

DECK THE HALLS

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The holidays are merry and bright at one guest-friendly Paradise Valley abode.

By Nora Burba Trulsson | Photography by Mark Lipczynski

“During the holidays, my kitchen never looks this pristine,” admits Sharon Zollo with a laugh, referring to the sparkling two-island cooking space that is the center of the modern Mediterranean-style home she shares with her husband, Tom. “Starting with breakfast on through the day, at least one of those islands is covered in food. In the rest of the house, all the bedrooms are full, and there are usually kids sleeping on couches and inflatable beds everywhere.”

From Thanksgiving through New Year's, the Zollos' 8,800-square-foot, four-bedroom residence—which also has a two-bedroom casita—brims with friends and family from around the country.

The couple's path to embracing the "mi casa es su casa" lifestyle for their far-flung clan began in Chicago. Seeking sunshine, the pair found a property in Paradise Valley with views of Camelback Mountain and asked architect Gary Wyant and builder Tony Calvis to create an abode reminiscent of the villas they had admired during their frequent trips to Italy, albeit with a lighter touch and an airy, clean look. "We didn't want heavy, dark architecture," explains Sharon. "We went with light stone walls and bigger windows."

The impetus for five guest bedrooms, however, came from family. "My husband is one of 14 kids," says Sharon, "and Christmas is big with his brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews. They all like to gather here in the desert. We'll have 35 to 40 members of the family come out and spend two or three weeks—some in hotels, but many with us in the house."

To make their home comfortable and welcoming for guests of all ages—and able to withstand the rigors of extended family gatherings—the Zollos turned to interior designer Lissa Lee Hickman, who helped them achieve a look that was both timeless and family-friendly. "Sharon came to me with a decorative ceramic plate that she liked, and we pulled the navy, rust and cream color scheme from its pattern," Hickman recalls.

When it came to Christmas decor, however, the Zollos realized their abode was beyond simply putting up a tree with a few lights. "We designed the house to accommodate a big tree in the great room," Sharon recalls, "but we soon came to the conclusion we needed expert help."



In the great room, a 12-foot-tall Christmas tree, one of many in the home, reflects the rust-and-blue color palette that is used throughout the home. A collection of mercury glass trees adorn tabletops and a sideboard in the adjoining dining room.



Nutcrackers and festive penguins make appearances on the playful tree in the entry hall.



A handmade stocking and jolly snowman, displayed beneath vintage ornaments, are family heirlooms.





The holiday decor is not limited to the home's interiors. Outdoors, courtyards are graced with fully decorated trees, garlands and greenery.



An elegant wreath made of verdant pine branches, pine cones and colorful bows greets guests as they approach the home's entry courtyard

Enter Regina Washburn, a designer who specializes in creating stunning holiday settings. “We put the whole look together,” says Washburn, who works with a team for up to a week to put up the decorations, and another after New Year’s to dismantle, pack and store the items. “We looked at what Sharon had, in terms of ornaments and trim, and then added over the years. “

The Zollos’ trees include a nutcracker-themed installation in the foyer, replete with 156 jaw-clenching figurines; the main, 12-foot-tall tree in the great room decorated with rust and navy ornaments that reflect the interior color palette; and a whimsical, woodland-themed creation on the home’s roof loggia, dotted with pine cones, owl figures and topped with a birdhouse.

No room goes untouched. Washburn designs table-scapes with holiday figurines, drapes garlands over fireplace mantels, makes generous use of her hand-tied bows and creates many vignettes, including a sentimental installation featuring Sharon’s grandmother’s antique Christmas ornaments, a hand-sewn snowman and a handmade stocking.

“I use faux Christmas trees and greenery,” says Washburn of her approach. “Real evergreens tend to droop after a few days, and the ornaments fall off. To get the best look, I decorate the trees from the inside out, including the lighting, which gives the tree a rich, glowing look.”

Against this festive backdrop, the Zollos feed and entertain family, not to mention friends and neighbors who might drop by. “We don’t really cook,” Sharon admits, “but we put out a breakfast buffet in the kitchen, so that everyone can help themselves.” Dinners might be as simple as a delivered six-foot sub or a more formal meal, prepared by a private chef, who comes in knowing the head count might be upwards of 55 guests. Occasionally, there’s a group trek to a private dining room at a nearby restaurant or resort. Christmas Eve follows the Italian tradition of the Feast of the Seven Fishes, with seafood dishes. In between, there are sightseeing expeditions, board games, billiards or lounging around in the sunshine.



Father Christmas is a cheery presence in one holiday display.



The kitchen is kept simple, leaving space for the all-day breakfast buffet the homeowners put out for family and friends.



A garland, highlighted by hand-tied bows, frames the great room's fireplace. The soft gold ribbons and red, gold and rose ornaments complement the artwork and add a touch of luxuriousness without overwhelming the room's muted hues. To the right, the entry hall's tree is inhabited by more than 150 nutcrackers.



In the game room, a village of Santas and a gingerbread man keep watch over the pool table.



The dining room, marked by a dramatic, groin-vaulted brick ceiling, gets the holiday touch through the greenery-and-bow-laced chandelier, a mercury glass ornament display on the sideboard and a rustic wreath hung on the framed mirror.



In the rooftop loggia—which has views of Camelback Mountain—mauve proteas and silvery greens offer an alternative holiday color scheme that is both cheery and understated, allowing the natural beauty of the surrounding scenery to shine.

“It’s chaotic, but fun,” Sharon says. “Just having everyone together for the holidays is a beautiful thing. And, so far, our house has survived.”

Architect: Gary Wyant, Calvis Wyant Luxury Homes. **Builder:** Tony Calvis, Calvis Wyant Luxury Homes. **Interior Designer:** Lissa Lee Hickman, Lissa Lee Hickman Inc. **Landscape Designer:** Jeremy McVicars, Refined Gardens