

Compliments of Paul Sanders

AMERICAN LIFESTYLE

THE MAGAZINE CELEBRATING LIFE IN AMERICA

ISSUE 144

MAKING A HOUSE A HOME

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Front of Tear Out Card 1

CAULIFLOWER AND BACON *pasta*





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57 percent of readers save these tear out cards to reference recipes and other helpful tips and pass along your contact info to referrals.

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Back of Tear Out Card 1

make

- 2 tbsp. canola oil
- ½ lb. thick-cut bacon, diced
- 1 small head cauliflower, cut into small florets
- 2 shallots, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 c. chicken stock
- Kosher salt
- 1 lb. dried cavatelli
- 1 tbsp. sherry vinegar
- Freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ c. grated Parmesan
- 2 tbsp. chopped flat-leaf parsley leaves
- 1 tsp. chili flakes

measure

1. Heat the canola oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add the bacon and cook until crisp. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate, leaving the rendered fat in the pan. Add the cauliflower and sauté until it begins to color and soften, 3 to 4 minutes. Use a spoon to hold back the contents of the pan and pour out and discard most of the fat. Return the pan to the heat and add the shallots and garlic. Cook until the shallots are softened, about 2 minutes. Add the chicken stock, raise the heat to medium-high, and simmer for 5 minutes.
2. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil and cook the pasta according to package instructions. Drain, then add the pasta to the pan with the cauliflower. Add the cooked bacon and sherry vinegar and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is hot and fully combined. Transfer to a serving bowl and top with the Parmesan, parsley, and chili flakes.

Recipe from *Everyday Chef: Simple Dishes for Family and Friends* by Jeremy Sewall and Erin Byers Murray. Rizzoli New York 2025.
Photography by Michael Harlan Turkell.

SERVES 4



AMERICAN LIFESTYLE

Dear Bill and Judy,

With the glow of the holiday season on the horizon, this issue of American Lifestyle encourages you to celebrate both the comforts of home and the joy of getting away. Inside are ideas designed to help make your season feel more meaningful and memorable wherever it unfolds.

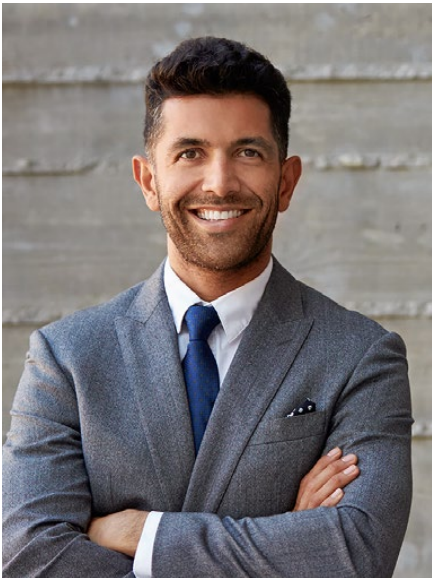
At home, the holidays often come alive in the little details. Start with the celebration that ushers it all in: Thanksgiving. You'll find tips inside for making the day more delightful as well as suggestions for items that can make baking and meal prep easier.

You'll also discover ways to deck your halls with style by simplifying your decorating and doing some thoughtful decluttering. Together, these articles show how a home can feel festive, welcoming, and ready for the moments that matter most. In addition, the enclosed guide to gift wrapping highlights how refined presentation can make giving feel even more personal.

While traveling, the season brings its own kind of magic, and a city that amps up this feeling every year is Grapevine, Texas. Learn more about this holiday hot spot, where dazzling lights, cheerful events, and old-fashioned charm turn a getaway into something special. Be sure to check out the timely travel gear advice.

Whether the coming months find you gathering around your own table or setting out on a memorable escape, the pages ahead offer inspiration for celebrating with warmth, creativity, and adventure. As always, it's a pleasure to send you this magazine.

Paul Sanders



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THE SECRETS TO SIMPLE FESTIVE TRIMMINGS

Written by **Anthony Coffman**

Ah, the holidays. Shiny ornaments sparkle among pine branches, garland winds gracefully across mantels, and paper snowflakes adorn refrigerators and children’s bedrooms alike.

But if you respond to all this holiday flair with unpleasant feelings—anything ranging from decor-shopping sticker shock to a general disinterest in excessive holiday paraphernalia—then you’re in luck. Options abound for crafting a simple, pared-down decorative scheme that still expresses the spirit of the season.

DIAL BACK THE COLOR

Should you appreciate clean, modern design, you may take umbrage with the multihued decor that stuffs the shelves of holiday trinket shops (and perhaps even your loved ones’ homes). The perfect alternative to such a scheme is a monochromatic one, exchanging red, bright green, gold, and other bold hues for subtle off-white, muted forest green, or other mild shades of your choosing.

Taking this approach will naturally make textural elements like seasonal patterns and diverse materials pop in the space, giving even subdued colors a more refined impact. Designing your holiday tree in this way will offer a particularly chic, contemporary look.

EMPHASIZE HOLIDAY HUES

You might prefer going the opposite route, assembling year-round decor that spotlights a seasonal-inspired palette in shades of red, green, or blue. Exchange your pillows, throw blankets, bookshelf adornments, and other smaller objects with ones in these tones for a more surprising take on ornamenting. Just avoid the obvious festive items emblazoned with holiday



greetings, instead showcasing cohesive colors. This will express holiday cheer in an understated, perhaps more rewarding way.

FOCUS ON A FEW QUALITY ITEMS

Less is often more when it comes to decorating. For a holiday setting that feels classy rather than cluttered, opt to prioritize just a few essentials for the season, such as candleholders, a tree, or garland. Do so, and you’ll have the freedom to invest in higher-quality products that feature the latest decorating styles. For example, consider embracing the “brave, light, and solid” holiday aesthetic that trend forecasters premiered at Messe Frankfurt’s consumer goods fair in Frankfurt, Germany. This approach emphasizes statement decor in unconventional materials: think modernized nutcracker sculptures rather than old-fashioned wooden pieces, for example.

STYLE ONLY YOUR HOSTING SPACES

One of the simplest ways to practice decorative restraint that still feels hosting-ready is to only trim the areas of your home your guests will



see, like the foyer, living room, and dining table. A few festive touches in these spaces will establish the holiday theme while saving you time and money by keeping your other rooms evergreen.

FOCUS ON ALL THE SENSES

When you think of holiday embellishments, you might readily picture merry visual elements like trees and baubles, but they can go well beyond sight. What about what you feel, smell, and hear? Try eliciting all these senses in your home instead. For example, turn on a fireplace, set out warm blankets, light diffusers in a winter scent like cinnamon stick or sugar cookie, then play holiday music when guests arrive. You’ll create a complete holiday vibe while your spaces still appear elegantly neat.

Granted, your idea of the holidays may lean toward loud, colorful maximalism, and that’s OK! Trimming your home with holiday tidings is about doing what makes you happy, not just pleasing your guests or meeting social media expectations. But if you’d prefer to practice moderation with your festive decorating, you don’t need to overwhelm your ambience with excessive decor. Just use the aforementioned tips to create a vibe that’s all your own and make the holidays a season to remember.

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New York City artist **Michael Storring** offers a glimpse into the inspiration that sparks his beloved holiday artwork—festive pieces that adorn books, puzzles, ornaments, and more.

WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO BECOME AN ARTIST?

I've loved drawing since childhood, but I didn't always plan to become an artist. After a summer art program at Fredonia College sparked my passion for art as self-expression, I decided to attend Parsons School of Design.

I began my professional journey in publishing after finishing those studies, working as a book designer. At the same time, I illustrated for magazines and books. I started licensing my work for ornaments around 2005, and that led to books and other products like puzzles. I am currently the senior vice president, executive art director of the St. Martin's Publishing Group and continue to illustrate and license my work.

WHO WERE SOME OF YOUR EARLY CREATIVE INFLUENCES?

I have to say that my biggest influence didn't come from other artists but from my high-school art teacher, who broadened my horizons beyond my hometown of Syracuse by taking our class on art trips into the city. She also encouraged me to join a summer arts program and assisted with my art college applications.

In terms of artistic influences, I especially appreciate folk and outsider artists like Grandma Moses and Clementine Hunter, as well as L. S. Lowry.

THOMAS KUOH, HEADSHOT BY PHILIPPE MATSAS



WOULD YOU SUMMARIZE THE SCOPE OF YOUR DIFFERENT ART MEDIUMS?

My artistic range is extensive, featuring vibrant and detailed illustrations that depict different

seasons and cities across the globe. I often refer to it as "art that celebrates." I strive to convey the spirit, energy, and joyful moments found in urban environments, and my work is widely licensed across

many products, including puzzles, ornaments, home decor items, stationery, and books.

WHAT DO YOU FIND ENGAGING ABOUT YOUR PRIMARY SUBJECTS, HOLIDAY IMAGERY AND CITY ARCHITECTURE?

I'm inspired by life's small moments, such as taking a walk with a dog or a baby or seeing a couple in the park. My creations often have a touch of fantasy, allowing me to build an ideal world where I can escape. This is why holidays and city life frequently appear as themes in my work.

WOULD YOU EXPLAIN YOUR METHOD FOR CREATING AN ART PIECE?

I start out by doing quick pencil sketches of the layout and specific elements of the intended image. Then I do research, take photos, and sketch the image in pencil on watercolor paper. Even though my art seems simple, I want to make sure that I have the details correct so I can capture the intended expression.

WHAT WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOUR BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT?

I've built a great career in publishing, designing covers for best-selling authors, and I also take pride in seeing my artwork featured on puzzles. It's incredibly rewarding to have so many people appreciate my artistic voice.

For more info, visit storring.com

MICHAEL STORRING

THE SWEET STORY OF *LITTLE SUSIE'S*

Interview with **Dan Martino**
Written by **Andre Rios**
Photography courtesy of **Little Susie's**



Dan Martino, founder of Little Susie's Coffee & Pie in Philadelphia, offers a look behind the counter at his bustling bakery and shares how it keeps up with the high-demand holiday season.

What inspired you to open this business?

I've worked in the food industry since I was a teenager, including small snack bars and industrial hospital kitchens. I spent over a decade after college working behind the curtain for a restaurant company as their graphic designer. I even tried (and failed) to run a soup truck.

I also come from a family of cooks, from my parents to my great-grandparents. That's where my center of gravity originates: their homemade Pennsylvania Dutch recipes of roasts, sauces, stocks, soup, and bread (with big hunks of butter). I recognized along the way that most people only want to eat what makes them feel good and that the best restaurants do one thing very well.

But the true inspiration to open the bakery came from the road. I spent years touring the country as a drummer for TJ Kong and the Atomic Bomb. In every town we played, the local coffee shop was the heartbeat of the community. It was where we met the most interesting people and felt the true vibe of the neighborhood. I wanted to bottle that magic and

bring it back to my area, creating a space where people felt that same sense of connection. I also thought that if I kept it small and simple, it would be easy for me to manage.

What were your first products, and how have they evolved?

We wanted to focus on high-quality, fast-and-friendly options that didn't compromise on flavor and were made in-house. Coffee was the easy part, but introducing our hand pies took a few weeks to get right. Once we dialed those in, lines started forming. The Pork Roll & Cheese Pie and Honeycrisp Apple Pie were the cornerstones of Little Susie's menu right away and still are today.

We had a larger menu when we started, which included things like bagels, oatmeal, cupcakes, and danish, but over time, the pies became our focus. In 2025,

we shifted entirely to pies and a few simple bakery items like chocolate chip cookies. We also have very popular dog treats made from piecrust.

Aside from the classics, which products are currently winning over your customers?

Our savory expansion has really surprised people. The Sausage Egg and Cheese and Chicken Pot Pie versions are hard to keep in stock. Mushroom & Swiss and Potato Cheddar are solid vegetarian favorites. We come up with special varieties for holidays like our Stuffed Turkey Pie for Thanksgiving and our Chocolate-Covered Strawberry one for Valentine's Day.

How does the business transform during the holiday season?

From the first day of school through Thanksgiving, it is pure pie season. We can barely keep



the shelves stocked. As we meet more neighbors and open new locations, we get to become part of people's new traditions. Pie isn't anything new. But we hear stories from regulars about how thrilled





“Supporting the domestic economy and community growers is a core value of our brand.”

people were to try our pies at their holiday parties—and we then start to see *those* people come back year after year. It warms the heart.

Your website mentions that you prioritize using local ingredients. How do you approach your supply chain?

Supporting the domestic economy and community growers is a core value of our brand. We’re incredibly

fortunate to be surrounded by fantastic farms. I make it a point of pride to source from them whenever possible and strive to buy American. There’s no question that when it comes to produce, fresh and local is unbeatable. Anyone who cooks would agree.

So we get local ingredients like mushrooms from Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, chicken

from central Pennsylvania, and apples from nearby orchards. But we do occasionally have to go beyond the Northeast. We’ve made some incredible pies with cured meats and olive oil from Italy, for example. I always want my customers to know that what they are getting is top-shelf.

Little Susie’s is known for its iconic walk-up windows. What was the strategy behind that design?

The windows were born out of necessity, but they became a great asset. We opened our first location just months before the pandemic. We had to pivot instantly: close down or open the windows. It turned out to be a blessing. Doing so removed the barrier between us and the sidewalk (and our customers). Now it’s a quintessential part of the experience. Parents with strollers and neighbors walking their dogs can grab a coffee and a pie without missing a beat. It has turned a simple transaction into a community social hour.

What does the future hold for Little Susie’s?

The momentum is incredible. We opened our fifth location in early 2026, and we are officially moving into franchising to bring Little Susie’s to other states. We’ve also invested heavily in our catering side with a vintage truck for events. As for the menu? The sky’s the limit. We’re always dreaming up new recipes to keep our customers excited.

For more info, visit littlesusies.com



CHRISTMASTIME in Grapevine

Written by **Matthew Brady**
Photography courtesy of **Grapevine Convention & Visitors Bureau, unless noted**

The holiday season evokes images of snowflakes, sleigh rides, and coziness, but it comes in all shapes and sizes across the country. One amazing example of this can be found in North Texas, where the city of Grapevine shines all season long.

PLANTING THE SEEDS

Grapevine was settled in 1844, one year prior to the Republic of Texas becoming America’s twenty-eighth state, and it became a town a decade later. Why the peculiar name? It was a tribute to the wild mustang grapes that flourished in the area during its infancy. Perhaps not surprisingly, Grapevine has long been a popular wine town. In fact, it’s proud to have four sister cities across the globe, from Mexico to Australia, three of which share a tradition of winemaking.

Today, Grapevine literally couldn’t be more convenient for visitors since it’s home to Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, the second-largest and second-busiest airport in the country. And being approximately twenty minutes away from both Fort Worth and Dallas allows easy access to a major metropolitan area.

Come November, Grapevine transforms into a magical Christmas mecca as the official Christmas Capital of Texas®. Of course, everything is bigger in the Lone Star State, and Grapevine’s holiday season is no different, hosting more than 1,400 events over the forty days. And the quality of experience matters as much as quantity here: *Newsweek* readers chose Grapevine as America’s best Christmas town in both 2024 and 2026. (There was no vote in 2025.)

The following travel guide highlights just some of the many things you can see and do in this enchanting southern city to maximize your merriment during the holidays.

WHAT TO SEE

Light up the night
The festivities here officially kick off with the annual Carol of Lights, held on the Monday before Thanksgiving. You can expect to be dazzled by over one million lights, live performances, and the overall festive feel of the celebration as you stroll down historic Main Street (which is closed off to traffic for the event). Food and drinks are plentiful, of course, as are kids’ activities. You’ll even see Santa and live reindeer!

Ten days later (December 3 this year), the city’s Parade of Lights rolls down the very same quaint street. This is the largest lighted parade in North Texas, featuring over one hundred floats, marching bands, and more.

You can also look to the skies for festive excitement since Grapevine’s Merry & Bright Drone Shows are back on the first two Mondays in December. Be sure to show up early to get a good viewing spot on Main Street, then ooh and ahh as you witness over four hundred drones create dazzling images in the sky that dance to Christmas music.

Enjoy an old-fashioned holiday
If you’d like to experience life from a century or two ago, you’ll find it in Grapevine. One notable example is the historic Palace Theatre, a restored movie institution that’s on the National Register of Historic Places. Where else could you view both holiday classics and modern favorites, in a 1940s vibe, for only ten dollars? Plus,



the theater offers live holiday performances during the season, including crooner tribute shows.

To party like it’s 1899, check out historic Nash Farm, a working homestead in the heart of Grapevine. Built in 1859, it embraces its agricultural heritage with interpretive programs, tours, and events throughout the year. However, the farm is particularly magical come the holiday season. In December, you can lose yourself in various crafts, from sewing your own mittens and creating a Victorian-style ornament to hand-printing Christmas cards and baking cookies.

WHAT TO DO

Ride the rails
One of the biggest draws to Grapevine any time of year is the Grapevine Vintage Railroad, whose century-old coach cars take travelers through six different cities along its Cotton Belt Route. After Thanksgiving, though, the railroad transforms into Santa’s North Pole Express, complete with sing-alongs and appearances by Mr. and Mrs. Claus. Tickets sell out fast, so get yours early if you plan to visit. Would you prefer an excursion geared more toward grown-ups? Then hop aboard the railroad’s Christmas Wine Train for a festive ride for adults.





GAYLORD TEXAN RESORT



Hit the ice

Granted, Grapevine may not normally be a winter wonderland—highs are normally in the 50s and 60s come November and December—but that doesn't mean you can't have festive frozen fun. The crown jewel of such an experience here is Gaylord Texan Resort's annual ICE! extravaganza, which features amazing hand-

carved sculptures made from more than two million pounds of colorful ice. In addition, there are over two million lights throughout the building to ensure that the holiday vibe continues wherever you trek. But that's not all: There's plenty of food, drinks, and shows and events, from gingerbread house making to ice tubing, to keep you and your family entertained for hours.

For a little outdoor icy enchantment, head over to the Peace Plaza Ice Rink, which is easily found near the city's live sixty-foot-tall Christmas tree. As the largest outdoor rink in North Texas, it has earned the nickname "The Rockefeller Center of the Southwest," making it a place not to be missed, whether you're skating under the glow of the giant evergreen or casually people-watching.

WHERE TO SHOP

Of course, buying presents (for others or yourself) is part and parcel of this time of year. And thanks to the vast number of shopping opportunities in Grapevine, you can literally spend all day doing it. For example, in the aforementioned historic Main Street district alone, you'll find dozens of establishments to shop at in a charming setting, from boutique clothing stores to gift shops to bookstores. One fascinating example is Vetro Glassblowing Studio & Gallery, where you can make your own ornament or snowman using a 2,000-degree furnace! And when you need to take a breather, there are dozens more places to get food and drink.



For an even more personal experience, check out the Grapevine Christmas Market in the Cotton Belt Railroad Historic District. At this open-air, European-style marketplace, which debuted last year, you can shop for local goods, get photos with Santa, and more.

Just ten minutes northeast, continue your holiday shopping spree indoors at Grapevine Mills. With over one hundred retailers at this mall set over its 1.8 million-square-foot facility, you're sure to find gifts you didn't know your loved ones needed. You won't believe the variety: You can find everything from high-end clothing outlets to kid-friendly stores, all in one place.

Perhaps even more impressive here, especially during the holidays, are the attractions. Catch the latest holiday flick at Grapevine Mills's twenty-four-screen AMC theater, or test your skills by trying its escape game. For the kids (and kids at heart), head over to LEGOLAND Discovery Center for its Holiday Bricktacular, greet aquatic life at SEA LIFE Aquarium, or get lost in immersive, interactive, family-friendly adventures at the wildly popular Meow Wolf.

Grapevine, Texas, pulls out all the stops during the holiday season. With its magical mix of traditional charm, jaw-dropping events, and ample shopping experiences, it more than earns its title as the Lone Star State's top holiday destination.

For more info, visit
christmascapitaloftexas.com



FIVE TIPS FOR A JOYFUL THANKSGIVING

Written by **Dan O'Brien**

THANKSGIVING CAN FEEL LESS LIKE A RELAXING HOLIDAY and more like a sprint. Cooking, hosting, timing, and atmosphere collide within a few intense hours, making even seasoned hosts feel the pressure build as the clock moves toward dinner.

However, you can better ensure a smoother day by making small adjustments that remove friction without touching tradition. They work in the background, steadying the pace and lowering the temperature overall.

Here are five simple tips that can help:

- 1** Making decisions the night before can change everything. On Wednesday, set out serving pieces and stage ingredients where you will need them. You just might find that waking up already halfway prepared brings immediate relief and a calmer start to the big day.
- 2** The turkey may be the centerpiece, but it doesn't need to run the schedule. Build in rest time and flexibility instead of pushing to the very last minute, and then work backward from dinner time, not forward from morning. This shift allows room to make adjustments if need be.
- 3** Create one self-serve moment for guests, such as drinks, snacks, or both. This not only sets a welcoming tone but also frees you from constantly tending to visitors and keeps the day moving.
- 4** Maintain a simple dinner table so food stays the focus. Use what's already out: serving boards, linens, candles, seasonal produce, etc.
- 5** Finally, build in a single margin of error, whether that's extra oven time or a flexible side dish. The best plans assume something might run late or go wrong, and they end with ease instead of relief.

Thanksgiving shines when simplicity outweighs perfection, and a few thoughtful moves can change the rhythm of your entire day. Try these suggestions, and you'll improve the odds of everyone, including you, being able to enjoy every moment shared gathered at the table.

A GUIDE TO HOLIDAY TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Written by **Matthew Brady**

The festive season can get quite hectic, especially if you're traveling to see loved ones or conduct business. That's why the right gear can be the difference between a fun trip and a frustrating one. Here are some must-have products to help make your excursions merrier.

Cozy clothing

Whether you're traveling by plane, train, or automobile, it's essential that you stay as comfortable as possible—so your choice of clothing matters. Flexibility is also key this time of year. It may be warm one day and snowing the next, and you may be traveling to an entirely different climate. A versatile coat like the Quince Puffer Jacket is a perfect solution and can serve you well all winter long. It's renowned for being super soft and warm yet breathable and packable.

And since you'll likely be doing your fair share of walking wherever you go, consider buying some comfy footwear. For example, the Allbirds Wool Cruiser line has a stellar reputation for being a lightweight, comfortable shoe that's perfect for travel.



Cubes

If you're going for ease with your clothes, why not also do so with their containers? Travelers can't get enough of travel cubes, which make luggage organization super easy, save space, and can even minimize clothes wrinkles. An excellent example is Shackle's high-quality, customer-approved line of organizers, which makes packing both a breeze and stylish by offering different sizes (five-pack, seven-pack, and eight-pack) and colors (over a dozen).

Contingency items

The truth is, not everything goes right during the holiday season. This maxim certainly holds true for travel, so plan for any pitfalls. For instance, a portable first aid kit, such as the compact one from General Medi, is vital in a medical pinch. It can help with setbacks ranging from surface wounds to CPR. It even has lip balm!

Connectivity lifesavers

Likewise, there's perhaps no worse feeling while traveling, especially on business, than realizing that your phone's unusable due to connectivity or charging problems. A portable hotspot like RoamWiFi provides reliable 4G internet access wherever you go, while a handy portable charger can save you from having to vie for charging station spots in the airport or vehicle.

When it comes to holiday travel, planning is paramount. Give yourself the gift of less stress and more comfort: As you prepare for your journey, be intentional when choosing the gear you bring. And if your loved ones frequently travel for business or pleasure, keep in mind that the items in this guide also make for thoughtful, much-appreciated presents.

HOSTING

FOR DIFFERENT GUEST TYPES

Written by **Dan O'Brien**

WHEN YOU HOST A SEASONAL GATHERING, you're not just staging an event. You're managing a room full of people who arrive with unique habits, appetites, good intentions, and quirks fully intact. The night works when you understand this reality and accept that a one-size-fits-all approach may not work.

Fortunately, most gatherings include the same cast of characters. Knowing how to accommodate them appropriately is often what separates a tense host from a relaxed one.

The early arrivals and the helpers

Early arrivals come ready: coats off, eyes scanning, and energy already on. They're usually the ones who text "Parking now" or ring the bell ten minutes early, not out of impatience but eagerness. Put a small snack and an easy drink (olives, cheese, or sparkling water with citrus) near the door so they can settle without hovering while the rest of your guests trickle in.





A place to stand, lean, or sip buys you time and gives them purpose.

The helpers arrive with a similar lightness but ask the question outright: “How can I help?” Not everyone means to commandeer your evening; many genuinely want to share the load of preparation or flow. Give them one contained task, such as folding napkins,

lighting candles, or pouring the first round, and the room starts working sooner. Avoid vague responses; specificity keeps them useful without putting them in charge.

The quiet guests and the ones who love to chat

Not every guest craves attention. Many are content to observe, listening to laughter while seated

in a cozy corner, a warm drink in hand. They’re often the ones who arrive on time, choose a chair, and stay there, happy to absorb the atmosphere before participating. Seat them where they can see the room and enter conversation on their own terms. A side table, a good lamp, and a clear sightline do more than forced introductions.

On the other end of the social spectrum is the guest who floats: the butterfly who easily connects people. They drift between circles, introduce neighbors to each other, and generate new conversation just when the room starts to cluster. They’re the ones refilling glasses unasked or pulling a newcomer into a story already in progress. Resist the urge to manage them. While your hands are busy with practicalities, their presence keeps the energy buoyant.

Guests with careful appetites

Food can be served with a side of anxiety for guests with allergies or other dietary concerns. They’re often discreet, quietly scanning labels or asking questions at the counter. To allay their concerns, include at least one clearly safe option and label it plainly. A neutral mention, such as “nut-free and dairy-free,” is enough to make someone feel seen without drawing attention.

Then there are the picky eaters: those with firm texture preferences or selective dislikes. They may eat slowly, separate foods on their plate, or quietly skip a dish altogether. They don’t need an entire separate menu; they need assurance. Including a straightforward crowd-pleaser,



like bread, roasted potatoes, a simple protein, or dessert, creates a fallback that keeps plates full and conversations flowing. Reliability matters more than novelty.

Abundance and absence at the door

Guests arrive with different forms of generosity. Some come bearing armfuls: maybe three bottles of wine, a homemade dish in foil that’s still warm, or a bouquet or

holiday treat. They may apologize for “overdoing it” while unloading everything at once. Receive these gifts with gratitude, and integrate what fits your plan. What doesn’t may make for a gracious encore later in the evening.

Others show up with nothing in hand except their energy and warmth. They’re the ones who will likely linger to talk, help clean without being asked, or stay

until the very end. Hospitality isn’t transactional. Some people bring wine; others bring laughter. Both are welcome.

A good gathering feels loose and welcoming, not perfectly planned. It’s defined by the home’s feel: inclusive, warm, easy-going, and alive. Plan for the array of people and personalities on your guest list, and you just might find that the night practically runs itself.

ALL ABOUT WREATHS

Written by **Dan O'Brien**



On a winter street, doors communicate something subtle yet powerful. Some remain bare; others carry a circle of green. You may notice the adornments without even stopping. There's a fir bough here, a frosted ribbon there.

The wreath is one of the few decorations that lives between private life and public space. It marks the season without demanding a religious belief. For centuries, this ring of greenery has signaled continuity during the year's coldest stretch. Today, it is displayed for a few weeks, then returned to the ground or the closet.

Though artificial wreaths are all too common nowadays, framing your entryway with a natural piece will add an authentic, warm touch that nods to the natural environment.

A time-tested symbol

The wreath's shape carries ancient meaning. The circle, unbroken and without beginning or end, was long understood as a sign of eternity, life's unending cycle, and renewal. Humans have cherished this simple geometry across time, not only for its beauty but also for what it quietly suggests about continuity and return.

Before wreaths adorned front doors, they encircled heads and hearts across ancient worlds. In Greece and Rome, laurel wreaths were worn like crowns, symbols of triumph, honor, and status. Victorious athletes at the original Olympic Games received wreaths made of olive branches, a practice that later spread into art and public ceremony.



Later, in the forests of northern Europe, evergreen wreaths took on a different life. Made from branches that kept their color even in winter, they became signs of resilience and hope through the darkest days. People in Germanic and Scandinavian cultures hung evergreens at the solstice to celebrate life enduring against the cold.

Over time, this form moved inward. As doors became personal statements, we adapted how we used wreaths. They stopped speaking for a village and began speaking for households.

The domestic life of a wreath

A wreath's lifespan is decided long before it reaches a door. Species, cut date, and weather shape its endurance. Evergreens harvested in colder conditions last

longer; those cut too early fade quickly. If you plan on purchasing an organic wreath, late November through early December offers a narrow window when freshness and durability briefly align.

People who make wreaths speak plainly about materials. Fir and pine hold their scent. Cedar dries faster, taking on a silvery softness as it ages. Juniper keeps its color but sheds when disturbed. And once you hang a wreath, it responds to the cold, sun, and wind.

Your doorway adds its own limits. South-facing doors with glass panels introduce warmth that speeds drying. Windy entries tug at fastenings and loosen needles. Dense forms tend to withstand exposure better, while looser arrangements belong on sheltered porches.

When you hang a wreath, you must balance the dimensions and finish of your door, the weather, and the wreath's weight. Over-the-door padded hooks can protect your door's finish. Adhesive hooks can work outdoors if rated for cold and load, though they require patience and a clean surface.

Care and disposal

Caring for a wreath is mostly a matter of attention. In colder climates, the season often does the work on its own, preserving the greens through consistent low temperatures. During a brief thaw, you can lightly mist it with a spray bottle to keep the branches flexible. In milder or drier regions, you can soak the greens before hanging.

When the season has passed, removal completes the ritual. On a dry day, cut away wire frames and synthetic ties and set them aside for reuse.

The greens themselves still have a role to play. Evergreen clippings break down slowly, making them useful long after they leave your door. Layered onto garden beds, they insulate soil and protect roots from sudden cold. Tucked around shrubs, they shield against wind and temperature swings. Many towns collect wreaths after the holidays, sending them to farms, shoreline-restoration projects, or municipal compost sites.

Being true to its longtime tradition of renewal, the wreath's presence lingers after the holidays. It simply takes its place for a while, then steps back and returns to the soil, making the next season possible.



GIFT WRAPPING MADE SIMPLE

Written by **Andre Rios**



When it comes to giving gifts, you've probably heard that it's the thought that counts. But there's a visual component to thoughtfulness as well, including how neatly and attractively you present your present. Do it well, and you can wow the recipient, setting expectations for a jaw-dropping gift before they even unwrap it.

That said, this skill doesn't come naturally to everyone. If wrapping gifts feels unnecessary or unnecessarily difficult to you, use this guide for successful results.

GATHER YOUR GOODS

Event designer Colleen Kennedy Cohen tells the Spruce about the wrapping supplies she always keeps on hand, including the usual essential materials (i.e., gift boxes, paper, and bows) as well as items like craft scissors and gift-wrap tape. However, Kennedy Cohen also includes other specialty products such as twine, calligraphy pens, and natural toppers like holly branches in her stash to kick the results up a notch. Assemble these provisions, and you'll be ready to get to work.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Here are foolproof steps for wrapping a gift in a simple box:

1 Lay it in tissue paper or surround it with crumbled tissue for cushioning and to keep it in place during step 2.

Next, measure your wrapping paper. Roll it out, and place the box in the center of it upside-down. To estimate how much paper you'll need, fold the paper over the box until box is completely covered. Feel free to overestimate.

3 Cut the paper in one straight go, using a straight edge like a ruler to make clean cuts if it's not grid-lined on the back.

Ensure that the box sits in the middle of the paper, and pull one side of the wrapping so it touches the center of the box lengthwise. Use a small piece of tape to hold it in place.

5 If you have enough slack to do so, take the other end of the paper and fold it in slightly for a neater seam. Then pull that side over to meet the other end of the paper, and tape it.

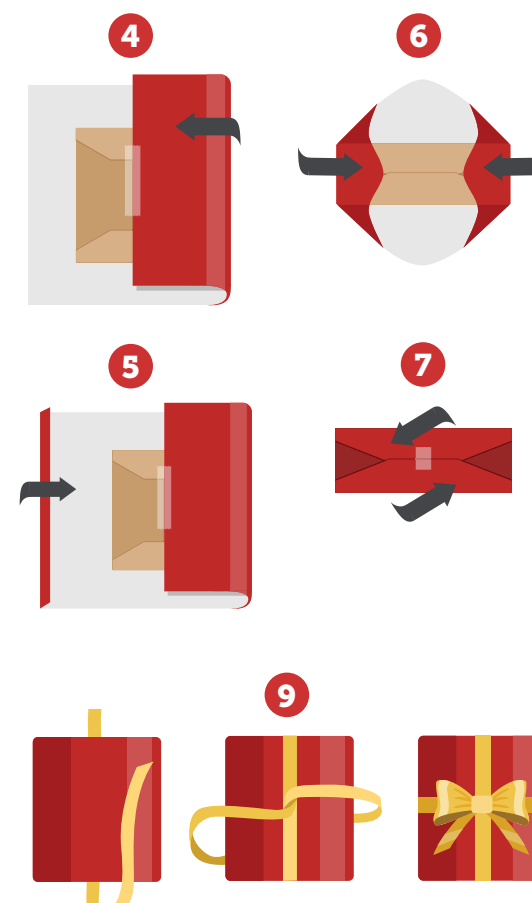
6 Now move to the shorter, exposed sides. Starting at one end, press the flaps against the shorter, vertical sides so two wings protrude. Crease the paper so you're left with two neat triangles on each end.

7 Next, press the upper wing down against the lower one so they're flush with each other, and bring them up against the side of the box in one crease. Fold the point of the fold in as much as necessary so it can sit flush with the top edge.

8 Repeat on the other side.

To craft a simple, classic look, measure ribbon by rolling one piece each to surround the box lengthwise and widthwise. Cut each ribbon so they meet neatly in the middle, then cover the seam with a bow. Finally, consider finishing the box with a decorative element like a flower or candy cane.

The good news is that this skill is easy to master and will likely become second nature the more you wrap. The best part? The effort you put into your gift wrapping will show in the results—and, hopefully, in the priceless glow in your recipient's eyes.



TROUBLESHOOTING YOUR GIFT

Didn't do the neatest job with your wrapping?

Cover any exposed edges with festive stickers, extra ribbon, or adhered decorations like fresh flowers.

Dealing with unusual products that don't fit neatly into a box or bag?

Kennedy Cohen has the answer: Wrap them in soft, appealing fabric, then gather and tie the ends. Or simply place it in a basket, and tie a bow around the handle.



CREATING A CALMING HOME

Written by **Dan O'Brien**

The holidays have a way of piling on quickly. What begins as comfort can quietly tip into chaos, and a home that once felt hospitable starts to feel tight and noisy.

When yours feels this way, it can be anything but calming. A big cause? The place being overfull, which keeps everyone, including guests, slightly on edge. In contrast, a truly soothing home invites people to settle in. The good news is that there's a simple solution. Decluttering can help you set the stage for more joy in the season.

WHAT THE OBJECTIVE IS

This isn't spring-cleaning in disguise. The goal is restraint: doing a light pass by focusing only on what is visible and most used during the season. (Think of it as making room, not organizing

everything.) And it can make all the difference between an enjoyable ambience and a fussy one.

WHERE IT MATTERS MOST

First impressions carry extra weight during the holidays because they set the tone. Shoes, coats, bags, and mail accumulate fast, so clearing your entryway helps immediately, providing a welcoming environment from the moment your guests arrive.

The same is true for shared surfaces. When tables and counters are less crowded, seasonal decor has room to

exist without competing for attention, creating a sense of visual calm. To achieve this, keep only one statement item on each small surface (like an end table) and up to three on a larger one (like a kitchen island) to ease your everyday routine and improve aesthetics. You'll quickly find that your spaces can support rest, gathering, and spontaneity rather than resisting them.

Clearing space shifts the season from frantic back to festive. It's an act of care for yourself and for the people you welcome in. The reward is a place that feels lighter, quieter, and ready for what the season brings.

Simply Satisfying EVERYDAY EATS



Home cooking gets elevated in the *Everyday Chef* cookbook, including the following recipes for soup, bread, potatoes, and pasta. Each dish is perfect for cozy get-togethers this season.

SCAN THE QR CODE
to get the full cookbook.



Recipes from *Everyday Chef: Simple Dishes for Family and Friends* by Jeremy Sewall and Erin Byers Murray. Rizzoli New York 2025. Photography by Michael Harlan Turkell.



CHICKEN, VEGETABLE, *and orzo soup*

Everyone should have a go-to chicken soup recipe. Some version of chicken soup is found in almost every culture, with recipes as ancient as our ability to boil water. My version is flexible: once you learn the basics, you can swap out the vegetables depending on what you have on hand. I use orzo because it holds up well in broth and it's easy to eat with a spoon. This tastes better the day after it's made, especially with a few crumbled crackers on top.



INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken thighs | 1 small bulb fennel, diced (about 1 cup) |
| 2 tablespoons canola oil, plus more for brushing | 2 to 3 medium carrots, diced (about 1 cup) |
| 1 teaspoon celery salt | 3 to 4 ribs celery, diced (about 1 cup) |
| Freshly ground black pepper | 2 leeks, white parts diced (about 1 cup) |
| 2 tablespoons kosher salt, plus more to taste | 2 tablespoons chopped garlic |
| 1 cup orzo pasta | 6 cups chicken stock |
| | 3 cups baby spinach leaves |

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1/ Preheat the oven to 325°F.
- 2/ Place the chicken thighs on a baking sheet lined with foil and brush generously with the canola oil. Season with the celery salt and a little pepper. Roast for 25 minutes. Remove and let cool. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, dice it into ½-inch pieces.
- 3/ In a large pot, bring 4 cups water and the 2 tablespoons of salt to a boil. Add the orzo and cook for 10 minutes. Once the pasta is al dente, drain in a colander, then spread out on a baking sheet and let cool to room temperature. Add 1 teaspoon of the canola oil and stir to combine to keep the pasta from sticking.
- 4/ In a large saucepan, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon plus 2 teaspoons canola oil over medium heat and add the fennel, carrots, and celery. Sauté until the vegetables begin to soften, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the leeks and garlic and stir to combine. Sauté until the leeks have wilted. Add the chicken stock and bring to a simmer. Simmer for 10 minutes. Add the chicken meat and orzo and return to a simmer, then simmer for 2 additional minutes. Season the soup with salt and pepper. Just before serving, add the baby spinach and cook until just wilted, 1 to 2 minutes. Serve hot.



FRIED SCALLION BREAD

*with marinated sun-dried
tomatoes, brie,
and kalamata olives*

This quick and easy recipe starts with a no-yeast dough that is pan-fried, topped, then baked. I give the dough a bit of bite with a dose of black pepper—it's my favorite part of the recipe. I prefer store-bought marinated sun-dried tomatoes that come in a jar. Keep a jar in your pantry for an easy addition to snacks. This dish also works well with thinly sliced fresh tomatoes.



SERVES
4 AS AN
APPETIZER

INGREDIENTS

1½ cups all-purpose flour	2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup whole wheat flour	About ¼ cup canola oil
2 teaspoons baking powder	1 cup sun-dried tomatoes in oil, drained and chopped
2 teaspoons kosher salt	8 ounces brie, cut into thin pieces
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper	½ cup pitted Kalamata olives, halved
2 scallions, green parts only, thinly sliced	2 tablespoons fresh oregano leaves
1 tablespoon honey	

INSTRUCTIONS

1/ In a large bowl, combine the flours, baking powder, salt, and pepper. Fold in the scallions. In a small bowl, combine the honey with ¾ cup warm water and stir until the honey is dissolved. Add the olive oil and stir to combine. Add the liquid to the dry ingredients and mix by hand until the dough forms a ball. Let the dough rest for 15 minutes, then remove from the bowl and cut into 4 equal portions.

2/ On a lightly floured surface, shape each portion into a ball, then use a rolling pin to roll each piece into a circle about ¼ inch thick.

3/ Preheat the oven to 400°F.

4/ Place a medium sauté pan over medium heat and add the ¼ cup canola oil; heat until shimmering. Add one of the dough circles to the pan and fry on one side until lightly browned. Flip and repeat on the other side, about 1 minute per side. Transfer to a baking sheet, then repeat with the remaining dough, adding a little more oil if needed. Evenly divide the tomatoes, brie, and olives and layer them on top of each piece of fried bread. Bake until the brie is just softened, about 3 minutes. Remove and allow to cool slightly before cutting each bread into 4 to 6 pieces. Garnish with oregano before serving.



CUMIN-ROASTED SWEET POTATOES

and basil pesto

Cumin and the other spices make this dish sing, and the smell of them toasting is amazing. You can use ground spices if you don't have whole ones, though grinding them yourself guarantees freshness. The pesto can be made ahead and goes well with many other dishes.



INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2 medium sweet potatoes, unpeeled | 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil |
| 1 teaspoon cumin seeds | Kosher salt |
| 1 teaspoon dark mustard seeds | Basil Pesto (recipe follows) |
| 1 teaspoon white peppercorns | |

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1/ Preheat the oven to 375°F.
- 2/ Halve the sweet potatoes lengthwise. Cut the halves in half and then again, for 8 wedges per potato. In a small, dry sauté pan, combine the cumin, mustard seeds, and white peppercorns and toast over low heat until the spices become fragrant. Remove from the heat and allow to cool. Transfer to a spice grinder and pulse until finely ground. In a large bowl, combine the spices with the olive oil. Add the potato wedges, season with salt, and toss to combine. Transfer to a baking sheet and roast for about 25 minutes.
- 3/ To serve, transfer the cooked potatoes to a serving bowl and distribute the pesto on top, or serve the pesto on the side.

BASIL PESTO MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 2½ packed cups fresh basil leaves | ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil |
| 3 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted | Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper |
| ¼ cup grated Parmesan | Basil Pesto (recipe follows) |
| 3 small cloves garlic, smashed | |

In the bowl of a food processor fitted with the metal blade, add the basil, pine nuts, Parmesan, and garlic and pulse to combine. Leave the machine running and slowly add the olive oil until the mixture is well blended. Season with salt and pepper. Refrigerate in a sealed container for up to 1 week or freeze for up to 1 month.



CAULIFLOWER *and bacon pasta*

Bacon and cauliflower are a stellar combination. Add cheese and pasta and it's a party. This straightforward dish can be prepped in advance, making it a breeze to put together. I call for cavatelli here but just about any dried pasta will work.

INSTRUCTIONS

1/ Heat the canola oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add the bacon and cook until crisp. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate, leaving the rendered fat in the pan. Add the cauliflower and sauté until it begins to color and soften, 3 to 4 minutes. Use a spoon to hold back the contents of the pan and pour out and discard most of the fat. Return the pan to the heat and add the shallots and garlic. Cook until the shallots are softened, about 2 minutes. Add the chicken stock, raise the heat to medium-high, and simmer for 5 minutes.

2/ Bring a pot of salted water to a boil and cook the pasta according to package instructions. Drain, then add the pasta to the pan with the cauliflower. Add the cooked bacon and sherry vinegar and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the mixture is hot and fully combined. Transfer to a serving bowl and top with the Parmesan, parsley, and chili flakes.



Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| 2 tablespoons canola oil | 2 cloves garlic, chopped | Freshly ground black pepper |
| ½ pound thick-cut bacon, diced | 1 cup chicken stock | ¼ cup grated Parmesan |
| 1 small head cauliflower, cut into small florets | Kosher salt | 2 tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley leaves |
| 2 shallots, minced | 1 pound dried cavatelli | 1 teaspoon chili flakes |
| | 1 tablespoon sherry vinegar | |

Recipe by **JEREMY SEWALL AND ERIN BYERS MURRAY**
Photography by **MICHAEL HARLAN TURKELL**



MAKING HER HOUSE A HOME

Interview with **Kristin Mullen**
Written by **Matthew Brady**
Photography by **Nathan Schroder**

Dallas-based designer **Kristin Mullen** shares what inspires her work and how she changed her current home from a 1980s snapshot to an elegant yet functional space for her family.

Have you always been interested in design? Who or what influenced you to join this field?

My mother was a self-taught home decorator and loved the process. Since my dad traveled frequently, she would pass the time by rearranging the furniture at night, putting pieces on towels or rugs to move them easily. I'd wake up to find the rooms transformed, often after hearing mysterious hammering the night before.

That said, I personally don't have the typical designer origin story. The closest I came to that was playing with my dollhouse and helping with displays at my mother's clothing store. My real interests have always been history, storytelling, and traveling. My mom also loved antiques, as do I. She favored American ones, whereas I lean toward Swedish and clean-lined French. I didn't start working as a professional designer until around 2005. Before that, I just worked on my own home and casually helped friends with theirs. They'd offer a glass of wine as thanks. *[Laughs]*

Things shifted when my husband and I moved our family to Dallas. One friend asked me to design her dining room and insisted on paying me. Word spread, and soon other friends began hiring me. What began as very part-time work quickly evolved into a full-time profession.

What did you do before starting your firm?

I majored in speech and language pathology in college and minored in theater: quite different from interior design! I actually worked as an actress then stayed home after starting my family.

Tell us about your travels. Which countries influence your aesthetic the most?

I've lived abroad and traveled extensively. My biggest influence, perhaps surprisingly, is Japan. My work doesn't look Japanese, but while living there, I took ikebana classes and learned to appreciate the power of negative space and balance over symmetry. I also embraced the idea that imperfection can be beautiful.

European design also influences me heavily. Europeans often live in smaller spaces, so every item is thoughtfully chosen. I also appreciate their willingness to incorporate whimsy and imperfection. While residing in England, I often visited friends' homes in France and got to see how people really live, not just the showy side.

When did you buy your current home, and what condition was it in?

We bought it in December 2021. It was very 1980s: pink tiles, wallpaper, carpet, shiny brass, and oddly shaped wall openings. But the exterior was charming, with storybook-like rooflines, and the layout had generous living spaces and a large primary suite. It's also a single-story home, which was important for our daughter, who has cerebral palsy. I saw a lot of potential.

How much of it did you change structurally?

We closed some walls, opened others, and made a laundry room out of our third-car garage. I tried to respect the existing footprint as much as possible while making it more functional. The kitchen layout



I tried to respect the existing footprint as much as possible while making it more functional. The kitchen layout was changed to open into the family room. I also converted the dining room into my study.

was changed to open into the family room. I also converted the dining room into my study. In all, it took about nine months because of appliance shortages at the tail end of COVID. We moved in without a functioning kitchen!

Your decor stands out. How do you choose what to include, and how do those pieces personalize your home?

When I furnish a home, I believe in incorporating items with emotional texture—things that feel lived-in and meaningful, even if you don’t know their history. Most of what you see in our home has been repurposed from our previous ones, and many of the standout pieces are antiques with stories. For example, the large cabinet in my study once held a TV and later sat in a dining room. Now it has a whimsical back panel that fits the room’s vibe.

How do you maintain cohesiveness in your design?

I like the home’s entryway to showcase the full color palette, then I weave those colors throughout the main areas, recombining them differently in each room. This helps everything flow well and feel calm.

What are your thoughts on color’s impact?

It influences mood, so one of the first things I ask clients is how they want to feel in a space. From there, I choose colors that support that emotional goal. In my home, I incorporated lots of neutrals so our antiques would stand out rather than compete with stronger colors. I tend to work with those all day, so

I prefer to come home to something soothing. Overall, the light walls here encourage rest and let a few pieces have that “main character” energy.

Tell us about how you updated your living room:

The fireplace originally had pink tile, so we updated it with thin European brick to give it architectural weight. The Trumeau mirror above it, which has been in nearly every home we’ve owned, reflects the Italian chandelier; that reflectivity combines with the softness of the mirror’s frame to make it stand out. I also added a striking blue grisaille painting above it to draw one’s eye.

The kitchen also pops. What were you aiming for there?

I wanted a European farmhouse feel, though the layout was tricky: It’s long and narrow, so fitting an island was difficult. But when everyone’s home, the kitchen is the hub, and we needed space for cooking together. The wooden island became the centerpiece. In addition, I added antique French casement windows to the pantry with fabric behind them to hide everyday items. The same fabric is used for the café curtains, a detail I love.

Were the home’s high ceilings a challenge?

At fourteen feet high, they’re unusually tall for a house this size. That meant I needed to balance vertical elements with horizontal ones for visual stability. I used tall cabinets and headboards and layered artwork to draw the eye up while keeping the rooms grounded and inviting.



The fireplace originally had pink tile, so we updated it with thin European brick to give it architectural weight.



What do you love most about the renovation?

Believe it or not, my master bathroom floor. Its combination of antique terra-cotta and limestone is breathtaking. I also love my Bertazzoni range, which is beautiful and incredibly functional. And we recently added silk balloon shades in the living room; they catch the northern light perfectly.

In 2025, you opened your online store, the Edit. What are your goals for it?

Initially, I resisted the idea because we only sell antiques at the Round Top Antiques Fair a few times a year and figuring out the fulfillment logistics was challenging. But people kept asking for a website, so I created one that includes curated collections, both antique and newly made, with thoughtful descriptions. I wanted the experience to reflect my voice, much like chatting about design in my booth, so customers can get a little KMD perspective without hiring me directly.

How is it different designing for yourself versus for clients?

Designing for yourself offers endless options, which can be overwhelming. Every designer I know can envision multiple fabulous versions of a space; the hard part is choosing just one. I enjoy the process, but I also want to reach the finish line. I'm a firm believer that function comes first. Once that's right, making it beautiful is the easy part.

For more info, visit kristinmullendesigns.com



The inclusion of useful tips is one of the top reasons 58 percent of recipients have referred the professional who sent them the magazine in the past 12 months.

RISK REVIEW

Having a "heads-up" for all of life's potential risks would be ideal... but since the unexpected is, well, just that—proper risk provisions are key to protecting your wealth.

WHEN THE SKY IS CLEAR, CARRY AN UMBRELLA.

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Front of Tear Out Card 2

CHICKEN,
VEGETABLE,
AND ORZO
soup





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Back of Tear Out Card 2

make

- 1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 2 tbsp. canola oil, plus more for brushing
- 1 tsp. celery salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 1 c. orzo pasta
- 1 small bulb fennel, diced (about 1 c.)
- 2 to 3 medium carrots, diced (about 1 c.)
- 3 to 4 ribs celery, diced (about 1 c.)
- 2 leeks, white parts diced (about 1 c.)
- 2 tbsp. chopped garlic
- 6 c. chicken stock
- 3 c. baby spinach leaves

measure

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F.
2. Place the chicken thighs on a baking sheet lined with foil and brush generously with the canola oil. Season with the celery salt and a little pepper. Roast for 25 minutes. Remove and let cool. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, dice it into ½ in. pieces.
3. In a large pot, bring 4 c. water and the 2 tbsp. of salt to a boil. Add the orzo and cook for 10 minutes. Once the pasta is al dente, drain in a colander, then spread out on a baking sheet and let cool to room temperature. Add 1 tsp. of the canola oil and stir to combine to keep the pasta from sticking.
4. In a large saucepan, heat the remaining 1 tbsp. plus 2 tsp. canola oil over medium heat and add the fennel, carrots, and celery. Sauté until the vegetables begin to soften, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the leeks and garlic and stir to combine. Sauté until the leeks have wilted. Add the chicken stock and bring to a simmer. Simmer for 10 minutes. Add the chicken meat and orzo and return to a simmer, then simmer for 2 additional minutes. Season the soup with salt and pepper. Just before serving, add the baby spinach and cook until just wilted, 1 to 2 minutes. Serve hot.

Recipe from *Everyday Chef: Simple Dishes for Family and Friends* by Jeremy Sewall and Erin Byers Murray. Rizzoli New York 2025. Photography by Michael Harlan Turkell.

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