

The Season of Sentiment

LEARN THE BEST WAY TO ACHIEVE VINTAGE
CHRISTMAS DÉCOR THIS HOLIDAY SEASON.

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CHRISTMAS IS THE TIME OF YEAR THAT ENCOURAGES
THOUGHTFULNESS TOWARD OTHERS AND CAUSES
NOSTALGIA FOR HOLIDAYS PAST.

Looking back on fond childhood memories, we often long to incorporate family traditions in our holidays. Keepsakes we've collected through the years can help us to recreate a magical, timeless Christmas. In his new book, *A Very Vintage Christmas*, Bob Richter shares images of his collection of vintage ornaments and other holiday decorations, giving readers tips on how to achieve their own unique décor this Christmas.

VINTAGE HISTORY

Aside from it being a wonderful aesthetic, "Vintage ornaments, lights, decorations, cards and wrapping all conjure up happy memories of holidays shared with family and friends," Richter writes. Every piece has its own history from a Christmas past, either having been passed down from one generation to another or having been part of several different families' memories. Either way, they all have a story to tell. Vintage pieces were made during a time when things were handcrafted and each piece was unique in its own way.

With several Christmas trees throughout the house, decorating in themes can be a great way to organize and showcase all of your ornaments. This tree has a bird theme, evokes a boiling-water look with its bauble-shaped glass ornaments, and is well suited for the kitchen area.





This Japanese umbrella tree is a unique addition to Richter's collection. Made of foil, it folds up like a genuine umbrella for easy storage, and the bulbs are easily removed. His vintage Christmas books add a personal touch and complement his vintage theme.



Mix and match ornaments and vintage holiday books to create a festive side table. This reindeer was a popular item when plastic ornaments were deemed unbreakable in comparison to fragile glass ornaments.



ABOVE: As most ornaments in the Victorian era were made out of paper, cardboard cutouts are a fun memory of those times. This particular tree cutout was passed down from Bob's mother, who had it hanging on the kitchen wall every Christmas since he could remember.

ACHIEVE THE LOOK

A great place to start when creating your own holiday décor is with the Christmas tree. "For me, nothing beats the look, feel, and smell of a live tree," Richter writes. In the 19th century, people would chop down live trees to display in their homes. Aside from the natural aspect, live trees produce the pine smell that no spray can emulate. Going vintage means going natural—though Richter also encourages readers to have a miniature tree in every room to spread the cheer.

Almost as important as the tree itself are the decorations that adorn it. When string lights didn't exist, families would light their Christmas trees with candles. "Candles were held in place with metal clips and holders, which are still widely collected," Richter writes. While using fire instead of electricity can be more dangerous on your tree, you can incorporate the tradition of candles by placing them in your windows and on tables. You may also consider stringing cranberries onto the tree, as families used to do before ornaments became popular.

Ornaments are the key to vintage holiday décor and happen to be what started Richter's vintage collection. "Vintage ornaments add that nostalgic, sentimental vibe to a home, and people often have a very warm and fuzzy response to them," Richter writes. Made with a myriad of materials and different color varieties, there are styles to suit everyone's preferences. "Some of the first European ornaments were made with embossed paper scraps. These were typically angels and were wildly popular in the Victorian Era," Richter writes. During WWII, all metal



was redirected to the war effort, and paper replaced the metal parts of ornaments. Others were made of glass, plastic or brass. The materials used will determine the weight of the ornaments and may influence whether you put them on a thin tree branch or place them on a side table.

The best time to shop for vintage Christmas décor—believe it or not—is in the summer. While most people aren't even thinking about the holidays, the right places will have Christmas decorations on sale, and you can shop to your heart's content. Be wary of vintage reproductions, as some ornaments are simply made to look old. This will still achieve a vintage aesthetic, however, if genuine vintage items are important to you, follow this tip: "The surest way to know if an ornament is old is to look at the cap on top," Richter writes. "If it shows age, the ornament is likely old. If it is bright and shiny, it is likely new."

SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL

"Vintage décor can also be done in a smaller way," Richter writes. The grandeur of a tree with lights and ornaments can be too much for some. If you desire a subtler Christmas theme, there are several ways to decorate without a big tree. You can place themed ornaments into a glass bowl and place it on a table alongside some candles. Mirrors are a great place to string vintage beads or hang lights. Even mantels can be used to hold greens, pinecones and poinsettia flowers.

Bringing natural elements into the home can allude to Christmas as well. "I also always have a number of evergreen wreaths because they are truly timeless," Richter writes. Use fruit, such as oranges and pomegranates, to decorate, as well as different colored ribbons. Don't forget holly, mistletoe and fir branches as well.

ABOVE: Handmade ornaments have sentimental value during the holiday season, and they can make special gifts or fun crafts for your family. This wreath ornament, embroidered with a Dickens quote, was a childhood creation of Richter's and is displayed all year long as a reminder of the spirit of Christmas.

OPPOSITE: Combining vintage objects, candles and ornaments makes a beautiful tablescape. Adding greens to your décor brings nature into the home and alludes to Victorian times when Christmas décor was mostly made up of natural elements.



"Vintage ornaments, lights, decorations, cards and wrapping all conjure up happy memories of holidays shared with family and friends."



When placing a tree in every room, don't forget the kitchen. Though a bit unusual, what better way to spread holiday cheer to the room in which all of the holiday food will be prepared?



For me, nothing beats the look, feel and smell of a live tree in my home.”

To add some more vintage fun, bring out your childhood favorite Christmas movies, sing carols and play vintage Christmas music, because as Richter writes, “At the heart of it, this is what Christmas means to me: the passing along of warmth, memories, tradition, stories and so much more.”



A Very Vintage Christmas by Bob Richter, published by Globe Pequot, © 2016; globepequot.com.

5 PLACES FOR VINTAGE FINDS

- **Flea markets** are the most easily accessible place to look for vintage Christmas décor. While local, they are also reasonably priced, and they allow for making relationships with vendors to learn the history of an object.
- **Antiques shops** are great for setting the vintage mood. While a bit more expensive, they specialize in decorating tips and can give you some ideas on how to switch things up.
- **Online** you can look for more specific items. Using the search bar, you can type in any shape, color or style of the decoration you have in mind.
- **Estate sales/auctions** require more searching, considering a whole house is not filled with Christmas items, but it can sometimes contain an entire set of holiday decorations. Make your way to the attics and basements first, as that is where most seasonal decorations are stored.
- **Vacations** are the perfect way to get some variety in your collection, as your finds can come from different countries. The oldest items generally come from the East coast of the U.S. or in Europe.