

HOLIDAYS AT HOME: DECORATE, ENTERTAIN, ENJOY

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# NATURAL INSTINCTS

A rustic yet refined mountain ranch house gets dressed up for the holidays with an abundance of natural decorations and lots of sparkle and shine

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THIS PAGE: Interior designer Stephanie Sandston blends softness and sophistication with rough-hewn elements in both the everyday décor of the house and the holiday decorations. She brings her Hollywood days into the picture with a zebra ottoman that once belonged to Bing Crosby.



OPPOSITE: Sandston layers fresh greenery with white lights, pinecones, antlers and silver branches to form a generous welcome at the front entry. "The elk antlers are a gorgeous piece of art in nature. The elegant lines are so suited to the house," she says.

As a former set designer in the film industry, Stephanie Sandston's experience with finishes, lighting and storytelling is an expertise she now brings to her interior design business in Montana. "Through design I tell my clients' story—how they live and entertain and what they hand down to their children," she says.

For the Speth family of Bozeman, Montana, the story is all about family, friends and special memories, especially during the holiday season. This is when Sandston helps the family add a fresh layer of Christmas magic to their beautifully appointed home in the Gallatin River valley. >>



## NATURAL STYLE

**THINK GREEN** and begin with a foundation of evergreen wreaths and boughs—the more the merrier. Build upon that by adding other decorative objects.

**BE CREATIVE** with natural materials. Anything goes, from pinecones and antlers to river rock, twigs and branches, bark, dried grasses and berries, seed pods, rose hips and feathers. Don't try to use everything, though. Focus on a few specific materials and repeat them for more impact.

**ADD LAYERS** of holiday decorations and incorporate them into your decorating scheme throughout the house. Choose colors and materials that coordinate with or highlight everyday décor.

**MIX IT UP** Use as much natural material as possible, but don't be afraid to mix it with glossy items. Try filling big bowls with glass ornaments, combined with pine branches or antlers. It's okay to improve on Mother Nature—add a little paint, glitter or lights.





Fabulous Food is an important part of every holiday celebration. To make tablescapes look bountiful and inviting, display food on pedestals of varying heights. Sandston enhances food presentations with flowers, seasonal greenery, candles and ornaments, and uses repetition to create pleasing patterns, like a semi-circular display of round champagne glasses (left). "Everywhere you look should be a vignette," she says.

## "WE INCORPORATE THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS WE LIVE WITH DAILY AND EMBELLISH THEM FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON."

The Speths' house, constructed with stone and 100-year-old hand-hewn square logs, is set on 200 acres of ranchland bounded by the Gallatin River and surrounded by mountains. Sandston worked closely with homeowner Beth Speth to create comfortable, sophisticated interiors that play off the rustic wood-and-stone architecture. Beth's collections of mercury glass and pottery from the 1920s and 1930s inspired the deco furnishings; the mountain setting inspired the soft color palette of green, brown, gray and blue. Each year, when the holidays approach, "we incorporate the beautiful things we live with daily and embellish them for the Christmas season," says Beth. "Stephanie takes everything to the next level with her ideas and the way she expresses them."

The Speths' holiday decorating scheme is based on the bounty of nature; fresh pine wreaths, cedar boughs and pinecones form the foundation. "It's always more special if you can harvest off the land and bring the outside indoors with a plethora of natural beauty," says Beth. Garlands are highlighted with just a hint of sparkle from silver glass balls and a restrained use of twinkling white lights. Elk antlers are interspersed throughout, from the front door wreath to the fireplace mantel and buffet decorations. "Antlers are wonderful, sculptural objects found in nature," Sandston says. >>



THIS PAGE: Aspen saplings were brought indoors to decorate the entry hall. Victorian nickel-plated tree stands and simple glass ornaments add to the light and airy display. OPPOSITE: Champagne is all the more inviting when artfully nestled in a glass bucket filled with fresh snow and sparkling ornaments.

THIS PAGE: "In the girls' bedroom, we used one color for the tree to play off how the light beds contrast with the logs," Sandston says. The all-white tree features animals and stars in porcelain and clear glass. OPPOSITE: A collection of vintage skaters and skiers stirs the imaginations of Gracely and Ruby as they snuggle in bed.







## SHIMMERING BLUE AND TEAL TONES MIRROR THE SKY AND NEARBY RIVER.

To enhance their pale color, she dipped them in glass glitter to resemble “that great 60-degrees-below-zero snow with hard, frosty edges,” she says. Picking up on the mercury glass that Beth collects, the designer added touches of sparkle to the home’s interiors with glass balls and silver branches.

But this is not simply a designer-decorated Christmas. “The family is part of each process,” says Sandston. “Beth and Steve and their daughters pick out a magnificent alpine fir tree each year, Steve wires the lights with a surgeon’s precision and everyone decorates the tree with the antique ornaments they have collected.” The ornaments introduce color to the neutral palette, their shimmering blue and teal tones mirroring the sky and nearby river. Peacock feathers tie into the color scheme and the deco period furnishings, adding another natural touch.

Holiday embellishments are woven throughout the house. A trio of aspen saplings adorned with clear glass balls rests in Victorian nickel-plated tree stands and greets visitors in the entry hall. Daughters Gracely and Ruby have their own fantasy tree in the cozy log-cabin bedroom they share, along with a charming display of antique toys. “All the styling I do is really creating landscapes...from the mantel and trees to the table décor and food,” Sandston says.

Beth is a gourmet cook who comes from a big Italian family, where Christmas “is all about food and family,” she says. Sandston helps create tablescapes worthy of Beth’s culinary skills, incorporating the same holiday materials and colors into the food presentations that she uses elsewhere. “Christmas is short-lived so I try to bring more magic and vibration to every space,” Sandston says.

From the beginning of December to the beginning of January each year, the Speths’ home takes on the special glow of Christmas memories in the making. “Stephanie helps us add new things each year,” says Beth. “And they become part of our family tradition.”

### { DESIGN BOOK }

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