



Dining room with an Oriental flavor with a table set in keeping with the surroundings will actually make the food taste better. A wrought iron

brazier centerpiece holds pomegranates, and the place mats are rattan.

Set the table—create a mood

How many times a year does the average American homemaker set the table for dinner? Whatever the frequency, chances are better than even that setting the table is not looked upon as the most exciting aspect of mealtime preparation—whether for family or guests.

For party occasions, the last item usually thought of—after the carefully choreographed courses of the menu are completed—is the table. All too often, table settings are dismissed as secondary elements or put together haphazardly.

"But setting the table doesn't have to be drudgery. The table setting is the aesthetic background for any food-related activity," said Donna Kaiser, showroom coordinator and fabric stylist for Drexel House Furnishings.

The challenge a homemaker faces, Mrs. Kaiser believes, is in creating an outstanding arrangement that isn't a stereotype.

"The trick is to think about the 'I' in individuality," she said.

"Of course, glassware, dinnerware, and flatware are the necessities, but the art of arrangement lies more in how three major elements are brought into play," she added.

•Lighting. It can be soft and romantic or bright and dramatic. Whether it's over-or-under-stated, it can make or break the mood of a meal. The nuances of effective lighting are often over-looked by homemakers.

•Table coverings. A second "must" on any homemaker's list is the nature of the table cov-

erings used. They can range from rattan mats to a hand-embroidered Madeira cloth. A currently popular, and not expensive, way to glamorize any type of table is to cover it with one of the new designer sheets. Stiff white damask tablecloths are "out."

To determine whether a dining table is to be covered depends on the tabletop. If it's there to be admired and appreciated, don't cover it, or cover it with no more than open-weave or lucite place mats. For example, a handrubbed fruitwood finish on a dining table calls for exposure.

•Centerpieces. Express your individuality with a conversation icebreaker, it could be something found in an antique shop, collection of vegetables, an inexpensive boutique item or an unusual plant.

"The most important thing to remember," says Mrs. Kaiser, "is that although the bill of fare will probably always be the primary focus of attention when people are gathered around the table, the ambience which the homemaker creates for family or guests certainly makes the food taste better and the company more enjoyable."

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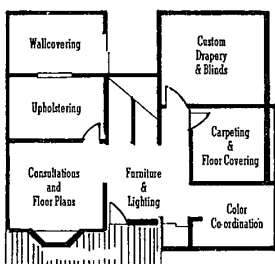
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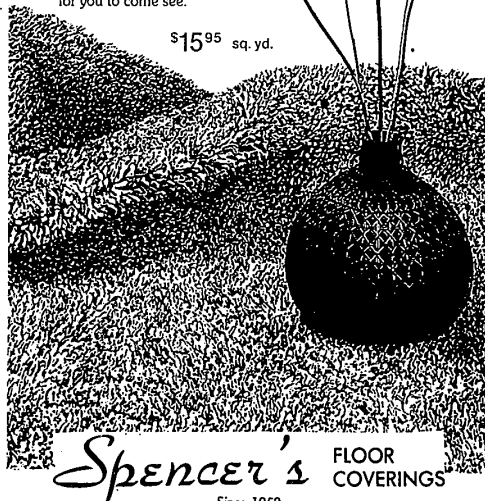
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