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MELISSA HAWKS,
THE EFFORTLESSLY CHIC
MOTHER OF THREE
AND OWNER OF THE
SHOP THE WELL APPOINTED
HOUSE, SHARES HER
SECRETS TO DECKING
OUT YOUR DOMICILE
IN STYLE

HOME FOR THE

Holidays

BY RIANN SMITH • PHOTOGRAPHS BY JULIE BIDWELL





"We used to go to a Christmas tree show when I was a child in North Carolina that I really enjoyed," says Melissa. Now, her home is a Fraser fir paradise. "We usually have one large tree in our library, a tree in our family room that the kids decorate on their own and a tree in our foyer that has a bird theme!"

The family's beloved Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, Lilly and Sophie, enjoy lounging in the gold-leafed, coffered-ceiling library. To make the rest of the house feel this cozy, Melissa employs a few easy tricks. "Bringing out a holiday pillow or two can add to the spirit, or swapping out hand towels in the powder room with a set that has a holiday theme. I also love burning candles to make the house smell good. There are plenty of high-end fragranced candles on the market, but a good old Yankee Candle that is very reasonably priced in a holiday or spiced fragrance can warm up a kitchen with holiday scents."

For many, the prospect of decorating one's home for the holidays incites a full-body shudder. Lugging out boxes of breakables. Crack. Smash. Back to Hoagland's I go. Trekking all over town for gluten-free, nut-free, everything-free cookies. Sorry, sold out! Gift-wrapping teacher presents like a kindergartner, despite the YouTube tutorials. *Keep your day job, Mom.*



In the Gracie-wallpapered dining room, traditional meals take center stage. "We often do a Christmas ham with sides one night, and a prime rib with Yorkshire pudding and sides on Christmas Day," says Melissa. "My mother passed down a potato gratin recipe with red and green peppers that is festive. I also have adopted my mother-in-law's sweet potato soufflé recipe that has sherry in it and is to die for. We usually serve fresh vegetables like haricots verts with almonds. There's also a festive green 'mold' that we serve as a side that was passed down from my father's mother. It adds color to the plate!"

Yet somehow, Greenwich resident Melissa Hawks makes the whole holiday enterprise look simple, inviting, even magical. All it takes are a few clicks through her home décor website, wellappointedhouse.com, or a stroll through her shop at 31 East Elm Street, to know that the entrepreneur is a pro at creating luxe environments prime for Pinterest-worthy celebrations. But Melissa's love of holiday decor runs deeper than tartan tableware. "To me, the holidays are about family and tradition, regardless of faith," she says. "My mother put a lot of

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A hallmark of Melissa's seasonal style is incorporating indoor greenery. "I use fresh garlands and preserved ones that I sell through my website. If buying greens year after year gets expensive, you can buy a faux wreath or garland that you bring out at the holidays. They look so real now that it is hard to tell the difference. Work in some dried magnolia leaves, or use greens and pine cones from your own yard. If you are a real DIY-er, spray-paint different leaves and items with gold or silver." **BELOW:** Waterford crystal, elegant flatware and crisp embroidered linens are an ideal backdrop for delicate china. "The pattern is Allée Royal by Raynaud," says Melissa. Detailed in green, blue and gold, it happily partners with red. "A holiday table gets personality by mixing formal and whimsical elements, which is fun for your guests," she says. A rose napkin holder adds drama and ties in the centerpiece and mantel, while festive figurines impart a playful touch.



effort into preparing our house for the holidays and creating memorable meals. She makes the most delicious rum cakes and would give them as hostess gifts to friends and family we were visiting."

Clearly, the partridge did not fall far from the pear tree. Now with a family of her own that includes husband Carney, daughters Lauren (ten), Katie (nine), and son William (seven), Melissa is carrying on the traditions she so adored as a child, while also creating a few of her own. "I spent half of my childhood in the Northeast and half in the South, so I was able to experience the holidays in both places," says Melissa. "We usually host family for the holidays here in Greenwich, and I love getting festive."

Not long after Thanksgiving, Melissa begins dressing up her landmarked Mediterranean estate, the Mary C. Morrison House, c. 1912. "We have a storage room filled with holiday decorations and usually bring them out the first week of December," she says. "The whole process takes about two days." The exterior of her home, iced in pale pink stucco like a Marie Antoinette cake topped with tiles of rose petal Ladurée macarons, is adorned with its own bling: an eight-foot wreath from McArde's that is studded with twinkling white lights. As you roll up the gravel driveway at night, it winks at you as if to say, "You have arrived."

And arrive they do. Friends, family, children and unexpected



"Music is such a part of the holidays for my family," says Melissa. She gives Lauren, Katie and William an appreciation for old-school favorites by playing "Silent Night" and "Jingle Bell Rock" together at the family piano. • A favorite Hawks tradition is to open one gift on Christmas Eve. • "The snowy scene is just so Christmas," says Melissa of her glittering village display. "I just love those little houses and lighting them up." **OPPOSITE:** Bedecked with spirited stockings fit for an Elf on the Shelf (who continues to make guest appearances!), the living room's stately marble fireplace sits beneath a trumeau mirror original to the 103-year-old home.

pop-ins are on a perpetual loop this season. "It's always a bit of a whirlwind before guests arrive, like it is in any household during the holidays," Melissa says. Her secret to harnessing the chaos? Two words: shopping bags. "A piece of advice I always give is to throw your mail and paperwork in bags so it's out of sight before people come in. It's nice to clear the mind, and the hostess must enjoy the fun, too!"

After all, there are more important things to do, such as cueing up some Harry Connick Jr. and pouring a hot chocolate—or hot toddy, depending on the guest—to accompany the decadent desserts she artfully arranges. "Part of the magic of the holidays is letting yourself indulge and feel like a child, regardless of your age, and truly experience the tastes and smells of the season," Melissa says. "I have a massive sweet tooth and love a table piled high with decorated

Christmas cookies, petit fours, pastries and candies." Her secret weapons for a fabulous dessert buffet: Black Forest Pastry Shop and Scarsdale Pastry Center.

As January approaches, the feasting winds down and family and friends disperse. Strings upon strings of lights are dismantled; china and silver are cleaned, polished and stored; precious ornaments are tucked back into their boxes like children into their beds; and visions of working off gingerbread men at SoulCycle spin through our heads. It's time for this multitasking dynamo to finally kick off her Choos and unwind. What is a local post-season lifesaver for the hostess who never does anything halfway or at half-speed? "A good massage at the Delamar!" she laughs. Now that's one Hawks holiday tradition we're all quite capable of following. **G**