

Homespun Holidays

TREES AREN'T THE ONLY THINGS getting trimmed this holiday season. Budgets may be smaller, but smarter shopping and entertaining will keep the festivities moving full-speed ahead. Taking cues from simpler times, revelers can find just as much to celebrate even without the big price tags.

Everyone is ready for the holidays. After a year of belt-tightening, families are happy to have a reason to celebrate. Even though extravagant soirees may have given way to more heartfelt, homespun gatherings, this year's parties will be no less festive and every bit as beautiful.

"Traditions are important, especially in difficult times," says **Terry Hoard, owner of Gatherings**, a west-side retailer of gifts, housewares and flowers. Hoard understands that many customers are looking to scale back, but expects them to look for ways to trim costs without cutting out get-togethers altogether.

There are several ways to save money without sacrificing celebrations this season. **Dawn Shaw, vice president of Shaw Building and Design**, says one easy strategy is to bring parties home. For example, Shaw hosted her company holiday party at home and expects to do the same this year. It works for small businesses—she had 30 or so guests—and it adds an intimacy and comfort that a restaurant or banquet hall just can't match.

"I'm excited by the fact that people are pulling it back in, that they're entertaining," says **Barry Avery, owner of Fontaine Design**, a near-east interior décor retailer and design studio.

Avery says manufacturers have certainly taken the hint that consumers are toning things down and want a more wholesome feel this holiday season. He has seen a lot of felt pillows and ornaments as well as needlepoint accents and handcrafted stockings. "People are going back to homespun," he says, noting that a lot of the new merchandise looks like more sophisticated and stylish takes on the holiday decorations

"like we used to make as kids."

Hoard says another strategy for low-key but high-impact decorating is using organic materials

such as fresh evergreens, magnolia leaves, fruit and pinecones accented with candles.

Avery also likes what candles can do. They are inexpensive but really improve the ambience with warm light and inviting fragrances of cedar, balsam, currant and other seasonal scents.

For other purchases, Hoard encourages shoppers to skip the big-box stores and disposable decorations. He thinks people are better off in the long run by investing in a few quality pieces rather than buying a lot of inexpensive decorations every year. "You don't throw away the good stuff," he says. "The other stuff is disposable. You use it for a year or two and you throw it away."

Krista Kozlik, a designer and salesperson at Century House, a gift, housewares, clothing and furniture retailer on the near-west side, agrees, noting that shopping for keepsake pieces is one of the best ways to go green for the holidays. "It's simple," Kozlik says, "but creating less waste makes a big difference."

That is why Avery encourages clients "to look at the value and longevity of each piece, not just the price tag," all year long.

Whatever the reason, be it the economy or the environment, Kozlik says many consumers have already changed their shopping habits. "People are buying less," she says, "but are buying smarter."

Kozlik realizes it can be difficult to determine what décor or tabletop additions will stand the test of time, so she encourages shoppers to also consider pieces that they can use beyond the holidays.

"Add a pop of color like red in a few places to make it look more festive," she

says, but notes that the hue can hang around until Valentine's Day once any green accents are removed. Also, greens get a longer shelf life if shoppers venture a shade or two off the traditional emerald. Kozlik suggests teal or lime, which she considers less conventional "Christmas colors." They work for the holiday when paired with crimson or scarlet, but they work year-round on their own.

And shoppers who can't give up the glitz just because they're scaling back or thinking environmentally are in luck.

Metals are hot this year and they work well as accents during the holidays. They can be high quality, too, so the new metallics don't need to be tossed out like old-school tinsel. Lines like Chilewich make great placemats and table runners (along with zippered pouches—great hostess gifts) that brighten but don't overpower a holiday table.

"The nice thing about metallics is that a little bit goes a long way," Kozlik says, "so adding just a few accents will make the table sparkle."



The Century House