

A young girl in a blue dress is the central figure, holding a gold gift box and a crown. She is surrounded by a large pile of gold star-shaped decorations. The background is a solid teal color. The overall mood is festive and celebratory.

HOME

Christmas Ideas

It's time to flex your creative muscles and get into making and decorating for the festive season ahead. From mood-enhancing colours and fabrics to gorgeous table settings and tree decorations, there's plenty to provide inspiration and imagination.

WORDS BY MONIQUE VAN TULDER

AL FRESCO

Consider moving beyond the traditional Christmas look. Experiment with dynamic florals, bold patterns and native foliage. Mix scale (big prints with smaller co-ordinating ones), yet keep a flow with the colour palette to bring the look together. Try the allure of fresh pinks and greens with a splash of festive red and white. It's joyful and perfect for our climate, and your Christmas indoor and outdoor spaces.



ON-TREND FURNITURE

If you're buying rattan seating for your al fresco celebration, double-check that it is suitable for outdoor use, as some items are not weather-friendly and may be marked for indoor use only.



MAKE YOUR MARK

To begin new traditions and extend the season, order personalised decorations and encourage each guest to visit, pre-Christmas, to hang their name on the tree. **Colour and Spice** have the perfect decorations that can be used again and again. They will always trump cheaper options, and your home will feel better for them. colourandspice.net.au

SWEETLY SCENTED

A beautifully scented home is the ultimate luxury. Evoke a sense of place and welcome with room fragrances; from plug-in wall diffusers, to room sprays, and perennial favourite candles.

BEAUTIFUL BEGINNINGS

A welcoming entry sets the tone for a fabulous festive home. **The Doors of Berry** turn your front door into a place of beauty with stunning Christmas wreaths – add your own twist (fragrant fresh florals, aromatic spices such as cinnamon sticks or clove-scented oranges, and amazing Australian natives). Thrill visitors and match your front door (or an entire room) to your 'Christmas colour scheme'. Resene have a DIY guide that makes doing it yourself look easy. Or schedule an appointment with a local handyman – just make sure you book in advance, they have been busy this year with all of us making home improvements. thedoorsofberry.com.au



NOTHING SAYS CHRISTMAS LIKE...

Making your own unique Yuletide wreath is not only creatively satisfying and sustainable, it can also hold wonderful festive memories year after year.

Synonymous with Yuletide, festive wreaths date back to the 16th century, when excess cuttings from Christmas trees were repurposed to create wreaths. While traditionally crafted from evergreen trees, modern wreath making now embraces a variety of materials, foliage and greenery. When making your own wreath, start by looking at the shape, says florist Beck Keep from **Keep & Gather**. "If it's irregular, decide which way you would like to orientate it to best suit your design and materials. Flowers and foliages all have a natural line, don't try to fight this." To create a striking and stylish wreath, sometimes less is best. "The urge to use lots of large focal pieces can be hard to resist but using less actually makes your focals more of a statement," she says. With a sustainable mindset, there are plenty of ways to hold onto the traditional 'repurposing' approach when making your wreath. "I self-dry florals from my garden, such as hydrangeas and hellebores, or flowers I have bought at the markets," says Keep. "I also use treasures I find on the ground during walks around my neighbourhood. This gives added joy to my wreath as it brings back the memories I have of finding or drying each piece."

PHOTOGRAPHY: COOTE & CO



TEXTURAL COVERINGS

Both Pottery Barn and Temple & Webster have sweet sisal styles.

When it comes to things underfoot, sisal floorings look wonderful and work incredibly well with a range of textures and colours. Or you might transform your space with the durable indoor/outdoor rugs. If you are off to a park, the rugs are also a good way to stake your claim on the best spot.



Like many natural-fibre carpets, sisal has a distinctive tan, beige, and creamy-white colour that naturally comes from the plant fibres it's made of.



LET IN THE LIGHT (OR KEEP IT OUT)

With a climate that lends itself to al fresco gatherings, not much surpasses the sheer joy of entertaining in the great outdoors. Special-occasion meals simply require a little more planning to ensure your guests experience is wondrously memorable.

For outside daytime entertaining, make cooling shade the priority with candy-stripe umbrellas from **Billy Fresh**. Red and white are the perfect festive choice, yet still a relevant part of your decor long after the last of the tinsel has been packed away. billyfresh.com

In the evening, every room, garden or courtyard becomes magical with a little extra lighting love. Soften these spaces with a generous placement of tea lights from **Koh Living** – their pretty candleholders can also be (separately) used as dessert bowls. kohliving.com.au

More is more when it comes to strings of fairy lights, or patterned LED outdoor pendant lamps. Finally, why not try a show-stopping centrepiece with a palm tree candelabra from **La Casa Vita**. lacasavita.com.au

SHADE IN STYLE

What could be more festive than a candy cane outdoor picnic umbrella? And the best thing is that you can re-use it after the big day.



THE DECOR

TRANSFORMATIVE TEXTILES

Transform your home by draping, affixing, and scattering intriguing textiles. If you are entertaining in the garden, effortlessly conjure up magic (and guest comfort) by adding an abundance of blockprint cushions such as these from **Humble Beginnings** (above, left). humblebeginningsrandwick.com.au

Hang diaphanous fabric from lines with timber pegs and let the summer breeze create a floating wonderland. Experiment with clashing prints (just

be sure to connect the colour dots to maintain a theme). The hand-drawn, botanical prints (top and above, right) from local design company **Utopia Goods** are a perfect place to start. utopiagoods.com.au

Head designer Sophie Tatlow says: "Layering beautiful textiles is key to creating colourful and joyous interiors. A printed, botanical-inspired tablecloth can transform a meal into a memorable and marvellous occasion."

FAIRYTALE FLORALS

Saskia Havekes of **Grandiflora** is an internationally renowned florist, author and creator of clever gift ideas such as fragrances and floral prints. She is also passionate about beautiful bloom-themed festive homes.

"Florals and greenery are a simple way to add magic at Christmas," she says. "Consider a voluminous bouquet of fresh florals as your table centrepiece, and don't forget to pop the flowers in a vase at the end of the day so the flowers last." grandiflora.net

Small vases, like this one above from **Dinosaur Designs**, can be as equally beguiling as statement arrangements. Place one at each place setting with a single bloom as a gift for guests. dinosaurdesigns.com.au





XMAS TREES

This Christmas, go to town on the decorations. Nothing says 'blah' more than a tree without personality – this is the year to let your imagination go wild. Stick to a single colour, or make a beeline for multi-coloured chic. No-one is judging anything, beyond what makes you happy. Real or faux, maximalist or minimalist – the choices are vast, with no 'right' or 'wrong' way to include a Christmas tree in your festive decor. It can be as simple as a few strategically placed branches in a favourite vase (these botanical-themed baubles from **Koh Living** (at top) are so beautiful, they are sure to become favourites for years to come). Or, for a fuss-free break from tradition, try this **Vinyl Design** wall art (above) to transform and theme the season. If you have the space, the bigger the better for fresh tree options (see responsibly grown, locally sourced options in your area). vinylsdesign.com.au

THE TABLE

HAVE FUN WITH CHRISTMAS
The table is your festive season entertaining centrepiece and provides a chance to step outside your comfort zone and layer colour, pattern and texture. Be bold and be brave. **Peacock and Paisleys'** range of table coverings embodies all that is chic and fresh to make for easy Christmas table glamour (below, right). Try a table runner in a contrasting shade and scour vintage shops for 'occasion-worthy' napkin rings. peacockandpaisleys.com.au

The key to creating a beautiful festive table is to make the styling your own. Perhaps use different coloured, mismatched glassware via influential fashion designer JJ Martin's eclectic range, **La DoubleJ** (below, right). ladoublej.com

Alex and Trahanas have just released their range of pretty painted cups. They're perfect for cool and hot beverages and the colourful hues do all the work for you. Oozing style for memorable occasions, they're the epitome of fuss-free festivities. alexandtrahanas.com



FIND YOUR PLACE
Create decorative place cards for your Christmas table. Buy blank cards, collect together glue and glitter, felt-tips and pastels, and engage in a bit of DIY with the kids, or custom print at the likes of **Vistaprint** for a more professional-looking product. vistaprint.com.au



HELP IS AT HAND
If you are still stuck for ideas for your festive table, style icon India Hicks has recently released *An Entertaining Story*, offering inspiration and advice for celebrations. Emulate her style with Christmas-themed plates such as these above from **Peter's of Kensington**. petersofkensington.com.au

SUMMER SUN
Alex and Trahanas' range of ceramics is synonymous with the sun-filled terraces and seaside trattorias of the Mediterranean in summer.



THE PERSONAL TOUCH
Monogrammed linen napkins are impressive. Make your mark on a set of linen napkins or placemats with a monogram that represents your personality, whether ornate and colourful or classic and paired back. Opt for heirloom-worthy pieces that can be used both casually and formally for a lifetime. Anna Lavdaras, stylish founder of lifestyle brand **Philé** (above), shares her ideas for setting beautifully classic, festive tables: "Buy a variety of initials to keep for each time a treasured guest visits. Alternatively, napkins make for a gorgeously timeless gift (sold as sets of four, place one out for a guest to use and wrap the rest of the set for them to take home)." phile.com.au



GIVING

WRAPPING MATTERS

Looking for an eco style of gift wrapping? Try Japanese furoshiki, a simple knotting method that helps the planet as much as it delivers a glorious present. Buy a traditional cotton wrap, a beautiful linen tea towel from the likes of stylish textile brand **Bonnie and Neil** (right), or a fabulous designer scarf. bonnieandneil.com.au

Or festive drawstring bags (below, right) are as fuss-free as popping in the present, and adding a card. **Provincial Home Living** has a great selection. provincialhomeliving.com.au



Adding bows and ribbons to your carefully prepared gifts further highlights the effort you have made to surprise your friends or family.



060 | mindfood.com



SWEET BITES

If not sweet things at Christmas then when? Create childhood nostalgia for your guests and thrill them with a 'dessert' lolly bar. Sydney food stylist Yael Barkhan says, "Let guests 'design' their own festive lolly bags; it's a perfect break in the meal, and ideal for all ages. Bear in mind it doesn't have to be a sugar-laden affair. Dried fruits and nuts also look wonderful."



THOUGHTFUL PHOTO BOOK

It might be that you are not spending Christmas with loved ones this year. Memento photo books are the gift that gives year-round. A photo book comes in many guises, limited only by your imagination or inclination: a storybook of your family's year for grandparents, a coffee table book to recollect a memorable trip with friends, or perhaps a book of favoured recipes – don't leave out accompanying mouth-watering images!

Give table settings a bit more festive fizz with these sweet little gift boxes.



BUY FROM REGIONAL FRIENDS

It feels better to buy a gift when you know you are supporting stylish local businesses.



GIFT BOXES

Stone's Throw gift store in Walgett has a range of hampers that support bush-based businesses. "Our Australian Bush Communities are full of clever people creating beautiful and unique products," says founder, Katie Murray. stonethrownonline.com.au



PRETTY FACE MASKS

Gifts at Teacup in Roma has a range of beautiful things for your home, and unique gifts. New times call for new accessories, keep loved ones safe and festively stylish with Liberty cotton face masks. giftsatteacup.com.au



FESTIVE FINDS FOR FURRY FRIENDS

Pets have worked hard to comfort us during the year so don't leave them out at Christmas time. Co-ordinating their bedding with your home decor is clever. **Alfresco Emporium** have you covered in classic style with their rattan pet beds, or add a splash of warm colour with one from Melbourne's **Kip & Co.** alfrescoemporium.com.au kipandco.com.au



BESPOKE CHRISTMAS TREASURES

At **Farmgate & Twine** at the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, you will know the days they are in store by the basketware framing the windows. If you can't pop in, their online shop is full of gifting treasures. farmgateandtwine.com.au

A FABULOUSLY FUSS-FREE FESTIVE SEASON AT HOME

Interior designer Charlotte Coote has made her name by successfully integrating timelessness and classic design with fresh, innovative and unexpected elements in her projects. She has more than 16 years' experience in the industry and worked around the world. We find out where she gets her inspiration when it comes to Christmas entertaining at home.

What does home mean to you?

A sanctuary where my family can relax and recharge. I love being in the garden tending to my vegetables, collecting eggs from the chooks, watching the children play, and time by the pool.

Picnics and lunches outside always bring so much joy. It's about being around the people I care about in a comfortable environment.

On creating festive tablescapes?

I generally go back to the basics of Christmas with festive colours and textures. Fill massive vases with pine cones, use candles, silver, glass, crisp white linen and Christmas crackers that work with your scheme.

For impact, pick just a few objects and colours and repeat them again and again. Steer clear of miniature Father Christmases and reindeer with snow on their backs. When it is 40 degrees outside, it's just odd!

How do you use festive colour in your home?

You really can't go wrong with a good amount of green, and a hint of woody tones. A pop of red is great, but unless you have a room that can take this strong colour, it is best to keep it green. The same goes for gold ... it's best in small doses.

Quick idea to transform a room for the season?

Greenery en masse in vases, or an oversized real Christmas tree (if it is too big for the room, that's even better).

Don't forget music; it doesn't have to be cliché Christmas music, but it does need to be festive. Scented Christmas candles in fragrances such



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CHARLOTTE COOTE



as sandalwood, cyprus, burnt wood or fig will create a beautiful atmosphere.

Sit candles in little mini wreaths of real holly, and try potted Christmas trees around the house. I love holly as a door wreath, and around fireplaces dripping down to the ground (it doesn't need to be in water). I also rather like Christmas lilies.

On the art of being a good host?

If the host has fun, the guests will, too. To entertain beautifully and stylishly, the key is organisation and keeping things simple. I aim to have organised 90 per cent of a party prior to guests arriving.

Pre-choose music, set tables, line up glasses, chill drinks, light candles, fill vases with flowers and make as much food as possible the day before – then I can truly enjoy time with my guests.

In my younger years, I may have been guilty of being disorganised and aiming too high with the menu. It was an utter disaster! Keep it simple. Now is not the time to try that new recipe.

...and guests?

RSVP immediately to the invitation in the same manner you were invited. For example, if a beautiful printed

invitation arrives in the post, you must write and accept or decline the invitation and post your return. The same goes for a text message invitation to a simple kitchen dinner, respond via text message immediately. It is important not to sit on an invitation. Thank your host within 48 hours – via text, phone call or hand-written note.

During the party, talk to other guests and make an effort. Have fun and be giving in spirit.

How do you celebrate the festive season?

In our home, Christmas is about children. We sing Christmas carols, and make loads of delicious homemade food – in particular, my grandmother's brandy butter, and glazed ham.

After the meal, it's carols, then we relax while our labrador, Bobby, cleans up the floor around the Christmas lunch table.

The gifts you love to give?

I am moving away from tangible, sometimes wasteful gifts and more towards experiences. For example, fancy restaurant vouchers or concert tickets, though of course the children still need something fun to unwrap. cooteandco.com.au

Charlotte Coote established her firm, Cooote & Co, in 2007, specialising in classic contemporary design. Her own dining room (at left) is painted in striking pink (Glamour Puss by Resene).