



THIS SOFA
SMELLS AS GOOD
AS IT LOOKS. LEARN
THE SECRET, AND
STYLING TIPS, ON
PAGE 48.

Ivory mud cloth pillows, \$85 each. alwayspiper.com; balsam fir hearts, \$15 each. vannandmaker.com; sheepskin rug (on sofa), \$125. homeremediesmaine.com; vintage Moroccan wool rug, \$600. portlandtradingco.com



Maine for the Holidays

Here in winter wonderland, the best-decorated homes harmonize, versus compete (sorry, inflatable snowmen), with the starkly beautiful setting. The proof is in these 29 ideas from local creatives, guaranteed to make spirits bright — and the season super-stylish

By Petra Guglielmetti

There may be no place like home for the holidays, but when that home happens to be in Maine, the season can be all the more enchanting. In a place where winter nights are extra long, dark, and frigid, even the simplest window candles provide an amplified lift to the spirits, while the rich history embedded in our cities and towns taps deep into December nostalgia. “Cobblestone streets and antique brick buildings are lovely year-round, but even more so at Christmastime,” observes interior designer Catherine Weiland, founder of Balance Design Studio in Portland. “Our abundance of natural conifers and fireplace weather is pretty great too.” Not to mention the visual magic of *so much snow*. When it comes to decorating, Mainers employ their characteristic inventiveness, borrowing supplies from nature and reinventing heirlooms and traditions with a contemporary twist. If you’re ready to dress up your own season Maine-style, start with these pointers and flickers of inspiration from some of the region’s most influential designers and craftspeople.



AVOID A STICKY SITUATION.
REMOVE ERRANT SAP WITH PINE-SOL- SPIKED SOAPY WATER.

Outdoor Décor

Reimagine the wreath

For abundant reasons, fragrant balsam wreaths are a staple of many Maine designers' holiday schemes. Yet twists on tradition abound. Portland interior designer Tracy Davis, founder of Urban Dwellings, orders balsam wreaths mixed with boxwood, cedar, and juniper branches for intriguing texture. (Her source: Gromaine in Caribou.) Kennebunkport designer Louise Hurlbutt likes to personalize her mixed-evergreen wreaths with white shells and starfish. Portland designer Heidi Lachapelle, meantime, opts for leaves over needles: "Magnolia wreaths are sophisticated and festive without being too obvious," she says.

Or branch out

"A sole branch is a welcome alternative to a wreath that can look almost like a living sculpture," says stylist Sarah Storms, co-founder of Portland branding firm SGBMade. "I love to cut a small branch dripping with apples and hang it

from twine on my front door." In cold weather, the apples last a couple weeks. A winterberry or hypericum branch, dangling from a thick velvet ribbon, would also look lovely, she says. Another wreath-adjacent idea: "Every year after Thanksgiving, I fill a vintage pack basket with cuttings of fir, pine, and winterberry from the woods behind my house and hang it on my door," says Leah Lippmann, an architect and designer with Portland- and Boothbay-based Knickerbocker Group.

Hang a fir

Even in a state where people put Christmas trees on boats and atop buildings, displaying one on your door is an impressive party trick. "The origin of this tradition is Scandinavian — who does winter holidays better?" says Portland photo stylist Janice Dunwoody. To pull it off: Trim away branches from the back of a small tree until it lays flat. Mount one tree on the front of the door and, if desired, one on the back, attaching the trunk to a wreath hanger with cable zip ties. *5-foot-tall Fraser fir, \$35. skillins.com*

Light the way with ice

One benefit to winters that rarely thaw: making beautiful ice lanterns to illuminate pathways at night. Dunwoody's how-to: Fill three- to five-gallon buckets with water, and if you want, some holly sprigs, red berries, and/or green herbs. Let the water begin to freeze. "Solid ice will start to form on the sides and that's when you want to poke and stir the almost-frozen inner water to build up the 'walls' another inch or two," she says. When the walls are about three inches thick, drain the remaining water and slide the sculptures out of the molds. Add votive candles — and hope it stays below 32 degrees.

Put your twinkle on a timer

In Maine, where winter "nights" begin in the late afternoon, it's worth investing in holiday lights that flick on automatically. "There's nothing better than coming home on a cold dark evening to a home that's illuminated,

inside and out, with soft lights," says interior designer Lisa Hinchey, founder of The Good Home in Gorham. She stocks up on timer-equipped classic string lights and LED glimmer wires from Pier 1 Imports and light-sensor window candles from A.C. Moore — a high-tech twist on New England holiday tradition: "They turn on at dusk and stay on till dawn, greeting you when you wake."

Mantels

Think knotty and nice

"In our shop, we use nautical rope to create simple knot garlands as a nod to our sea heritage," says interior designer Nicki Bongiorno, co-owner of Spaces Kennebunkport. Adapt the idea to your fireplace by tying basic sailing knots (we used fisherman's knots and figure-eights) in marine rope. Drape the garlands over a greenery-decked mantel, looping the ends around boat cleats, if desired. *5/8-inch*

LOVE THIS LOOK? TRY WINDING ADDITIONAL ROPE GARLANDS AROUND A RAILING, OR YOUR TREE.





**PRESERVE
CUT APPLES
FOR UP TO A WEEK
BY BRUSHING FLESH
WITH LEMON JUICE
TO PREVENT
BROWNING.**

white polyester rope, \$1.60/foot, and 1/2-inch red polyester rope, \$2.19/foot. hamiltonmarine.com; 7/8-inch green nylon rope, \$3/foot, and vintage Herreshoff brass cleats, \$250 each. marinesalvagemaine.com

Feather your nest

To lend a natural pine garland a bit of woodland flair, work in some real feathers, whether purchased or collected. "Maine is full of wild turkeys; check around your yard for their fallen feathers," says Storms, noting that the wing feathers are handsomely striped and the tail feathers have a wonderful iridescent sheen.

Gather family by the fire

Turn your mantel into a showcase of family photos in matching frames — "it allows you to 'see' loved ones, even if you don't get together with them for the holidays," says Lippmann, who uses white frames in a range of sizes for a crisp, modern look. Snake an evergreen garland around the pictures, or mount it above them (tucked below art or a TV), letting the ends frame the sides of the fireplace.

Have some scents

For a fragrant arrangement without the accompanying mess of fallen needles, Portland interior designer Annie Kiladjan, owner of Annie K Designs, wires eucalyptus sprigs from a local nursery or Trader Joe's into a mantel garland. Weave in twigs with red berries and cinnamon sticks for a hint of color and another layer of aroma, says Kiladjan, who rounds out her

display with clear vases in varying sizes filled with cranberries and floating candles.

Craft a future heirloom

"Many countries claim straw stars as a holiday decorating tradition, since both their material and shape harken to the manger story," says Weiland, who loves their simplicity and symbolism on a pine mantel garland or the tree. "Straw ornaments also remind us that, as the Grinch says, Christmas 'doesn't come from a store.'" To make: Soak hollow pieces of straw in water to soften. With a utility knife, slice the pieces open, then iron into wide, flat strips. Layer strips to create a star; weave thread around the middle to fasten, allowing extra for a hanger.

Tabletops

Make apple lanterns

"For holiday dinner parties, my mother always cored apples and put tea lights in them — so simple and colorful," says Lippmann, who arranges hers in an old wooden trough for a centerpiece.

Cultivate a tabletop forest

Bongiorno has a collection of bottle-brush trees in soft pinks, blues, and greens that she arranges with votive candles in white milk-glass jars on her dining table. Available at crafts stores and in vintage varieties on eBay, the retro firs "are whimsical and textural, two things I try to incorporate into all my designs."

Try canvas on the table

Cold weather begs for warm layers on the table, but simple components can look just as elegant as pricey linens. "I drape my dining table with a drop cloth from the hardware store, then add color and pattern with a rich green or blue runner," Storms says. (Fabric store remnants are a thrifty runner option.) On a wood table, you can also trim a length of duck canvas into a runner, says Winterport floorcloth designer Addie Peet; pull threads along the edges for a soft, frayed look. Peet tops hers with clear glass vases filled with pine boughs and bright berries.

Fill your menorah with natural beauty

Pairing a sleek menorah with beeswax candles instead of smooth white ones adds texture and a welcome hint of the outdoors. Use natural-colored candles for a modern vibe or multicolored ones for a festive pop. "My glass menorah is always out in my kitchen and my family enjoys making new patterns with the colored candles each night before lighting them," Bongiorno says.

Trees

Put some sea in your tree

Of course, ocean motifs make a natural tree theme. Kiladjan sticks to red and white, mixing small lobster ornaments with other decorations in the color scheme. "Every year, I try to acquire one new piece from the Holiday Arts & Crafts Show in Portland to add to my collection," she says. (Check out this year's event Dec. 1-2; visit unitedmainecraftsmen.com for more info.) Doing all shell ornaments, meantime, creates an ethereal feeling. "I'm a huge fan of Thirdlee & Co. hand-felted ornaments that celebrate the Maine coast," Storms says. Think

realistic-looking — yet soft — mussel shells, sand dollars, and sea urchins with subtle metallic flecks (see page 48 for details).

Stamp custom ornaments

No need to lug giant boxes down from the attic each year — simple (lightweight!) ornaments can also make an impact. "I've passed down all of the family ornaments to my children," says Portsmouth interior designer Lisa Teague, who also works in Maine. So she adorns her small tree with white lights and hand-stamped gift tags tied with twine. Play with words like "joy," "peace," "merry," and "bright," or stamp family names and meaningful phrases.

Mix multiple bulb sizes

You can also skip ornaments entirely without sacrificing one bit of visual drama. Dunwoody strings her tree with varying-sized incandescent lights (many find their sparkle warmer than LEDs). "When people look at our tree, they love it but aren't sure why. It's the gradient light source!" 7-foot-tall balsam fir, \$58. skillsins.com

Conjure white magic

Even in Maine, there's no guarantee of a white Christmas — so go ahead and

**CREATE
A COZY
GLOW WITH WARM-
TUNED LEDS IF YOU
CAN'T FIND
INCANDESCENTS.**



create your own, says Portland interior designer Jeanne Handy, whose family makes “snowballs” to decorate their back-porch tree. Purchase palm-size white Styrofoam balls (the “aerated” type with a shimmery finish, not the firmer, opaque kind) from a crafts store, then gently mold them into less-perfect spheres with your hands. Handy hangs hers on the tree by pinning on white ribbons; white lights and crafts-store snowbirds complete the look. (If decorating a tree that’s not under a porch, spray all ornaments with matte polyurethane to protect them from the elements.)

Around the House

Take time to declutter

“My best holiday decorating

advice is consistent with all decorating advice: When you bring new things out, make sure you take a few things away,” says Kennebunkport interior designer Krista Stokes, who comes armed with storage boxes when she helps clients prep their homes for the season. Adds Hinch: “I remove most of my family photos and accessories from each room so they don’t become overly cluttered. We want to feel the holiday spirit, not be assaulted with an overload of stuff.”

Christmas-up your couch

Layer on the holiday vibes by swapping in seasonal pillows and throws. “Adding some touches of plaid, fur, velvet, wool, and nubby fabric gives a cozy feeling and instantly transforms your space,”

Hinch says. Adds Storms: “I love hiding pine-scented sachets behind sofa cushions or between pillows to impart a subtle Christmassy scent.”

Go rogue with string lights

Sometimes it’s freeing to embrace colored lights instead of traditional white — and to hang them somewhere other than the railing, mantel, or tree. “Last year, I bought these amazing mini-globe LED string lights in pink, orange, blue, and green and draped them from the center point of my rooms out to the corners, like an event tent,” Stokes says. “It was really magical and dramatic.”

Spice things up

“Growing up in Maine, we always made orange pomander balls for decorations around the house — the smell of citrus and

cloves always brings me back,” Lachapelle says. To make: Use a peeler or the corner of a citrus zester to carve designs in the skin of an orange. Poke holes in the orange with a toothpick and push whole cloves into the holes. Pile oranges in a bowl in your entry or powder room; they’ll keep for three to four days.

Embrace impromptu traditions

Pay attention, because sometimes the chaos of holiday preparations can spark the best, most personalized ideas. “One year, I couldn’t find our nativity set and my son decided to make one using dolls, toys, little statues, and even salt and pepper shakers,” Handy says. Now, her family recreates the moment each year: “I think it’s very Maine with its unique and independent spirit!” □

All the Trimmings

Designers’ top local product picks



1. **Thirdlee & Co. Sea Urchin ornaments**, \$58 each. thirdleeco.com
2. **Pretty Flours napkins**, \$48 for 4. prettyflours.com for stores
3. **Cobalt Sky Studio Anchor stocking**, \$44. shop.downeast.com
4. **The Vanilla Studio Menobster menorah**, \$85. etsy.com/shop/thevanillastudio
5. **Sea Bags Nautical Tree wine bag**, \$40. seabags.com
6. **Sara Fitz gift wrap**, \$12.50. sarafitz.com

