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## *The more the merrier*

Nothing is done by halves in *creating a sumptuous, made-from-scratch Christmas* in this elegant home

WORDS SUE ALLISON / PHOTOGRAPHS ELIZABETH GOODALL



CHRISTMAS MAY COME but once a year, but that doesn't mean you can't spin it out for as long as possible. Candy Harding so loves the festive season that she sometimes leaves a tree up for all 12 months.

Candy, who lives with her husband Fred in a Georgian-style home on the banks of the Avon River in Christchurch, decks the halls with trimmings from all over the world and has as many as four themed Christmas trees throughout the house. The most lavish takes her up to two months to assemble, so little wonder she is loath to dismantle it.

"If there was a Mother Christmas it would be Candy," says Fred, who is no Scrooge himself. Even without the trappings of Yuletide, the Merivale house is a tribute to the Hardings' meticulous attention to detail. The couple bought the imposing home four years ago. Built at the turn of the millennium, it was the last house designed by the late John Trengrove.

"As soon as we walked in, we saw it had good characteristics and the potential to add the detail we like," says Fred. >



**THIS PAGE** Candy and Fred Handlings' Christmas dining area, which looks over the lawn to the Awaes, has a woodland theme in red and green; the table setting includes a Christmas dinner set by Villeroy & Boch and Waterford crystal tumblers and champagne flutes engraved with scenes from *The Twelve Days of Christmas*.

**OPPOSITE** Candy greets her grandchildren at the front doors, which were copied from a photo of an apartment entrance in Paris and made by Christchurch joiner Gary Attop; the children - from left, Serita, Madolyn and Lachlan - are dressed in their *Rolph Lauren* Christmas outfits; the vignette is from Crabtree & Evelyn.



**THIS PAGE** The entrance foyer should be an experience that sets the tone for the entire house, designer Devin Buchanan tells his clients. Sofia and Madelyn run across the polished marble floor, which was imported from Los Angeles, to the formal living room; the soft duck-egg blue of the hand-painted wallpaper by Paul Montgomery is "the colour of the house," says Candy Fried; she found the antique French wall clock in England. **OPPOSITE** (from top) The furniture in the formal sitting room is all by Nancy Corzine, apart from the metal side table, which was made by another American designer, Allan Knight; the chandelier is by Schonbek, a member of the Swarovski group. An English rococo mirror sits over the Nancy Corzine Versailles console with gold-leaf details in the foyer.



*"CHRISTMAS FOR US IS ALL ABOUT THE FAMILY... THE THING OUR KIDS WILL REMEMBER WILL BE WAKING TO THE SOUND OF CHRISTMAS MUSIC"*

**THIS PAGE** (clockwise from right) The urns were imported from Haddonstone in the UK. Richard Fowler Landscaping did the paving, steps and stonework. The gate leads to a jetty where the family feed the ducks or set off for canoeing trips.

**OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) Madelyn in the children's room, which is equipped with a wide range of books and toys. The chandelier is a French antique that was shipped to New Zealand hanging on a hook in a big wooden crate. Candy bought Charlie Bear lion from Fortnum & Mason in London.

"It's fun and just takes a bit of extra effort," says Candy. "Too often mothers make rooms for themselves, not for the children."

When their own offspring, Natalie and James, were small, the Hardings spent three years in Michigan, where Fred was studying. Just as Candy likes the American style of furnishing, she enjoyed their fervour for festivities. "We loved our Christmases in America." She has transported that enthusiasm back home, along with many of the physical trappings.

"Christmas for us is all about family," says Candy, who describes their Christmas as very traditional. One tradition is that Fred cooks the Christmas dinner. "If you saw Fred's Christmas dinner, you would be staggered. He's a great cook and he goes to town." >



(clockwise from right) Lachlan chats with a reindeer under Christmas tree. Flugo, a golden retriever, ambles from the guest to the foyer, which features a Richelieu love seat by Nancy. The bathroom was designed by Emma Morris; the silver-leaded mirror from England.

The downstairs guest bedroom is a tribute to Ralph Lauren, from a prototype stirrup chandelier to the bed, bedside chest, wallpaper and Lachlan, fittingly dressed in the designer's boyswear label. Under the bed, the tartan carpet, one of the only things unchanged from the original interior, "goes perfectly," says Candy, who had 1930s photos of her parents enlarged and framed to fit the theme.

The wallpaper in the entrance hall is hand-painted by Paul Perry. The chandeliers are Swarovski, the balustrade in the hall well handmade by Christchurch Steel and the guest bedroom is entirely Ralph Lauren. Every handle, switch and light fixture has been carefully chosen. "Candy is very particular," says Fred, who adds that, bar a minor dispute over a drainpipe ("she won"), they have been on the same page for every decision. Candy's attention to detail extends to practical considerations, such as every bit of space. "Cases in point: the tiny but perfectly placed laundry behind the en suite bathroom, a fold-down board "cupboard" and rollaway shoe drawers.

Candy browses design magazines for ideas and is ever-vigilant while on the job. "Whenever we go overseas, Candy is always taking photos," says Fred. The new double front door is a copy of the original found in a Paris apartment.

Candy has made a "children's dream room" for their four children. "I've always loved children's things and I wanted to create a story," she says. Gingham, stripes and animal patterns provide a colorful backdrop for a menagerie of soft toys, nursery rhymes and shelves lined with books. Candy's precious possession is a copy of *The Magic Faraway Tree* among them. The room, which the children raid for parties, is packed with the latest haute couture dresses and Disney outfits. >





**THIS PAGE** (clockwise from left) Candy helps Madelyn, Lachlan and Sofia make gingerbread men. The bear closely observing proceedings came from London's Fortnum & Mason. A Fitz and Floyd goose casserole is part of the Christmas setting.

**OPPOSITE** Fred and Candy's daughter-in-law Hayley, who has a styling company, Hayley and Co, and helped decorate the house, supervises Sofia with her puzzle while Lachlan plays under Candy's 'I Spy' tree, which features glass decorations; specially printed Harding lynxly Santa sacks from Fortnum & Mason sit in front of a fire surround from Francois & Co in the US.



The look the couple were after was New York elegance. "We go to the US all the time and like the American look and the way they do things," says Candy. "I wanted a Hampton style of house."

While visiting the Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood, Candy and Fred chanced upon the Nancy Corzine showroom - and specifically, designer Devin Buchanan. "It started with a chair in the master bedroom and the whole house evolved from there," says Candy. Devin has been responsible for much of the interior design - choosing furniture, colours (paint was shipped from the US), wallpaper and soft furnishings. Nancy Corzine furniture was made to measure for the living room, master bedroom and foyer in consultation with local architectural designer Lauren Gasson and builder Nick Griffin.

"The success of a house is in the details," says Candy, who started the renovations by adding cornices and architraves in every room. All the mirrors, including in the bathrooms, have bevelled glass. "You only want to do bevelled glass," she says. "It gives that luxury framed look." >

**THIS PAGE** Bronwyn Thoms of Flame Tree in Christchurch designed the armchair and footstool in Mokam fabric; it sits in a sunny alcove at the top of the stairs; the floor lamp is by Ralph Lauren and the lacquered cabinet, a replica of one in Nancy Corzine's own house in the Hamptons, contains Cardy's collection of dolls and decorative teapots as well as books.







**THIS PAGE** (clockwise from above) Fred wanted paneling in the master bedroom, which was fitted out and decorated by Devin Buchanan; the walnut bed is by Nancy Corzine, as is the Richelieu bench seat, to match the bedhead; the side lights are Ralph Lauren. All the linen throughout the home is Ralph Lauren. A Bianca Lorenze bedspread picks up the soft blue of the rustic French armoire, also by Nancy Corzine, where Candy stores her blankets and linen. "Even the shelves are solid timber and beautifully knitted," she says. >





## Q&amp;A

**FAVOURITE CHRISTMAS RITUAL:** Setting up the Christmas stockings for the children. Finding my own as a child is such a happy memory and it gives me as much pleasure doing the same for my own children and grandchildren.

**ON BOVING BACK THE BYLL BO:** Having a picnic in the front garden by the river.

**BEST SHOP:** Ballantynes – they have one of the best Christmas shops in the world.

**BEST PIECE OF ADVICE:** Trust your instincts and make sure the designer or architect does what you want.

**BEST FIND:** Electrician Pete Smith and his sidekick Dale. They are my knights in shining armour.

**BRUCEST DECISION FEELING:** Using hand-painted wallpaper.

**THE THING WE WANT TO CHANGE NEXT:** The kitchen – we are designing an American-style one with Devin Buchanan.

*Candy Harding*

**THIS PAGE** The Hardings' house viewed from the river; it's surrounded by a formal garden designed by Ben McMaster of Inside Out Design.

Fred starts preparing the meal the night before and then gets up before dawn and turns on the music. "The thing our kids will remember will be waking to the sound of Christmas music through the house."

Candy makes her own Christmas cakes, plum puddings in bags and a legendary brandy sauce using whipped egg whites. "I don't believe in buying anything."

The family, which includes Hugo, their elderly golden retriever, gather mid-morning and start the celebrations with bubbly and nibbles while the children open their stockings. "Candy loves Christmas and these kids are spoiled rotten," says Fred. Dinner is at 1pm and the afternoon is spent playing games on the lawn by the river. The leftovers last for days.

"We don't do things by halves," says Candy. "It's everything you think Christmas should be, and more." ■





