



Winter Solace



DESIGN SUZETTE DONLEAVY OCCASION INTIMATE GATHERING LOCATION COLTS NECK

Party Prep

To create a memorable table setting, take inspiration from something personal, whether it's what you plan to serve, the guests themselves or the details found in the room, says interior designer Suzette Donleavy, principal of Well-Designed Interiors in Rumson.

Here in the Colts Neck home of photographer Patricia Burke, a triptych of snow-capped trees that Burke took while skiing in Steamboat, Colorado, launched the design scheme: a calming wintry mix of dark grays and whites coupled with mercury glass and other shimmery silver accents.

Setting the Scene

For a cozy, relaxed ambience, Donleavy chose a round dining table, which "invites intimacy," she says, and dressed it with a custom tablecloth that draws from the high-contrast tones in the photographs. The fresh geometric pattern "takes the formal setting down a notch," juxtaposing the formal with the informal, Donleavy says. Modern also mixes with tradition in Lucite chairs that almost disappear into the setting. "We didn't want anything too heavy or bulky," the designer explains.

When it comes to setting the "proper" table, Donleavy says, we are less inclined to follow old rules of etiquette. "People decorate more casually today,"

Table Talk *with Suzette Donleavy*

Mix it Up "I'm a collector of dishware, so I have antique serving pieces [and other vintage finds] that don't necessarily match that I love to mix in." Anthropologie is another source of inspiration. "They have great plates, linens and vintage-look glassware that are a little out of the box."

Plan Ahead "I set my table about a week in advance so I can get it right. Then I get to enjoy it for a time and don't feel rushed when guests arrive."

Nature's Bounty "I always go outside and clip something" to accent the table, whether it's holly, magnolia leaves or swags of evergreen. Incorporating seasonal fruits or produce is another way to bring in color and texture.

A triptych of snow-capped trees that homeowner Patricia Burke photographed on a ski trip inspired the table setting's peaceful two-tone palette, silvery accents and Lucite chairs, which have an icy see-through quality. The vintage etched stemware belonged to Burke's mother.



High contrast between the living area and dining room “creates drama as you walk in for dinner and elevates the expectation of what is to come,” interior designer Suzette Donleavy says.

she says, favoring an eclectic, mix-and-match attitude that is more personal. Though she never sets the same table twice and loves to mix things up by pairing new finds with antiques, “I always start with a beautiful place setting,” she says.

As for the platinum-edge white china, “it’s so classic you can do anything with it,” she says. In spring she might add colorful accent plates or glassware. But for the more introspective winter season she opted to keep it calm and serene with elegant white-on-white place settings along with Burke’s vin-

tage etched stemware, a combination of sterling silver flatware and glistening mercury glass votives. “I love the element of fire,” she says. Linen napkins are another must-have at her table, such as the personalized monogrammed versions favored by Burke, always a classic.

Leaving an Impression

Each place setting contains an individual vase filled with ranunculus and a thoughtful snowflake-themed gift card. “It’s the small finishing details that help



details make the difference



Sparkling gift cards on platinum-edged white china, vintage etched stemware and ranunculus in a silvery vase add a wintry feel to the table.



set the mood or make guests feel special,” Donleavy says. Christmas crackers or a simple holiday ornament would do the trick also. “It doesn’t have to be over the top,” says Donleavy, who is also a fan of inscribing a memorable quote or one inspiring word on place cards to evoke special meaning or spark conversation, especially at large gatherings. “That’s always a huge hit.”

SOURCES styling, assorted accessories and table topper, Suzette Donleavy of Well-Designed Interiors in Rumson; tablecloth fabric, F. Schumacher & Co.; Herend Platinum Edge china and Reed & Barton sterling silver, both from Rumson China & Glass in Red Bank; gift cards, Bergdorf Goodman; fine art, James Yarosh Associates Fine Art & Design Gallery in Holmdel; triptych photographs, Patricia Burke Photography in Colts Neck with Lucite frames by Frame of Mind in Holmdel; wall color, Down Pipe (No. 26) by Farrow & Ball; flocked tree, Sickles Market in Little Silver.