year.” Clients may also feel friskier with color at holiday time — and a neutral home might find itself adorned in brighter tones for the season.

With her clients, Angie Morse of The Room Stylers in Portland, OR, likes to spend time hearing their stories, and with the holidays, she says, there always seems to be more stories. “I embrace family memories no matter how hokey, because truly the essence of the holidays is family and friends, and memories of the past or creating new memories,” she says. “Listening is a key part of the process. You’re in their homes, and it’s so personal. I have fantastic homeowners who have their own collections and trees, many have been passed down through the generations.”

With a little ingenuity and a willingness to go beyond traditional holiday designs, interior designers can flex their creative muscles through holiday design and find new opportunities for revenue growth in the process.



Designer Shayla Copas took home first place in the holiday design category of the Interior Design Society’s 2017 Designer of the Year awards. Her award-winning look, shown here, mixed jewel tones into a traditional red-and-gold Christmas scheme.

GRAPHIC: ALEKSANDRA - STOCKADOB.E.COM. PHOTO COURTESY SHAYLA COPAS



PHOTO COURTESY LINDA BAKER

For her team’s holiday design, Linda Baker of the Baker Design Group Interior Design, tied for first runner up in the 2017 Designer of the Year awards from the Interior Design Society. She makes sure that her clients understand the scale of their rooms so designs make the most elegant and sophisticated statement.

Signature Styles

Morse, who had a career as a graphic designer before training in interior design, says her go-to holiday decorating trick is working with natural items like curly willow or mossy branches and adding them to trees. Doing so gives her trees loads of appealing texture. “I’m the tree stuffer!” she says, laughing, “if it’s not earthy enough, I’ll make it earthy.”

Anne Runde of Anne Runde Interiors in Portland, OR, says natural greens are her trick for putting any space in the holiday spirit: “If you can get cedar, fir and pine, it doesn’t matter what your accent color is. Once you layer that into a room, you immediately have a holiday feel.” She also likes putting greenery and naturals like sticks and seedpods into unusual containers, digging through the china cabinets and garages of her clients to get that piece to create a stunning display. Her most unusual container choice? “A chamber pot! Fill it with holly and people just say, ‘What a gorgeous ceramic container!’”

Copas, who began her career in the silk flower wholesale industry, often goes for the greens as well. Her must-have element for her rooms? “I love a full garland! I will get a full artificial garland and add live cedar branches so you get that authentic Christmas tree smell,” she says, adding, “I do not like a wimpy garland.” Her faux/live hybrid just needs to be misted once a week to keep its Christmas good looks. She also uses glass to ensure plenty of shine and reflective sparkle. “Plastic tends not to look as authentic, and it just doesn’t have the glisten,” Copas says, advising that designers new to the holiday world buy an average of 20 percent on glass ornaments because breakage will always happen when ornaments are boxed and reused year after year. Most importantly, Copas makes sure her trees have dimension and depth by hanging ornaments from deep inside the branches to the outer edges.

Linda Baker of the Baker Design Group Interior Design in Dallas advises clients on scale. “A lot of times clients want a larger tree than their ceiling

height can really allow,” she says, “That’s when I bring out the tape measure.” Once a tree is selected, she packs it full of orb ornaments and layers with texture, “so it looks interesting and more like a floral piece or a piece of art.”

Designers admit Christmas lights can be their biggest challenge. “It’s wonderful that so many trees come with lights, but I’m going to tell you, don’t ever hold your breath that it’s all going to work,” says Karen Sacksteder of Sacksteder’s Interiors in Cincinnati and New Trenton, IN. Missing or burned-out bulbs along the pre-lit strand can mean starting over or finding replacements in the middle of a project.

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Runde makes sure that all the lighting around the room is part of the work she does for clients. “A lot of people entertain at night over the holidays, and in winter, it is dark, of course, so lighting is important,” she explains. She examines how her decorations will be lit at night and may introduce lanterns, candles and LED lights, even a new lamp that spreads a pleasing pool of light on a certain display once the sun goes down.

Dream Team

Morse and Runde have their own design firms in Portland, but a chance meeting at a design class brought them together for their dream gig: For 11 years, they have teamed up to create award-winning Christmas looks for Portland’s famous Pittock Mansion.

Almost 20,000 visitors stroll through the mansion during the holidays to see the French Renaissance-style chateau, built in 1909, bedecked for the holiday. “Oregon is the Christmas tree capital of the world, and we’re so fond of our natural trees, but at the mansion you have to use artificial so they can last through the season and you don’t introduce any insects into the historic home,” Morse says.