

A festive holiday scene featuring a decorated Christmas tree, a teapot, and cups on a green tray. The tree is lush with greenery, pinecones, and white snow-like decorations. The teapot and cups are white with a red and gold ornate pattern. The entire scene is set against a large window with a grid pattern.

CHRISTMAS BY *Design*

INTERIOR DESIGNER GRACIELA RUTKOWSKI PLAYS
WITH COLOR FOR HER FAMILY'S OWN CLASSIC-
MEETS-CONTEMPORARY HOLIDAY DECOR.

WRITTEN BY STACY KENDALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEX HAYDEN

Image: THE SOFT GLOW OF A STRING OF LIGHTS
MISTLED IN A CEDAR GARLAND WELCOMES GUESTS IN
FROM THE CO. OF PHILEXUDOWSKI'S MERCURY GLASS
WALLS PECK OUT FROM THE TOP PANEL. (PHOTO: ALWAYS
PREPARED FOR GUESTS, RUTKOWSKI DISPLAYS HIS
FAVORITE HERMES CHINA ON A CHIC LACQUER TRAY.





left: FRESH WREATHS FLANK THE FAUX DEER HEAD THAT SERVES AS THE FAMILY'S "PARTY MASCOT"—SPORTING NEW RIBBONS FOR EACH YEAR'S COLOR THEME. **opposite:** WHITE-FLOCKED BRANCHES, RED BERRIES, A CENTERPIECE OF WHITE LILIES AND GREENERY, AND GARLANDS WITH RED AMARYLLIS CREATE A FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE IN THE DINING ROOM.

For interior designer Graciela Rutkowski, 2009 was a red-and-green year. Not surprising, since those are the traditional colors of Christmas, but for Rutkowski and her family, colors are a significant part of their holiday décor. “We change out the colors and accents from year to year,” Rutkowski says. “I want my house to be a special oasis at Christmastime.”

(In years past, her color scheme has been chocolate brown, silver or plaid; at press time, Rutkowski was thinking that for 2010 she might design tabletop topiaries made from fruit, to give her home a more English flair, and perhaps use dark purple accents.)

Working with her favorite florist, Betty, at the Queen Anne Metropolitan Market, Rutkowski determines the design direction for her decorations. The designer often uses inspirational photos she has culled over many years as owner of Graciela Rutkowski Interiors and as a partner in G.R. Hedges, formerly a Seattle Design Center showroom and now an exclusively online design source. For last year's

décor, she adorned a green garland with red amaryllis, and the dining-table centerpiece included white lilies and red berries. Although her décor changes yearly, Rutkowski likes to keep it looking classic and traditional but “with a modern twist,” she says. Two large white ceramic vases stand in the dining room year-round, for example, but filling them with tall, white-flocked branches and red berries turns them into dramatic holiday statements.

Rutkowski, her husband, Rick, and daughters, Nicola, 13, and Pilar, 8, have made Christmas a special tradition in their Laurelhurst home for the past 15 years. “Our families don't live nearby, so it's





A CLEAN MIX OF TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY DESIGN MAKES RUTKOWSKI'S LIVING ROOM THE PERFECT SETTING FOR HER SIMPLE AND TASTEFUL HOLIDAY DECORATION.





Left: RUTKOWSKI'S LOVE OF ENGLISH-STYLE CHRISTMAS DECOR IS REFLECTED IN SIMPLE GREENERY. **Below:** RUTKOWSKI'S HOLIDAY DECORATIONS INCLUDE A COLLECTION OF TRADITIONAL NUTCRACKERS THAT SHE DISPLAYS EVERY YEAR.



usually just us sitting around the table for Christmas dinner in our pajamas," Rutkowski says. The family's main celebration is Christmas Eve, when they serve a large Italian-style dinner and enjoy English-style Christmas crackers that Rick fills with special gifts for his wife and children—such as the diamond cocktail ring that Graciela found in hers four years ago.

Another tradition that the family shares is bringing out the festive pieces that Rutkowski has collected over time. These keepsakes are displayed every year, regardless of the color scheme. The *Hermès Batcon de Guadalupe* patterned china enjoys permanent holiday décor status—a splurge that Rutkowski says "makes me happy, and makes my guests feel special."

Her favorite way to capture the sparkle of the season is with her collection of silvery mercury glass. "I love the newer, oversized pieces," she says. "I put them outside in pots or down the middle of the table—candlelight makes them glow, and it gives a jewel-box effect."

Plenty of candlelight illuminates the family's annual pre-Christmas party. The Rutkowskis have hosted as many as 150 people at their house—once extending the entertaining space by setting up a large tent outside the sunroom and furnishing it with carpets and living-room furniture. "It's

the one time of year that we can pull out all the stops," Rutkowski says. Passionate cooks, she and her husband often prepare the food for their guests themselves, crafting delicious but unpretentious dishes such as mini tenderloin sandwiches, salads, tarts and big bowls of shrimp cocktail.

Rutkowski describes the wooden reindeer head that hangs in the living room throughout the holiday season as their "party mascot." Every year, he is festively adorned with mercury glass ornaments hung with pretty ribbons—in a color that coordinates with the current scheme. "It's the holidays. It's a celebration, it's fantastic," Rutkowski says. "If I'm going to do something, I want to do it well."

Although the décor makes the Rutkowski house sparkle at Christmas, it is merely the vehicle through which the designer expresses her love for her family and friends during the holidays. "Good design makes everyone feel welcome and appreciated," she says. "There is something very civilized about having a little vacation in your own home." ■

SHAUN MURPHY/STYLING: SUE KENDALL; DECORATION: SUE KENDALL; HAIR: JESSICA WILSON; MAKEUP: JESSICA WILSON

For resource information, see Sources, page 70.