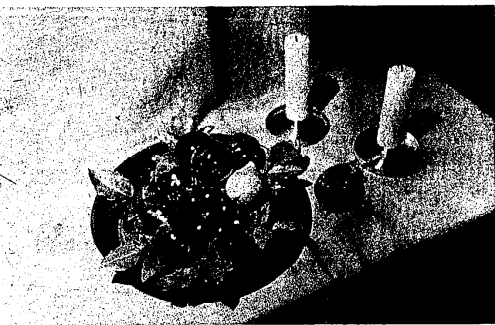
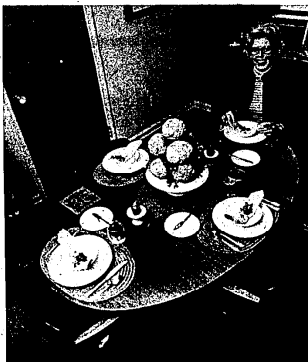


## FOCUS

## holidays -- worth presenting well



A NATURALISTIC SETTING for glass and alabaster ovals... (Observer photo)



NATURE'S GIFTS are captured artistically for holiday entertaining by Bess Decker. (Observer photo)

By JUDITH BERNIE

Blonde, sophisticated Bess Decker relies on nature for home decoration — holidays and everyday.

Married to artist Albert Decker, the talented Garden City woman has arranged displays for a fashionable Ann Arbor store for nearly 20 years and now concentrates on her own home and occasional sales to local groups.

For the holiday table settings she whipped up especially for Observer readers, "I didn't go out and buy anything," Mrs. Decker pointed out. "Most people have the makings of a lovely holiday centerpiece right within their homes and yards. They just don't realize it."

"TOO MANY PEOPLE deny their eyes. They think in terms of standard table settings, standard centerpieces and standard holiday fare."

"I don't like people being dictated to by rules and regulations."

Mrs. Decker depends on her garden for many of her table arrangements as well as for treatments throughout her home. "I can't leave nature," she explained simply. "It's exciting to find things that go together."

Cuttings from the boxwood hedge and pine trees in her yard are included in two table arrangements... one in combination with a pyramid of orange oranges (known as hedgeball) and the other to set off turquoise Christmas balls resting in a crystal bowl.

"When I use artificial things, there is no doubt that they are artificial," the talented lady stipulated. "I never try to cheat nature."

An arrangement of alabaster grapes and figs and glass balls makes a lovely centerpiece against a backdrop of leaves which Mrs. Decker dips in glycerine to preserve. The combination of evergreens and reshaped foliage into a wicker basket can make a perfect centerpiece for an informal supper — part and practical.

"Never deny the simplicity of fresh fruit in an arresting bowl for a focal point," Mrs. Decker admonished. "It says you cared enough." And colorful napkins arranged in a wicker basket can make a perfect centerpiece for an informal supper — part and practical.

"I love the glow of candles, but you have to be careful," the artist Mrs. Decker explained. "Candles should either be lower or higher than eye level in a table setting, or they intrude."

"Actually, I prefer candles used around a table rather than on it. Or, they may be used to welcome people to the table and then removed."

She believes that a holiday table, as well as any other, should harmonize with the room and house around it — and also the host and hostess. "It's just smart to wear something which blends in. That totalness becomes part of the party."

"THE BEST WAY to welcome guests into your home is to have things in order," she continued. "Trying to force decorations and feelings just doesn't work. It will make people immediately uncomfortable. Just relax with nature."

Mrs. Decker finds that at the Christmas season people have a compulsion to use red, regardless of whether it fits their color scheme. "If you are uncomfortable with red, just don't use it," she advised. Greens and golds or silvers and blues symbolize Christmas just as well.

For people whose homes avoid nature's colors, such as decorative schemes built around red and black, Mrs. Decker suggests using nature's shapes rather than its colors: trace leaf shapes on black paper, or dip something from nature into a cup of white paint going with your existing setting.

She observed that food color as well as taste should be considered in planning meals and table settings. "I'm a strong advocate of white china. It's a perfect backdrop for colorful foods and looks well on any tablecloth or placemat."

She also advised against using total sets of dishes. The perfect trio is elegant dinnerware, a casual line and a dessert or coffee set — different in pattern and texture, but in harmonizing colors to be used separately or together.

"So much buying today is done without thought," Mrs. Decker mused. "Look at the fantastic number of garage sales, the piles of rubble in front of people's homes on garbage pickup days. How much energy and money is wasted on tossed out kinds of things!"

"People aren't content to live with what they have. They haven't learned to hold, to draw from nature. If you know the atmosphere you want to create, then buy and put things together accordingly. You can move things from room to room."

"We each weave our own pattern. It's all out there just waiting to be captured."

PART OF HOLIDAY party planning is to recognize your own dictations and limitations, according to Mrs. Decker. "If you have a set menu, then start from there and let your table and decor revolve around the foods. If there are certain dishes you want to use, then let that be your starting point."

"I don't believe in doing any kind of entertaining without a schedule. Once you have your list, find out what can be done and made ahead... and do it. My most important list is the last half hour before my guests come and the first half hour they are here. I write things down almost minute by minute."

She laughingly admits that one reason her list is so important to her is that she is a great talker. "If my guests come into the kitchen and I got started talking, I'm lost without a list. I get so wrapped up in the conversation that all these last minute things just fly out of my mind."

And mental woe unto the dinner guest who arrives at the Deckers with cut flowers. "It is really upsetting to a hostess to bring a gift which is going to take her time at the last minute," according to Mrs. Decker. "The thoughtful guest should realize that situation."

DEVELOPING A HOME that is always ready for friends — from centerpiece to frozen ahead casserole — is a well-placed ambition, the articulate designer believes.

"If you have nature around, you can always set a 'fun table' if company drops in unexpectedly. A deep dish of something in winter — try, philodendron — is a perfect centerpiece. Dress it up with a single flower."

"Herald and jolly go feast and crown cheese is a lovely offering if it is done well. The presentation is the important thing."

Be creative, not apologetic. Don't panic. Just go to the refrigerator and see what you can start with."

She predicts that despite rising food costs and concern over affairs on both the domestic and international fronts, people will still reserve the holidays 1973 for entertainment.

"We're a sentimental people; we like to tie things down to annual events. If we ever lose the format of family, then we will really have lost something."

"To me, a table represents a circle. It brings us together. Holidays are for togetherness. They are worth presenting well."



BERRIES, evergreen and candles...



CHRISTMAS balls and fresh pine cuttings... (Observer photos)

## SANTA'S PREVIEW

**MARK 30**  
**ERECTOR SET**  
Get this 3-speed retractor-controlled motor (battery not inc.) 3-speed Erector parts box 31803

**10.95**

**saucy**  
**13.99**

Any face you can make, she can make, too! Just move Saucy's arm up or down and her expression changes to realistic poses like a yawn, a smile, pouting—happy, sad, surprised, bored. This cuddly playmate is a petite 16" tall and has her own fashionable dress and toddler shoes. No batteries necessary. 8660

**24" BABY CRISSY**  
**11.88**

She's a delightful playmate and has four soft Magic Skin™ arms and legs to keep her huggable! Her lovely autumn hair "grows" out to nestle round her shoulders. Even her real life leather size pink dress with all the authentic details makes Baby Crissy a born beauty! Give her a home. 11510-6

**ZIP**  
**REBOUND GAME**  
Zip pack up alley. Try to knock others out but too much zip and you lose. 2035-4

**5.99**

**CHECKERS & CHECKERBOARD**  
Good low price to let you really get rid of that old set! Durable. Nylonite board. 2092

**1.99**

**LITE-BRITE**  
**Hasbro**  
Create beautiful pictures with 400 Lite-Brite color pegs. W/22 sheets. \$14.99 not incl. \$4.95

**6.99**

**LIVONIA HARDWARE**

5 MILE ROAD  
LIVONIA, MI 48150  
PHONE: 242-1155 — 242-1611  
DAILY 9 a.m. — 9 p.m.  
SUNDAY 10 a.m. — 2 p.m.