

Chapter 1

Setting the Stage for Holiday Decorating

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding how holiday decorating differs from regular decorating
- ▶ Overcoming decorating obstacles
- ▶ Busting common holiday decorating myths
- ▶ Keeping the joy and fun in holiday decorating
- ▶ Being open to decorating for blended cultures and beliefs
- ▶ Knowing where to find info on other holidays and special events

You may be feeling intimidated about decorating for the holidays, or you may be ready to dive right in. No matter what level of decorator you may be, I give you some tricks that you may not already know, I give you ways to conquer the decorating-fear bug, and I give you tips that can turn you into a quick-change artist — for any holiday — if that's what you want to do.

If you worry about time, money, and skills, fahgetabahtit. Read on! You can find some real world ideas that aren't so unachievable that you'll throw up your hands in frustration. But don't get the wrong idea. Just because I present simple ideas doesn't mean that they're plain and blah. Elegance is simple! Many of my so-called simple ideas are tricks that set designers, magazine stylists, and interior designers use all the time to transform the plain into extraordinary — and you can do it, too!

You're getting ready to embark on quite a fun ride as you glance through this chapter. After going through some basic concepts and getting past some obstacles and common myths about holiday decorating, you'll be ready to dress up your home stage with some holiday décor.

10 Part I: Becoming a Holiday Decorator Extraordinaire

Defining Decorating for the Holidays

Even if your home's style hasn't changed since 1976, with a few simple strokes, your home is refreshed, revamped, and revitalized at the holidays. Unlike regular decorating where you have to pain over what color to paint the walls, what upholstery you should pick, and what furniture style will last a few years, each specific holiday makes it easy. You have a theme, a color palette to choose from, and merchandise and motifs usually mass manufactured, so you can purchase and decorate when you're ready.

Now before I go on, I want to clarify what holiday decorating is, and isn't.

Year-round decorating

Holiday decorating is not just Christmas decorating. (For some reason, that's automatically where people's minds go.) Holiday decorating is year-round. It celebrates many special occasions and important events. It's seasonal. It has many styles. It's constantly changing. It's performed outside, inside, and upside down. You make things, you hang things, and you store things; it constantly evolves. But it does *not* have to be intimidating — it's fun!

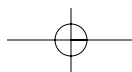
Temporary decorating

Even though holiday decorating happens year-round, holiday decorating is also temporary. When I say temporary, I mean that nothing is set up, strung up, hung up, or put up that doesn't come down. Really, that's the beauty of it. Even if you make a complete mess of things, it's only temporary!

Realizing that holiday decorating is temporary, though, takes a certain kind of mindset. In a normal decorating situation, if I choose to add a porcelain vase to my décor, I know exactly where it will live.

In holiday decorating, your décor has to be a bit durable, will take up storage space out of season, will take certain packaging restrictions, and that's just the beginning. Your holiday decorations have to withstand a certain amount of wear and tear within a short amount of time. They may be subjected to abnormal use as well, like, say, at a party.

So, temporary decorating is both a blessing and, sometimes, a curse. You don't have to worry too much with it at this point; the main thing is, you'll want to assess your storage space and look at the sections in each holiday chapter titled "Jazzing Up Smaller Spaces" for space-saving decorating ideas.



Clearing Decorating Obstacles

What do you feel is standing in your way of decorating for the holidays? Is it time, budget, space, or skill — or all the above? Let me just put some of these preconceived notions to rest. You *can* decorate. Really, you can!

Out of time

Feeling like you don't have enough hours in your day to get everything done? It's a common problem. So many things have to be done that it's hard to squeeze in holiday decorating, I know. But don't worry: I include several quick tips and ideas in each holiday chapter. Look for the "Decorating in a Flash" sections, in particular, for specific ideas. And, of course, you can always tell folks that you're a minimalist at heart if you run completely out of time.

Out of money

Finding the ol' pocketbook a little light these days? You needn't ever sacrifice necessities to decorate for the holidays (besides, I wouldn't want you to). I help you find ways of decorating frugally in each holiday chapter. Many of the ideas in these sections show you how to repurpose, reuse, revamp, and restyle many of the same items over and over.

I firmly believe that you should set a budget no matter what — whether you have all the money in the world or are on a strict ramen noodle diet.

By setting a budget, you can readily figure out how much you'll be spending every season, so that it can feed into your normal budgeted household expenses. You'll also be able to calculate, after putting everything down on paper, whether the huge after-season sale items are really worth it or not.

You can find out more about how to set a holiday decorating budget (including having an emergency fund) and stick to it in Chapter 5.

Out of space

If you barely have enough room to hold your personal belongings, you may find it hard to justify acquiring many seasons' worth of holiday decorating supplies.

12 Part I: Becoming a Holiday Decorator Extraordinaire

A simple solution (because you want to decorate, right?) is to read the sections in each holiday chapter that are specifically geared toward small-space decorating.

These sections aren't meant for tiny apartment dwellers only. Doesn't everyone have a tiny bathroom, sitting area, or some other space that has to be dealt with? Find some inspiration to decorate smaller spaces. Bonus? The ideas take little time, effort, or cash!

Out of your mind

Not everyone can have the talent of a poet, artist, or interior designer. Guess what? You don't have to. So don't go crazy thinking that only professionals or incredibly "crafty" people can decorate for the holidays — decorating for the holidays is for everyone.

Holiday decorating is easy if you take it in small, manageable chunks. As I show you in this book, you don't have to have an extraordinary amount of talent to come off looking pretty amazing when decorating for the holidays.

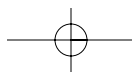
Even if you can't make frozen bread dough rise (oh wait, that's just me), you can figure out how to use just a few props and look at things with a fresh eye — no talent necessary. It's really a simple formula. So stop thinking you have to be the next Picasso to have a well-decorated home for the holidays.

Debunking Decorating Myths

Okay, so you know you have the time, money, space, and talent to decorate, but you still aren't convinced that you can come up with some great looking décor. Perhaps you're stuck believing in one of the many decorating myths I discuss in this section.

Aiming for perfection

First of all, let's get real. Nobody's perfect. Even the most famous models gracing the covers of magazines (that includes houses, too) get professional help to look the way they do. Not all of us can have stylists on staff to decorate our houses for a photo shoot or keep it looking like it belongs on the



Chapter 1: Setting the Stage for Holiday Decorating

13

cover of our favorite decorating magazine. However, I do provide tips and tricks in this book that can help you get it looking as if someone did.

Now, I'm not saying that you shouldn't strive for perfection, or actually achieve it once in a while. I'm merely saying that you shouldn't get so wrapped up in achieving and maintaining perfection that you lose focus of why you decorate in the first place — to create warm, inviting interiors that welcome family and friends.

Kids tromp in snow and mud, pets leave their hair on items, friends prop their feet on coffee tables, and spouses can leave dried-up cereal bowls on kitchen counters. That's just life.

Decorating, especially at the holidays, is to be lived around and in and all over. That's why we have holidays, to join together and celebrate. One of the underlying themes you find in this book is that, although you can decorate perfectly, if your guests don't feel comfortable, you've defeated the very purpose of your decorating.

Again, form follows function. Try to make comfort part of your idea of perfection instead of everything in its place staying in its place. And if you're blessed enough to already know this, can you please tell my husband? He hates my dried-up cereal bowls.

Believing you can do it all

Every holiday — if you celebrate it — can get really hectic. You may want to throw a party, attend parades, purchase gifts, and still have time to live a normal life with its crazy demands.

Thinking that you can do it all is a great and noble belief, but is it a reality? If you're hardheaded like me, you refuse to believe that it can't be done. But allow yourself a little slack when it comes to the decorating part.

If you just put up a few decorations, as opposed to decking the whole house, I doubt that anyone will say, "Gosh, I can't believe they didn't have the bathroom decorated!"

Start with a decorating goal in mind and work up from there. In Chapter 6, I give you a planning tool to help you realistically set your plans in motion. In addition, each holiday chapter contains sections that give you little things to do when you're short on time and/or money. And if you really want to go all out, next year's looking a bit better all the time, isn't it?

14 Part I: Becoming a Holiday Decorator Extraordinaire

Creating everything from scratch

Whoa! Whoever said that you had to *make* everything from scratch is out of his or her mind! Take it from me, the one who touts creating your home décor (www.CreatingHomeDecor.com — shameless plug), I believe that you can make just about anything yourself if you want to, including from-scratch recipes, but sometimes, it just ain't feasible — or frugal for that matter!

So although I give you ideas and instructions for making things in this book, don't take it as the only way to get a custom-designed look. If you like the idea, go out and look for an item that's similar. Not everyone is crafty, nor does everyone want to be. If you buy your garland and wreaths instead of crafting them because you don't have a forest growing in your backyard, and purchase your eggs to dye at Easter instead of raising them in your own chicken coop, you're no less qualified to decorate your house beautifully.

Many times, I buy things premade, such as gingerbread houses, because I just simply ran out of time, and I couldn't possibly do a job that's half as good! It doesn't make your decorating any less important, beautiful, or meaningful. The mere act of decorating for a holiday is meaningful in itself.

With imported merchandise and new technologies driving the cost of many manufactured items down, you can easily find many decorating items cheaper than if you bought all the raw goods and made them yourself. Of course, there are always exceptions to the case.

I do believe that there's something intrinsically satisfying about making things yourself, especially if it's a hobby or personal interest. You find many instructions for making things yourself in this book, and you may actually want to try some of them — if only to say that you've done it once.

But never, no never, think that you have to make everything yourself or that someone else is more talented or skilled in holiday decorating because he or she can. You may have a better eye at putting things together or arranging items on a mantel instead of pricking yourself on the wire tying up millions of bows.

Decide what you want to make yourself by evaluating your own personal interests, what you feel you're good at, and how much play time you have. You may, in fact, decide that making things is not the route to go, or you may come off with a completely handmade holiday. And if you do, I want to see how you made your own Christmas lights.

Keeping up with the Joneses

Remember that some of the biggest blessings come when you do what's best for you, not when you discover that you've finally outdone your neighbors. Trying to keep up with competitive neighbors, friends, or, yes, even family is a self-defeating behavior that saps the life out of a holiday. You'll get so wrapped up in trying to purchase more, throw a better party, and buy bigger stuff that you'll quickly drain your bank account and your spirit of the season.

Place your hand on this book right now and pledge to me that you will put your time and energy on focusing what's best for you. (And don't you dare say that beating the competition is best for you!)



Concentrate on the meaning of the season, take the high road, and avoid competition in decorating your home for the holidays. You'll feel better about what you do and don't do at the holidays if you do it just for you and your family.

Finding the Pleasure Principle

The idea of decorating for a holiday shouldn't shower you with tension, leaving you wondering what in the world you're going to do and how you're going to find the time to do it. You should *enjoy* holiday decorating, and the ideas in this section can help you make sure that you do.

Keeping the fun in the holidays

It seems silly to say "Remember to have fun!" during the holidays, but the reality of stress-filled seasons is prevalent in almost every household. There are places to go, people to see, presents to buy, things to arrange — and that's on top of all the regular hustle and bustle you probably already have going on in your life.

Sometimes, when I mention holiday decorating to a group of people, they grimace, sigh, and I can just see the energy draining out of them right before my eyes. I know: Holiday decorating can be time consuming and energy draining. Some people even procrastinate or forego holiday decorating altogether because of the hassle they're anticipating.

16

Part I: Becoming a Holiday Decorator Extraordinaire

I'm not giving a lecture here on Fun 101. But perhaps the following suggestions can sway the way you envision decorating:

- ✓ Don't take on all the labor of decorating by yourself. Involve the family. I'm *not* saying to bark out the orders while they submissively obey; instead, creatively think of ways to incorporate or have fun with your family or a friend while still accomplishing your decorating tasks.
- ✓ Pencil in an afternoon or day to take the whole family to pick out pumpkins or a Christmas tree. Help a child make his or her own kinara or menorah. Use the sections in each holiday chapter titled "Involving the Whole Family" as idea starters for coming up with other fun ways to decorate. As you glance through each chapter, make notes in the margins of any other decorating ideas you think may be appropriate to enlist help or have someone tag along for company.
- ✓ Hold tree-trimming parties, invite close friends over to decorate for Purim, and find as many ways as you can to infuse joy into every occasion.



If you've tried all these tips, and you still find your decorating to be a burden, pare down what you're trying to do. Life's too short not to have a bit of fun while you work.

Remembering why you're decorating

At some point in time, most everyone forgets the reason for any season. Although you don't have to pore over history books at every President's Day, remembering why you celebrate each holiday is important.

Holidays mean different things to different people. Find your inspiration through the stories and history that have been passed down and keep them tucked away in your heart while coming up with your decorating plans. I've found that when my clients firmly understand that the reason we all decorate is to celebrate, it suddenly takes on more meaning.

It's also important to decorate not just for yourself, but also for others. Years ago, I was in charge of compiling a series of Christmas books in which I was immersed in Santas, reindeer, Christmas trees, Nativity scenes, and every other thing you can imagine that had to do with Christmas. I was so sick of the whole topic that I couldn't decorate my own home at Christmas for years until my little boy came along. And then I rediscovered the joy of decorating to see the delight in *his* eyes. He was seeing all this for the very first time!



List all the reasons you celebrate, so when you get a little down or overwhelmed, you can accurately adjust your feelings about what you're doing.

Taking your audience into consideration

I follow the theory that form follows function. When I consult with clients to discuss the different ideas they have, I also note whether they have children in the house, allergies, pets, special routines, how they use rooms, and so on. I know how they use their spaces, so I get a good idea of what I need to stay away from.

For example, I would most certainly never suggest black velvet anything for someone who owns a white, long-haired cat. Neither would I place poisonous plants, expensive breakable items, or vintage rugs where a toddler can harm himself or the décor by my carelessness.

When you're decorating for a holiday, think of every person who may come through your door. Make sure that you plan around your audience.

For instance, if you have grandchildren, nieces, or nephews, what may be fine for a very grown-up environment may not be practical when they come to visit. You have two options:

- ✓ Adjust your decorating to accommodate them, caring for their safety and keeping your sanity.
- ✓ Allow extra time at the holidays to say, "No, no! Don't touch that!" and be constantly tense instead of enjoying your holiday gathering.

Perhaps striking a happy medium is a good option for you — having an incredibly decorated pad while not having anything breakable is certainly possible. Simply list what you need to exclude, just in case, and you should be fine.

Keeping the basics in mind

Holiday decorating becomes easy when you keep these basics in mind:

- ✓ No worries — your theme and color palette are chosen for you for the holidays.
- ✓ Make the things you want, and buy the rest.
- ✓ Skip to the parts that mean the most to you.
- ✓ Do only what you have the time, money, and space to do — the rest will follow.
- ✓ Blend religious holiday decorating in your home when called for.

- ✓ Defy the need to aim for perfection (even though you know that you could be perfect if you wanted to).
- ✓ Keep this book handy for reference. (You didn't think I was going to leave that out, did you?)

Sharing Cultures and Religion during Holidays

Many people you know or welcome into your home may have different religious beliefs or celebrate holidays other than the ones you celebrate. Don't tiptoe around diversity. Celebrate it.

Holidays are the cause of much angst, I'm afraid, even without having differences of religion. If you have a blended household or will be welcoming guests of many faiths into your home, remember two things:

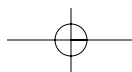
- ✓ You don't have to shove your religious holiday down their throats.
- ✓ You don't have to neglect your holiday, either.

Try implementing a few of these ideas that complement blending several holidays and cultures:

- ✓ Choose a neutral decorating scheme that's based on seasonal decorating (meaning summer, winter, fall, or spring) rather than decorating for any particular holiday.
- ✓ Stay away from adding any particular color that's associated with a certain holiday color scheme. Focus on making an elegant and tastefully decorated home where anyone would feel welcome.
- ✓ Use lots of candles in neutral colors and keep the tabletops as neutral as any other day you may gather together for dinner.
- ✓ Decorate the house with seasonal swags, garlands, and centerpieces.
- ✓ If gifts are to be exchanged, place them on a gift table, instead of under a tree, and get together on a day other than the specific day any particular holiday is celebrated.



People of different religious backgrounds and cultures appreciate their holidays being included in the decorating mix. Most don't mind whether or not you practice their beliefs. Instead, they like the acknowledgement of cultural diversity or the fact that equal weight is given to each specific holiday instead of focusing on one.



Chapter 1: Setting the Stage for Holiday Decorating

19

To bone up on holidays that you're not familiar with, visit a library, read this book, and find out more about your friends' and family's various beliefs, or ask them yourself what means the most to them. They might appreciate the fact that you took the time to seek their input and give you fabulous ways of including their symbolic holidays into your own holiday decorating.

You have countless options for decorating for a holiday without having to go theme central. Keep your audience in mind and seek creative ways to decorate. Hopefully, you can find much of the help you need right here in this book.

Finding More Holidays

The United States is a melting pot of cultures, traditions, and religions. On top of that, we have special interests and hobbies that also bind us together in celebrations. Many of these events and occasions include decorating. Here's how you can find out where to go to find more information and gather ideas for decorating your event.

Observing religious holidays

If you worship or celebrate specific religions or practices, your congregation can apprise you of dates you should be aware of for special events or celebrations. Look for classes to find out more about specific religious holidays offered by your place of worship. They can give you detailed information about the correct way to celebrate — and decorate — any holiday associated with religious practices. They can also guide you to sources where you can find merchandise to help you celebrate or decorate with meaningful items for a particular holiday.

Finding cultural or traditional holidays

If you're part of an ethnic or cultural group or want to start decorating and celebrating cultural events that are part of your heritage, find a resource center near you that has historical accounts or books containing more information about celebrations or holidays from your heritage or home country. You can find many sources on the Internet by doing a keyword search in your favorite search engine. Refer to the section in this chapter on looking online to find out more about what you can find and how to find it.

20 Part I: Becoming a Holiday Decorator Extraordinaire

Often, online searches lead you to local or regional resource centers. These places are set up around the country to help connect people with their roots. The staff can provide information, text, references, and more — often free of charge — to help you start planning your celebrations.

Visiting your library

Visit your local library to gain access to more holiday decorating resources. Study the encyclopedias and other reference resources to find more information and history on certain holidays. Besides finding out about specific religious holidays, you can easily find more holiday-specific recipe books, decorating books, and magazines. You can find out what the Pilgrims really ate for dinner and discover that — can you believe it — Thanksgiving really wasn't an official national holiday until President Abraham Lincoln appointed a national day of thanksgiving in 1863.

Ask your reference librarian for *Chase's Calendar of Events*. This book is full of special days, weeks, months, holidays, historical anniversaries, fairs, and festivals for holiday or special-interest junkies. Laid out in an easy day-by-day, month-by-month format, you can quickly find something to celebrate or research for more decorating ideas. Usually, contact names, addresses, Web sites, or phone numbers are included in each listing, so you can find out more information about each event. *Chase's* is revised annually, with the new editions coming out in the fall for the following year. It really is an invaluable resource for the holiday-decorating inclined. You'll be able to find something to celebrate and decorate each and every day, if you want to!

Looking online

The Worldwide Holiday & Festival Site (www.holidayfestival.com) has an extensive database of events broken down by country, religion, and other specific categories. It's relatively easy to navigate and gives you great tools for exploring other cultures and traditions.

Likewise, a wealth of other special-interest sites provide great information on holidays in general. Simply type in the name of a holiday or a special-interest keyword or phrase into your favorite search engine. You'll find many sites you can visit to get specific holiday information with calendars to go along with them.