

Decorating for the Holidays with Morven Park Style

By Alexandra McKay, Events Coordinator

I spent last weekend decorating for the holidays. There are ribbons, greenery, and ornaments wrapped around the bannister. The stone bunnies and gargoyle in the herb garden all have festive bows wrapped around their necks. The tree has been decked out with fairy lights, white balls, glass woodland creatures, and clay artifacts from my childhood. When all that was done, I opened the mail to find that *Better Homes and Gardens* proclaimed the return of fake snow and pastels.

Bah, humbug. I guess I am a traditionalist.

For those of you who are traditionalists like me and still looking for inspiration for your dinner tables or homes, let us take some lessons from the Davis Mansion itself. Holiday tours are now available, and you can find plenty of inspiration while walking the Davis Mansion halls.

Boxwood

I should start this section by saying, "Please, whatever you do, don't steal boxwood and magnolia leaves from Morven Park!"

Once, I read an article about what makes each state's architecture unique. Louisiana has shotgun houses, Illinois has the Prairie School Houses, and Georgia has grand plantation manor houses. Do you know what it said for Virginia? Boxwoods.

Adding or replacing your current greenery décor with boxwood is simpler than it sounds. Try running boxwood and pine down the center of the table with candles instead of a vase of roses. (Just remember to keep everything under 14 inches tall so people can see across the table.) Try putting boxwood sprigs in the windows with little LED lights on them, or try weaving boxwoods through the chandeliers above your table, and you'll be ahead of the newest floral trend. Make sure you keep the twigs far from the actual lightbulb since they can catch fire!

Place Cards

You rarely see place cards used for dinners these days, and I don't know why. The easiest way to add formality to your holiday dinner is to use place cards. Also, they are the nicest way way to ensure that the shy guests don't create a pod at the end of your table.

You can easily pick up folding cards at Staples and print them from your computer, or you can try some more creative methods. Some of my favorite ideas are creating stands for your cards with candy canes, writing your guests' names on slips of paper and putting them inside clear ornaments, or attaching paper leaves (with the names on them) onto oranges (or other fruits) with stickpins.

China and Gold Chargers

The holidays are the perfect time of the year to use your formal china. Morven Park has multiple sets for every occasion and the Davises' Oyster Plates are on display for this holiday season. Personally, I am lucky that my great aunt, Elia, had dark green plates with gold rims and matching silverware. This makes decorating my holiday table easy. Perhaps your family thought that white would be a better choice of color for formal china since it would work year-round – dark green is hard to use at Easter or summer bridal showers, for example – and you need something to make your table look festively elegant? Adding a charger will give you a holiday feel while upping the ante on formality.

Wondering what a charger is? It is a larger plate that goes under the plate you eat on. The idea is that when someone comes to pick up the plate to prepare for the next course, your guests are not looking at an empty tablecloth. Look for the heavy acrylic types that can be found at most craft stores on the cheap. (I promise I will not tell!) I recommend gold; silver can look washed out on a white tablecloth with white china. And don't worry about mixing gold chargers with silver candlesticks – it just adds layers of wealth and warmth.

Velvet

When I was little, there were two things I knew about the Christmas Eve party my mother threw every year: One, the kids' table was not getting crystal glasses, and two, I would be wearing a velvet dress with a bow. Mrs. Davis used the fabric far more than my mother – who had a small child who liked to spill hot chocolate – would have ever dreamed of. In the front hall of the Davis Mansion, velvet covers almost every chair.

To add that bit of texture without reupholstering everything, the easiest thing to do is to add velvet ribbon. Hang the mistletoe with a velvet ribbon on it. Drape the tree in velvet ribbon, but ensure that the ribbon is wired so that it does not droop. Tie huge bows on the backs of each seat. You can wrap your presents with velvet ribbons. You can even tie a ribbon around your throw pillows like a present.

If you need more inspiration or simply need an afternoon out of a house filled with relatives, please visit the Davis Mansion during the month of December for our holiday tours. In addition to seeing the decorated tree, you will also learn the origins of some of our holiday traditions. For more information about our holiday tours, [click here](#).