

“Help me deck the halls like a pro!”

We asked the design gurus for the simple shortcuts and heartwarming touches that'll inspire *your* holiday decorating

Make your tree sparkle

Try this lighting trick

The easy way to get your tree twinkling: “Starting at the top, string lights *vertically* close to the tips of the branches in an S-shape,” advises design expert Francesco Bilotto. “It’s so much faster than going horizontally in and out. Not only will this give the outside of your tree a gorgeous glow, making it look brighter, it’ll also be easier for you to remove the lights after the holidays because you won’t have to struggle reaching all the way into the interior of the tree.”

Tell ornament stories

“There’s no need to be crafty to create meaningful ornaments,” promises vintage lifestyle expert Bob Richter. One touching example: “When a friend sold the house her mother had grown up in, she took down the chandelier, tied a silver ribbon around each crystal prism and gave them to loved ones so everyone had a little piece of the family home for their tree—it was a really lovely, easy thing to



do.” Whether you affix a hook to a small teddy bear or draw a ribbon through heirloom cookie cutters, the opportunities to make your tree even more special are endless.

Add balance with a “belt”

How to create the look of a polished tree in one move? “Just drape on a garland,” says tree-decorating pro Carol Field Dahlstrom. “Since the triangle-shaped tree is bottom-heavy, adding horizontal lines with a garland balances it out. It’s like putting on a belt when you’re getting dressed—all of a sudden, everything looks finished!”

Give your home festive touches

Make a keepsake wreath

“I always encourage folks to take down one piece of art in their home and hang a wreath in its place,” says Bilotto. “Just attach Christmas cards to an inexpensive faux wreath or use

floral wire to tie on homemade ornaments that may be too delicate for your tree. When you look at it, you’ll be coming ‘full circle,’ so to speak, telling your family’s story.”

Bring nature indoors

“Just head to your local garden center and pick up a few scraps of evergreens,” encourages Bilotto. “You can keep them fresh with little stem tubes—like the ones florists use for roses, available in crafts stores—or simply mist them once a week. Stick a few sprigs into a faux tree to infuse it with a wonderful natural scent or just place them in a vase and hang a few ornaments on them for a ‘mini tree’ on your kitchen table!”

Display memories

An overlooked “decoration” as simple as it is sentimental? Gift tags, says Richter. “I saved one from my grandmother that has a beautiful cardinal on it because cardinals were her thing,” he reveals. “Every year, I tuck it into a bit of festive greenery on my coffee table, and whenever I look at it, I think of her.”

Richter isn’t alone in his desire to display heirloom décor: “People tell me all the time they want to use old family ornaments but are worried they might get damaged,” he says. The solution: “Just cluster precious ornaments under a glass cake dome—Christmas is a time to celebrate the good, so don’t hide away the things that mean the most!”



Our expert panel



Francesco Bilotto has been seen many times on *Good Morning America*, *The View* and *Today*. Find more of his creative ideas at FrancescoBilotto.com



Bob Richter, costar of the PBS series *Market Warriors*, is the author of *A Very Vintage Christmas* and the forthcoming *Vintage Living*. Learn more at RichterDesign.net



Carol Field Dahlstrom, author of *Merry Christmas Ideas* and *Christmas in the Nick of Time*, is a holiday decorating expert. Visit her at CarolFieldDahlstrom.com