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Professional Tips for Decorating Your Holiday Mantel

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The fireplace becomes the heart of the home during the holidays. It's where we sip hot cocoa, warm up after sledding, roast marshmallows for indoor s'mores and set cookies out for Santa on Christmas Eve. So it's no surprise that we put such emphasis on our mantel's decor during this time of the year.

Getting started is often the hardest part of decorating your mantel, so we spoke to two designers to help you out. [Shane Inman](#) and [Sarah Dorsey](#) shared their tips, tricks and must-haves to transform your mantel for the holidays.



Proportion, height and scale. Both Inman and Dorsey agree — paying attention to proportion, scale and height is crucial for a great mantel vignette. “Create balance by placing objects with similar visual weight opposite each other,” says Dorsey. “Start with taller objects on the ends and shorter items towards the center.” This display took that tip to heart, with the tallest trees at either end of the mantel.



Layering items of different heights can make your display pop visually. Hang a mirror behind your display, like on this mantel, and layer candlesticks and evergreen branches in front.



Color. Stick to a simple color palette — one to three colors tops — to prevent your design from looking too busy. “The fireplace is the focal point of the room, so keep your colors and lighting soft to create drama on the mantel,” says Inman. This mantel sticks to deep red and a forest green, with just a few pops of gold and silver sprinkled among the garland.



Texture. A simple color palette allows for freedom with texture, shine and sheen. Add a little shimmer to your mantel with mercury, glass, ornaments and stocking holders to honor the holiday season.



Shapes. Incorporate a mix of organic and geometric shapes for visual interest. Mix in fresh greens and flowers with the strong lines of circles and squares for contrast. This coastal-themed mantel does a great job of mixing organic shapes with geometric designs. The round stones mimic the sparkling ornaments littered around the fireplace.



Garlands. Inman suggests using a garland to provide horizontal proportion on top of the mantel, and vertical proportion on the sides. "The end tails of the garland should hang no further than 1/3 the height of the floor to the mantel for vertical proportion," he says.

Keep your garland's color palette simple, like this beautiful red and brown garland, but vary texture to keep things interesting but cohesive. "I like to create my own garlands by combining several different species of boughs to get a variety of texture and color," says Inman. "The trick is to make the garland very thick and dense."



Designer tip: Getting everything to stay in place on your mantel for the entire season can be difficult. Inman suggests using hot glue, which can be peeled away after the holidays.

Tell us: How do you like to decorate your mantel for the holidays? What's your favorite theme for your home's holiday decor?