

holiday scene setter

Hire out the fussing of holiday tablescapes and spend time on your guests.

STORY BY SUE CAMPBELL
PHOTOS BY RENÉE JONES SCHNEIDER

Every shared meal is a celebration.

That's the philosophy Amy Leyden remembers from her upbringing. Her mother always set a beautiful table, seeing it not as a fussy chore but as a way of showing love and caring to her family and guests.

As an adult, Leyden amassed a collection of china, an assortment of glassware and yards of fabric for sewing her own tablecloths and napkins.

"I love fabric like most women love shoes and handbags," Leyden says. "I'm a graphic designer, and I love seeing how color and texture and shapes come together. I can see in my mind how different elements will create a beautiful table."

She realized not everyone had her gift. Then the pandemic hit, and it dawned on her that people would be at home for every birthday, anniversary and bar mitzvah. That spurred her to turn her skills into a business.

Leyden launched Kaleidoscope (k-table settings.com) in May, renting out unique table settings for up to 24 people. She delivers and will set up everything needed to transform an everyday dining room into a celebratory space.

Clients can select from set offerings or give Leyden a color palette or general idea of what they want, and she surprises them. Leyden sets up and leaves, and after the party the hosts rinse and pack up the dishes (in protective sleeves that Leyden designed) and she picks them up. The cost is \$25 a person, plus a setup and delivery fee that varies.

Leyden notices that her younger clients don't want to own china or silver — they don't want to store or clean it. Older clients, on the other hand, often talk about having dishes and glasses passed down from grandma that they rarely use. Leyden will consult with them to create designs that make their heirlooms feel contemporary.

"I love nostalgia, and I mostly want people to use these pieces that are part of their family traditions," she says.

It fits with her upbringing and philosophy.



Sitting pretty

Think outside of the box when setting your holiday table. Incorporate knickknacks doing shelf duty in other rooms, and mix and match glassware to add a festive — and colorful — touch.



Amy Leyden's tips for setting a beautiful holiday table

1. Buy fun fabric. The costume aisle offers festive textures from sequins to organza to tulle. A yard or two becomes a table runner. If you don't sew, don't worry — tuck under the hem or cut the edges with a pinking shears. Mirror squares and votive candles can add extra sparkle.

2. Think outside the box for colors. Christmas doesn't have to mean red and green, for instance. Try red, silver and teal; gray and white with pale blue; or black, white and red.

3. Fill a trio of clear cylinder vases with seasonal items for a centerpiece. Try three or four cobs of multicolored Indian corn with the husks springing from the top, or old-fashioned Christmas tree bulbs, or line the inside with a favorite wrapping paper. For added dimension, buy a matching wide ribbon with a wire edge and shape it into a full bow on the outside of each vase.

4. Seek out a set of clear "starter course" plates with a crystal-like or snowflake pattern to add a fancy touch to your table. Goodwill is a great place to find inexpensive treasures. If the plates are clear in the center, place a favorite holiday photo underneath to bring a smile to each dinner guest.

5. Set your holiday table early and start eating there. Enjoy your table's beauty all season long.