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CENTRAL ILLINOIS

NOVEMBER • DECEMBER
2022

Home for the Holidays

Shelly Damore has filled her family's Champaign home with traditional yet unexpected seasonal decorations

Campus Confidential

Take a tour of the iconic University of Illinois President's House

Authentic Experience

Cut your own Christmas tree at these two area farms

Ask the Expert

A few tips for decorating for the holidays on a tight budget



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TOP LAWYERS

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These **LEADING LAWYERS** have been recommended by their peers to be among the **TOP LAWYERS** in Illinois.

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Chad S. Beckett	Beckett Law Office PC	Urbana	217.328.0263	Class Act/Mass Tort Plaintiff; Close/Private Held; RE: Commercial; Trust/Will/Estate
Muriel Collison	Collison Law Offices Ltd	Champaign	217.751.4878	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation
John L. Barger	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Agriculture; Gov/Muni/Lobby/Admin; RE: Comm; RE: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate
Robert G. Grierson	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	AG; Banking/Finance Institution; Close/Private Held; RE: Residential; Trust/Will/Estate
R. Sean Hocking	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	PI Defense: General; Product Liability Def
J. Patrick Lee	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Criminal Def: DUI; Criminal Def: Felonies/Misdemeanors; Family; PI Defense: General
John F. Watson	Craig & Craig LLC	Mattoon	217.234.6481	Insurance/Insur Coverage/Reinsurance; Med Malpractice Def; PI Defense: General
Bruce L. Bonds	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Employment: Management; PI Defense: General; Workers' Compensation Defense
John D. Flodstrom	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Workers' Compensation Defense
Keith E. Fruehling	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Employment: Mgmt; Med Mal Def; PI Def: General; Product Liab Def; Prof'l Mal Def
Joseph K. Guyette	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	PI Defense: General; Prof'l Mal Def; Workers' Compensation Defense
Renee L. Monfort	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Health; Med Malpractice Def
Michael E. Raub	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Med Malpractice Def; PI Defense: General; Product Liability Def; Prof'l Mal Def
Brian M. Smith	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Civil Rights/Constitutional; Commercial Litigation; Employment: Management
Toney J. Tomaso	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Workers' Compensation Defense
Kenneth R. Torricelli	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	ADR: Personal Injury
Daniel P. Wurl	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Commercial Litigation; Insurance/Insur Coverage/Reinsurance; Med Malpractice Def
James D. Cottrell	James D. Cottrell Law Office PC	Champaign	217.693.4905	Agriculture; Close/Private Held; Land Use/Zoning; RE: Commercial; Trust/Will/Estate
Larry A. Apfelbaum	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Workers' Compensation
Todd A. Bresney	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1520	Personal Injury: General
Charles N. Edmiston II	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Workers' Compensation
William J. Harrington	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Personal Injury: General
Kathy A. Olivero	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Workers' Compensation
John J. Waldman	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Workers' Compensation
Richard P. Klaus	Klaus LeFebvre & Wince LLP	Champaign	217.337.4700	Civil Appellate; Commercial Litigation; Personal Injury Defense: General
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Rowan E. Themer	Schiro & Themer	Champaign	217.607.0750	Personal Injury: General; Workers' Compensation
William A. Peithmann	The Peithmann Law Office	Mahomet	217.586.6102	Agriculture; RE: Commercial; RE: Residential; Tax: Individual; Trust/Will/Estate
Denise Knipp Bates	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Elder; RE: Residential
James D. Green	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Insurance/Insurance Coverage/Reinsurance; PI Defense: General
Richard R. Harden	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Med Malpractice Def; PI Defense: General
Kenneth D. Reifsteck	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Civil Appellate; Workers' Compensation Defense
John M. Sturmanis	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Workers' Compensation Defense
Lott H. Thomas	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Trust/Will/Estate

These **EMERGING LAWYERS** have been identified by their peers to be among the **TOP LAWYERS** in Illinois who are age 40 or younger OR who have been admitted to the practice of law for 10 or fewer years.

Tyler J. Pratt	Heyl Royster	Champaign	217.344.0060	Med Mal Def; PI Def: Gen; Prof'l Mal Def; Transportation Def: Aviation/FELA/Maritime
Gina Couri-Cyphers	Kanoski Bresney	Champaign	217.356.1570	Personal Injury: General
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Eric S. Chovanec	Thomas Mamer LLP	Champaign	217.351.1500	Employment: Management; Labor: Management; Workers' Compensation Defense
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The interior of the Orchid & Vine plant shop that opened in July at Windsor Road in Champaign, next to Abbott's Florist.

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it gave them a chance to experience all four seasons. That enthusiasm is evident in Shelly's decorations.

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With the holiday season in full swing, we take a look at a great contest at a coffeehouse featured in the July-August issue; vegan gingerbread cookies; a signature peppermint martini; and tips on caring for houseplants over winter.

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Karen Devine lends her insight on decorating for Christmas when your budget is tight.

On our cover

A basket of Christmas cards sits in front of stockings hung with care on the fireplace at the home of Shelly and Steve Damore in Champaign.

Photo by
Robin Scholz

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Giving thanks



Though this issue is dedicated to all things Christmas, I want to give a shout-out to the holiday that sometimes feels like it gets lost in the shuffle: Thanksgiving.

I love this low-key holiday. It's all about spending time with family and friends and eating a good meal together, whether it's homemade, store-bought or at a restaurant. No running around frantically trying

to find the perfect gifts, no pressure to decorate, no holiday parties to attend, just good food and time with the people you love. And of course, giving some thought to what makes each of us thankful.

For those of you who have been counting down the days until Christmas since Labor Day, I hope this issue gets you into the holiday spirit. We divulge some pretty fantastic holiday food and drink recipes from two women who really know their stuff, give you the scoop on where to go for a Christmas tree if you want an experience and not just a transaction, and let you see how a local interior designer gets her house turned out for the holidays. Hint: it's as much about the process as the end result. We also feature a fun new plant shop that you might want to add to your list of places to shop for unique holiday gifts.

Finally, I had the opportunity to get a tour of the University of Illinois President's House, and I would be lying if I said I wasn't practically jumping up and down at the prospect. I've wanted to see inside that house for years, and it did not disappoint. Though they don't do public tours, you will get a pretty good idea of what it looks like thanks to the artistic eye of photographer Robin Scholz.

You'll also notice we have another talented writer to add to the fold. A big welcome to Janani Pattabi, one of The News-Gazette's most gifted High School Confidential correspondents. With an eye for detail and a clear talent for interviewing her subjects, Janani really brought her stories to life. I, for one, am thrilled to have her on board.

With that, I wish you all a tasty and relaxing Thanksgiving and a joyful holiday season!

Cheers!



A bathroom attached to one of the guestrooms at the University of Illinois President's House has the original pale-green hexagonal floor tiles laid when it was built in 1931.

— Carolyn



CAMPUS

*More than just a campus
as event center, s*

Story **Carolyn Maille-Petersen**  Photos **Robin Scholz**

URBANA

The University of Illinois President's House, though lovely, is more than just a pretty face.

It's an office, an event venue and a showcase for beautiful art, furniture and architecture. But maybe most important, it's a home, filled with memories of the families who have lived there over the decades.

The 14,000-square-foot home on Florida Avenue in Urbana was completed in 1931. It was designed by University of Illinois supervising architect James White and prominent New York City architect Charles Platt and approved by the UI Board of Trustees.

Trustees also chose the location for the home, situating it near a swath of land the horticulture department was developing as a laboratory for students and staff, and that is now the site of the Idea Garden, Arboretum and Japan House.

Built in the Georgian Revival style to complement other buildings on the south end of campus, its construction was not without controversy. Completed in the midst of the Great Depression, there was pushback from the general public, who felt it was an unnecessarily extravagant expenditure. Though the home was paid for with income generated by the university and not state funds, that was small consolation to the people who were suffering under the weight of a catastrophic economic downturn.

The home has hosted 13 UI presidents and their families since its completion. Much like the White House, there are public and private portions of the home, and the family has the run of the residence while living there. There are no public tours for this reason, but it does play host to a variety of events throughout the year, giving lucky guests a glimpse of the classic interior.



PUS JEWEL

*a residence, UI President's House serves
showcase of architecture, interior design*



The formal drawing room at the University of Illinois President's House. The French doors lead to the half-moon-shaped solarium.
INSET: Embossed paper towels in the powder room.

The home is symmetrical in design, with a solarium and formal drawing room on the east end of the main floor, and the first lady's sitting room and library in the center, with views of the backyard. On the west end of the main floor are the formal dining room, private dining room, private kitchen and catering kitchen. It is all connected by a wide, spacious hallway with the original herringbone-patterned wood floor, creamy-white paneled walls, Ionic pillars and classic dentil crown molding.

At the center of the main floor is the front entrance, with a curved staircase sweeping overhead to a spacious open landing. From there is a panoramic view out the second-floor picture window to the flower-filled front yard. The east end of the second floor features three guest bedrooms, one of which features an ornate antique roll-top desk. The desk was purchased in 1874 and used in the regent's office for years before eventually finding its way to the President's House.

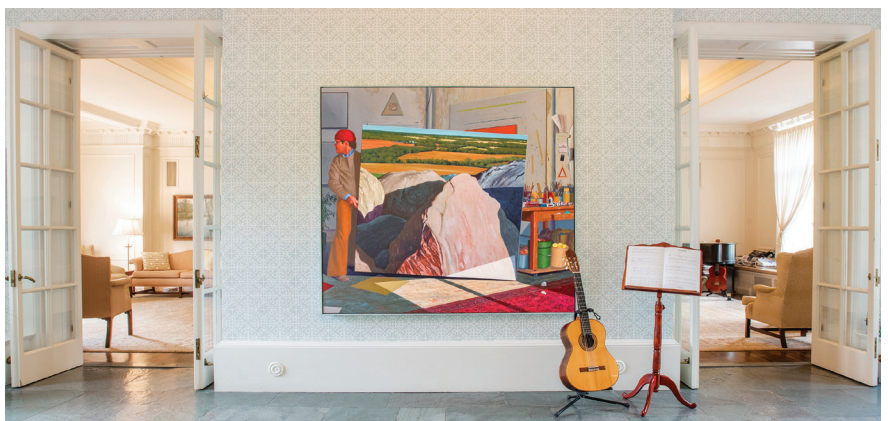
All three guest bedrooms include en-suite bathrooms with some of their original features, from the pale-green hexagonal floor tiles in one to the original salmon-colored floor and shower tiles in the other. The west end is the family's private space, with two bedrooms that mirror the larger of the three guestrooms on the other end, as well as two smaller bedrooms next to the service staircase.

In addition to hiring the architects, trustees also commissioned the Chicago-based interior design firm Watson & Boaler Inc. to conceptualize the style and placement of furniture for the home. Much of it is still in use today, with some of the most notable pieces being the dining-room table and chairs and the ornate burled-wood side buffet, which has stood in the same spot in the formal dining room since 1931.

The chair-seat covers received a face-lift in 1984 thanks to Judith Ikenberry, wife of former President Stanley Ikenberry (1979-1995, 2010), and the Illini Stitchers. Judith Ikenberry was the driving force behind the project.

"One of my most cherished memories," she says, "was leading a group of Illini needle-pointers to use their stitching talent in making covers for the house's 24 reproduction Chippendale dining-room chairs."

Each cover was stitched by a different individual and represents a native Illinois wildflower. It is estimated that each stitcher spent an average of 390 hours completing his or her seat cover.





**CLOCKWISE
FROM LEFT:** The
half-moon-shaped
solarium is filled
with houseplants,
sheet music and
UI President Tim
Killeen's guitar; a
view of the Georgian
Revival home from
the backyard; the
curved staircase;
and the view of the
first and second
floors from the
staircase.





A wood-paneled library off the main hallway on the first floor.

Though it is a working residence, there are personal touches throughout, with many of the former inhabitants leaving their mark. Current President Timothy Killeen, who has been in the post since 2015, and his wife, Roberta Johnson Killeen, have filled the home with books, music, art and a few intricate Lego creations, including a replica of the Titanic that the Killeens built with their children.

The library, located in the heart of the main floor, is a favorite room for the Killeens. With its cozier size, warm honey-colored wood-panel walls, black-and-white marble fireplace, book-lined walls and beautiful views of the expansive, tree-filled backyard, it beckons family and friends alike. Candid photos of the Killeen family are interspersed amongst the books along with small framed photos of every president and

his wife who have lived in the home.

When the Killeens moved in, as with every other family who came before them, they hung their own art, ranging from an elegant crane print in the formal dining room to an intricately stitched tapestry in one of the guest bedrooms. They also had the opportunity to choose pieces from the Krannert Art Museum collection to display in their new home.

Dena Bagger, director of special events for the president's office, said curators at the museum gather a variety of items from their collection that can handle the conditions of the home and that fit the available spaces. Then the sitting president and their spouse can select what they wish to display during their time in the home.

Some of the pieces that were done by Illinois artists have stayed with the house through the terms of several presidents, including two oil paintings of cornfields by Harry Breen of Champaign in the library, a watercolor painting of yellow lilies by Charlotte Nesmith Brady of Seymour in the upstairs hallway, a wall-sized self portrait by Kenneth Holder of Bloomington in the solarium, and at least two paintings by Judith Ikenberry that hang in the kitchen and the first lady's waiting room.

There is also a large collection of china and silver in a built-in display case in the formal dining room. The simple floral-print china belongs to the Killeens, but the monogrammed silver tea sets were donated to the UI by the Zuppke and Beckman families.



ABOVE: A Lego model of the Titanic that the Killeens built with their children sits on display. **BELOW LEFT:** One of the needlepoint seat covers on the 24 Chipendale dining-room chairs completed by members of the Illini Stitches in 1984 in a project led by then-President Stanley Ikenberry's wife, Judith. **BELOW RIGHT:** A book with an original drawing of the burled-wood side buffet that has stood in the formal dining room since the house was built in 1931.



Though not on display, there is also a set of simple ivory-colored china rimmed in teal and gold from 1931 that is original to the home.

"When we have a small dinner party, we pull that out," Bagger says.

Next to the formal dining room is a smaller, private dining room. At the west end of the room is a faux window with an idyllic view of a flower garden surrounded by trees and fields, but that wasn't always the case.

"When the Ikenberrys lived here, they had their boys and their family dinner there," says Bagger, adding that Judith Ikenberry often sat in the chair that faced a blank wall. "She got tired of it," Bagger continues, and commissioned a local artist to paint a "window," and families have been enjoying the improved view ever since.

At the other end of the house is another space favored by the Killeens. The half-moon-shaped solarium with its green slate floor and French doors leading to sunny patios on the side and back of the house is light and airy and filled with houseplants, sheet music and Killeen's guitar. It is also home to four stained-glass panels depicting flora and fauna based on the UI gardens. Commissioned by former President Robert Easter (2012-2015) and his wife, Cheryl, as a gift to the university, it was designed by Nan Goggin, former professor and director of the UI School of Art and Design, and executed by her husband, Ron Sentowski.

There is also a third floor and a basement, though they don't get as much use.

The third floor acted as one of Killeen's impromptu office spaces during the pandemic, Bagger says, but previous residents used it as their private retreat.



A hidden door in the hallway on the first floor leads to a powder room.

There are multiple bedrooms, a sewing room, two bathrooms and storage space, offering plenty of room to host a large number of official guests as well as friends and family. The Ikenberrys' two sons had their bedrooms on the third floor, and the Easters' grandchildren stayed there when they came to visit.

"Our oldest granddaughter loved claiming a third-floor bedroom, and she had her 12th birthday party at the house," Cheryl Easter says.

The Easters' grandchildren were "amazed at the size of the house the first time they visited," Cheryl says, "and enjoyed deciding where they would sleep."

Hide and seek was popular inside the house as was the Easter egg hunt they held out in the yard.

"They were not always able to find all the eggs, and months later, Rodney (the groundskeeper) would discover one when he was mowing," she says.

Of course, the backyard has been the site of many family and university events besides egg hunts.

"The house is beautifully sited on 6 acres, and those acres provided places for large Illini tent parties and our sons' football games," Judith Ikenberry says.

Mary White, wife of former President B. Joseph White (2005-09), has fond memories of the many "planned events and impromptu moments" at the home.

"Hosting the opening receptions of Ebertfest stands out," she says. In particular, the opening night of "My Fair Lady" came to mind. "On a gorgeous evening, with Roger and Chaz (Ebert) in attendance, women arrived wearing extraordinary hats like those in the famous (Royal) Ascot scene in the film."

The Whites also recall the night they hosted a spur-of-the-moment dinner party for Sheila Johnson, an alumna who was being honored by the UI School of Music. They were unable to book a last-minute restaurant reservation, so the Whites hosted Johnson and her family and friends at the President's House.

"Staff had all gone home for the night," recall the Whites. "Mary rushed to Schnucks and bought the ingredients for dinner for 20. An hour later, we and



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The seat at the private dining room that faces the mural that Judith Ikenberry commissioned a local artist to paint after she got tired of looking at a blank wall; the built-in china cabinet; photos of Harry Chase, president at the time the house was built in 1931, and his wife, Lucetta.

the whole gang were cooking away -- at the grill, in the kitchen, setting the table -- while someone was playing the grand piano in the living room. Dinner was relaxed, convivial and memorable. A good time was had by all!"

The grand piano in the drawing room features in a Killeen family memory as well. In 2018, the Killeens hosted former U.S. President Barack Obama at the house, where he was presented with the Paul H. Douglas Award.

"It was an immense honor, and such an exciting time here as we prepared for that special day," Roberta says. "We were delighted that our son, Cormac Killeen, had the chance to serve as the pianist for the ceremony. When Tim thanked Cormac in his remarks as the event was underway, we had a chance to capture a photo of President Obama applauding Cormac -- which is priceless for us!"

Of course, a house and yard of this size and importance to the university requires a lot of care and upkeep, which is done by a dedicated crew of people who clean

the house, tend to the grounds and plan events. Cheryl Easter sums it up: "It is not possible to think about the house without remembering the wonderful staff that worked there," a sentiment echoed by other former residents.

Grand in scale and design, the UI President's House was built with many purposes in mind, from hosting large public events to intimate family gatherings. Its spacious main floor has welcomed thousands of guests, from Mannie Jackson and Governor Vaughn, Fighting Illini basketball's first African American lettermen, to former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt; its private spaces have been home to countless presidents and their families.

Every family leaves with indelible memories of their time there, as do the many visitors who have passed through its doors.

"The President's House has served presidents' families, students, staff, alumni and the people of Illinois in countless public and private ways," Judith Ikenberry says. "It is a beautiful working treasure."



ABOVE: Overton Tree Farm in rural Mattoon. **BELOW:** Hager Tree Farm in rural Ashmore.

Trimming the TREE



Story **Carolyn Maille-Petersen**



Photos **Provided**

Do you dream of piling into the car with your children and driving to the country to pick out the perfect Christmas tree? Turn the page to see two places in the area that can make that dream come true.

HAGER TREE FARM

Hager Tree Farm in rural Ashmore offers families the option of cutting down their own tree or choosing from a large selection of premium pre-cut trees they have brought in from Michigan and North Carolina, say owners Jeri and Dan Hager.

Established in 1994, the farm has become a yearly destination for families in the area, Jeri says. In an average year, they have about 200-300 trees available to cut directly from their fields, another 800-900 pre-cut trees, as well as freshly made wreaths and garland. There are also ball-and-burlap trees for sale, which can be used as Christmas trees and then planted in the ground after the holidays.

For people who choose to cut their own, Hager provides tools and supplies, from saws to twine. However, if someone isn't comfortable cutting their own, an employee will do it for them.

Once the hard work of choosing (and cutting down!) a tree is done, families can grab a cup of complimentary hot cocoa or homemade wassail, cookies and popcorn, and warm themselves around one of three fire pits.

Owning a tree farm is hard work, as every proprietor will tell you. There is work to be done year round, from planting new trees to fertilizing, spraying for pests, and maybe most importantly to the average consumer, trimming the trees to give them that quintessential Christmas-tree shape.

Some of the area tree farms that have closed were victims of the pandemic and a lack of help to get all the work done. But thankfully for the Hagers, it is a family operation, and their grown children help out when needed, so they haven't had to rely on outside help to get the work done. 

FYI: Hager Tree Farm opened for the season Nov. 19. It is located at 9791 North County Road 2250 East in Ashmore.

More information: 217-349-8689, hagertreefarm.com.



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OVERTON TREE FARM



The Overtons, from left: Lilly, Sophie, Cody and Brooks.

Overton Tree Farm in rural Mattoon is also a family-run business, but they are new on the scene this year.

Cody and Sophie Overton have been working on their dream for the last six years, and it is finally coming to fruition.

“My husband grew up getting a real tree every year,” says Sophie, and as self-professed lovers of all things Christmas, opening a tree farm wasn’t a stretch. They already live on a farm where they grow corn and soybeans, so adding Christmas trees to the mix made sense. After all, “Christmas trees are a crop.”

Growing and selling Christmas trees is also the Overtons’ way of literally “keeping it real,” she says.

They want to “push on the natural thing” and encourage people to buy real trees. When artificial trees are thrown away, they don’t decompose, she says, instead staying in landfills “for centuries.”

“Our tree farm is going to be more than just getting a tree,” Sophie says. “We want families to come and start traditions.”



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Although their farm won’t be able to let people cut their own trees for a few years since theirs are only a foot tall, they will be bringing in pre-cut trees for families to buy.

As the parents of two young children – Lilly, 10, and Brooks, 8 -- they very much wanted to give families a place to make memories. They will be offering activities such as face painting, caroling with Santa one weekend, food and drinks, as well as a gift shop where visitors can purchase fresh wreaths, garland, Christmas ornaments, stockings and more. The goal is to give families a chance to spend time together and get into the spirit of the season, and if Sophie’s cheery outlook is any indicator, the spirit of the season will be on full display for families who venture out their way. 

FYI: Overton Tree Farm opened Nov. 19. It is open Friday through Sunday at 9700 East County Road 550 North in Mattoon.

More information: 217-246-6480 or facebook.com/overtontreefarm.





Home for

After moving from the California
Shelly and Steve Damore are



ABOVE: Santa looks over a wall of family photos at the home of Shelly and Steve Damore in Champaign. **LEFT:** The festive dining room is all set for a holiday feast.

Story **Carolyn Maille-Petersen** § Photos **Robin Scholz**

CHAMPAIGN

Moving from coastal California to central Illinois in the dead of winter may sound crazy to some, but for Shelly Damore and her husband, Steve, it was one of the best choices they ever made.

They moved to Champaign in January 2016 for Steve's new job as a radiation oncologist at Christie Clinic. Though some people might have bemoaned the cold and snow, they were excited to move somewhere with four distinct seasons and where sweaters and a cup of hot chocolate smothered in marshmallows are commonplace.

The Damores have embraced not only the winter weather, but also the joys of a more stereotypical Christmas, even when Mother Nature doesn't give us that coveted blanket of fluffy snow on the holiday.

It comes as no surprise then that Christmas at the Damore house is quite the extravaganza. Shelly and Steve and their youngest son, Brenden, live in a classic French Revival home on Country Lane behind the Champaign Country Club that Shelly, an interior designer, completely renovated.

for the holidays

ifornia coast to Champaign-Urbana in the dead of winter, are happy to embrace a place with four distinct seasons







A festive bulldog in the kitchen is emblematic of Shelly Damore's traditional-yet-unexpected decorating style.

At the holidays, their home is transformed into a festive and inviting showcase.

Shelly, owner of D'Amore Designs, loves decorating for Christmas.

"I'll do a few hours here and a few hours there," she says. For her, decorating isn't a chore; it's a time to reminisce and savor the memories.

Though she uses the same decorations from year to year, she doesn't put them in the same place in her home.

"I use the same base, and then I usually change it up a bit," she says. "I have fun with it. Otherwise, I get bored."

Her home, done in a palette of neutrals, provides the perfect base for decorating at Christmas or any time of year. Decorative pillows are a favorite accent no matter the season. At the holidays, she uses throws and pillows in traditional red, white and green to set the tone, and adds from there.

Of course, a Christmas tree is the icing on the cake for anyone who loves to decorate for the holidays, but in the Damore house, one tree is not enough. Multiple trees are scattered throughout the main floor, each with its own theme.

Where she chooses to place various decorations depends on the style of the room. Her entryway is more formal, she says, with its black-and-white checkered floor and curved staircase.

"I like to have (the staircase) with a more formal look to it, so I change up the ribbon and things like that," she says.

The entryway is also home to one of her favorite pieces: a black-and-white harlequin-checkered moose head that greets visitors as they come through the front door. Flanked on either side by small white reindeer heads with golden antlers, it sets the tone for Shelly's decorating style, which is traditional, yet unexpected. The entryway is also home to her most formal tree, decorated with her House of Hatten collectible Santa ornaments.

Walk through the sitting room or the living room and you'll find stockings hanging jauntily from the fireplaces, faux cranberries wreathing the light fixtures and Santas of all shapes and sizes scattered throughout.

In the dining room, the rustic antique table she found on one of her trips to Paris is always ready for company. Covered in a



red plaid tablecloth, it is set with a mixture of tableware to keep it from feeling too formal. Crystal stemware and heirloom silver flatware are juxtaposed with the rattan placemats and pewter chargers topped by fanciful reindeer plates given to the Damores by Shelly's sister.

Atop the plates are black watch plaid cloth napkins and sprigs of fresh greenery and faux cranberries spilling out of antique sterling silver napkin rings given to them by Steve's mom. To complete the festive look, garland drapes from the center of the dining room to the four corners, and a sweet-faced Santa perches on the candelabra to keep an eye on everyone.



LEFT: A black-and-white harlequin-checked moose head greets visitors in the main entryway. **ABOVE:** One of the many Christmas trees of all sizes found throughout the house.



To the west of the dining room is the bar area, with a tabletop Christmas tree decorated in felt ornaments. To the south is the open-concept kitchen and family room where the most important tree in the house is located: the one that holds all the ornaments made by the Damores' three children — Bailey, 22, Sophia, 20, and Brenden, 17 — over the last two decades.

Shelly loves this tree, smiling and pointing out the ornaments filled with handprints and footprints of various sizes and others with school photos pasted to them.

"The kids' handmade ornaments are my absolute favorite," she says. In addition, "I do have certain ornaments that I pull out, and I remember the people who gave them to me." She has one friend she calls every Christmas when she pulls out the ornament the friend gave her.

Shelly and Steve's children have also written them numerous thank-you notes at Christmastime, and some of those come out every year as well.

"I'll put their funny notes out in a basket or something as décor," she says.

She also puts all the Christmas cards they receive into a separate basket, and they go through the cards as a family on a night when they're all together: "We love doing that."

Though Shelly is not one to scrap her Christmas decorations from year to year, she's also not one to put them in the exact same spot. With the exception of her harlequin moose, she is always changing up the locations.

"I'm constantly thinking how I can refresh my house and change a little thing here and a little thing there," she says, whether it's Christmas baubles, pieces of furniture or decorative items. "I move things around, and I just have fun with it. I try to use what I have."

When decorating, she tries to work from the top to the bottom of the room, she says, with garland as the top note and presents wrapped in coordinated Christmas paper and fancy ribbon scattered underneath the various trees as the base note.

In both her holiday and everyday decorating, Shelly is big on mixing and matching, with her furnishings and accessories coming from flea markets and estate sales around the globe. Aside from the fact that antiques are unique and can't be found mass-produced at retail stores, Shelly likes them for another reason: "I don't get upset if they get a little bruised." They're already worn, so there's no fear of scratching or denting them, she says.

Not an impulsive buyer, she is also willing to wait until she finds exactly what she wants.

"I would rather have a space empty until the right piece comes along," she says.

But she also believes in going with your gut when you see something you like: "I think if you love something and you see it, if you buy it, you're going to use it."

The Damores' home, bedecked with Christmas decorations collected through the years and placed thoughtfully throughout their home, tells the story of their lives together. From the ornaments gifted to them by family and friends to the funny and earnest notes their kids have written to them through the years, their home brims with Christmas cheer and fond memories.

And you can bet they're reveling in the opportunity to bundle up in something warm and cozy and drink hot chocolate around the tree while they wait for snow. 

SEASON'S GREETINGS!

As we enter one of the favorite times of year, here's a few ways to eat, drink and be merry

1. LATTE ART THROWDOWN

Story **Carolyn Maille-Petersen**



Photos **Isaac Mitchell**

After the July-August issue featured one of Champaign-Urbana's hidden gems, BrewLab Coffee, and its sister store, BakeLab, I was asked to be one of three judges for BrewLab's inaugural Latte Art Throwdown on a Sunday in October.

Full disclosure, I am not a coffee connoisseur.

I love it, but know very little about it or latte art, but store manager

Harry Alexander Krigel assured me that did not matter. This was about aesthetics and going with my gut, he said.

That evening, I joined a festive crowd packed into BrewLab's campus location. I had the chance to see some fabulous



At Home Editor Carolyn Maille-Petersen, second from right, and the other judges of BrewLab's inaugural Latte Art Throwdown debate during a round of the competition.

and original latte art. But even more fun was seeing how many talented baristas there are in this town and how enthusiastic the coffee community is about these young adults who take pride not only in making a good cup of coffee, but making it pretty in the process.

The event was fast and furious — 22 contestants from local coffee shops went head to head until it was narrowed down to six people in the third and final round. The technical prowess displayed by the baristas was impressive, but what was even more

impressive was the supportive atmosphere.

From the green-haired spectator with the sparkly silver pom poms cheering on the baristas by name to the competitors all grinning and laughing and hugging one another when the throwdown ended, there was no lack of goodwill and camaraderie between competitors.

This was not the first special event held at BrewLab, and it won't be the last. They also do interactive workshops where you can learn about different methods of brewing and sample different types of coffee. If coffee is your passion, or even if it's just a mild interest, keep your eyes peeled on social media for future workshops and throwdowns. You won't be disappointed. 



The work of three of the 22 entrants in the contest is shown on the judges' table.



Winners with their prizes.

2. CHRISTMAS COOKIES

Story **Janani Pattabi**



Photos **Robin Scholz**

URBANA

With the holidays come traditions: Family time, winter activities and the promise of presents.

However, we can't forget one of the most important aspects — food!

Nothing makes this time more magical than enjoying fresh-buttered rolls or a slice of pie. But many of these festive foods share one thing in common: gluten, restricting most versions from a significant portion of the population that has celiac disease or gluten intolerance. This is where RegCakes steps in to save the day.

RegCakes is the region's only brick-and-mortar, dedicated gluten-free bakery. Located in Urbana's Lincoln Square Mall, RegCakes serves a variety of baked goods ranging from cakes to croissants to chewy cookies, and even fresh slices of pizza on Saturdays.

"People with celiac disease or gluten intolerance may not feel comfortable eating the gluten-free options at other places ... (since) there's the risk of contamination," says owner Regina Johnson.

The bakery's goal has always been to offer gluten-free versions of everyone's favorite foods.

"We know that the people who come here are not necessarily (looking for) offbeat, wild flavors," she says. They "want the things that they miss."

RegCakes was born from a love of sweets and a need for accessibility. Johnson was a professional cake decorator 15 years ago but put her business on hold in 2010 to raise her four children. Around the same time, she developed a gluten allergy herself. In 2015, when she decided to reopen a bakery, she realized she couldn't sell things she wouldn't be able to taste. So, she started working on creating a cake that could compare with its gluten-containing counterparts in both taste and shelf life.

She reopened her decorating shop out of her home but soon moved from



cake decoration to general desserts. RegCakes, a "pandemic baby" as Johnson calls it, made major strides from 2019 through 2022.

"Because we were a food-service operation, we were able to stay open," Johnson says. "All we have ever known is pandemic life, so I have nothing to compare to. I only hope that things will continue growing."

Johnson hopes to be able to expand her business to offer all things cake-related. She would love to have a larger variety of ready-made cakes along with candles, cake toppers and sprinkles for further customer customization. Along with that, she would love to offer classes on gluten-free baking, cake decorating and even ones about running a small business for teenagers.

RegCakes has some annual favorites coming back for the holidays: Dinner rolls, red velvet and mint chocolate cupcakes, and snickerdoodle cookies. New on the menu is brioche dinner rolls. They will also be selling gingerbread house kits.

Cinnamon rolls are always a hit during holidays as Johnson said many of her customers couldn't find gluten-free versions before RegCakes.

"That just makes me delighted to be able to give people the confidence to serve cinnamon rolls to their family, grandkids,

and friends that have celiac disease and they don't know what to do," Johnson says.

For those looking to include more gluten-free baking in their lives, Johnson advises lots of trial and error.

"A lot of our best recipes are things we stumbled upon because we screwed up ... (and) it turned into 'Wait a minute, there's something about this new accident that I really like, let's try that again.'" Johnson explains.

She emphasizes the importance of creating flour blends that have starches, proteins and gums that are also specialized to different types of desserts: "We blend about six kinds of flour on our own with all the different components ... they're all a little different, and that's part of what makes the products really good."

For those looking to replicate RegCakes' magic at home, the bakery has offered its recipe for vegan gingerbread cookies. It's well-loved by bakers for its deliciously spicy flavor and easy prep and cooking.

Johnson is grateful for the support she's received from customers.

"We just love being a part of what they're doing with their families, and their friends and their communities and their schools," she says. "They're absolutely the base and the foundation of everything that we do."



RegCakes owner Regina Johnson
with her Vegan Gingerbread Cookies.



GLUTEN-FREE/ VEGAN GINGERBREAD COOKIES

3½ cups all-purpose
gluten-free flour
¾ cup packed brown sugar
¼ cup white sugar
¾ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon ginger
1 tablespoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon cloves
12 tablespoons vegan
margarine
¾ cup molasses
2 tablespoons water

Combine all dry ingredients
in bowl of a heavy-duty
mixer. Cut cool/room-
temperature margarine
into chunks and carefully
incorporate (start slow, then
speed up).

Add molasses and water;
mix very thoroughly. (Do not
worry about over-mixing!)

Dough will be very thick. If
it proves too thick for rolling
out, add additional water
1 tablespoon at a time.

Cookies roll out well without
much flour. Roll dough
directly onto a lightly-floured
countertop (don't forget
to use gluten-free flour),
or between two sheets
of parchment paper with
no flour, to about ¼-inch
thickness. Cut with cookie
cutters and transfer to a
parchment-lined (or lightly
greased) cookie sheet.

Bake at 350 degrees for
about 10-12 minutes. Cool
on pan or transfer to a rack.

To ice, we like to dip their
"faces" in a glaze made of
powdered sugar, water and
a few drops of real vanilla.
The glaze can be tinted,
and you can add sprinkles
right away, before it forms
a dry crust.

Cookies age well when
stored in an airtight
container at room
temperature.



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3. MERRY MARTINI

Story **Carolyn Maille-Petersen**



Photo **Robin Scholz**



Urbana Country Club bartender Lesley Lustig pours one of her signature peppermint martinis.

URBANA

Planning on hosting a holiday party this year? Don't get bogged down in the kitchen making drinks!

With a little planning and prep work, you can dazzle your guests with festive holiday cocktails that don't require your constant presence.

Lesley Lustig, seasoned bartender at the Urbana Country Club, has some tips for all you holiday merry

makers out there. She has been bartending for 35 years, 29 of them at the country club, so you can trust that she knows a thing or two about how to pull off drinks for a crowd.

When she begins thinking about cocktails for the country club's annual holiday party, there is a lot to consider, from ingredients to appearance to ease of creating in batches. These same factors also figure into holiday parties at home.

"Make sure you have simple

ingredients," is her first recommendation. "You don't want a cocktail that has 10 ingredients, because you'll be sitting there making a drink more than enjoying your guests."

She suggests no more than three ingredients per drink. Prepping the garnishes in advance also saves time for hosts, as does prepping the glasses and mixing up some of the ingredients and storing the mixture in the refrigerator until needed. If you are

putting sugar or salt around the rim, you can do that in small batches just ahead of the party and periodically throughout the event.

Since Lustig always has a martini bar for the holiday party, she begins by working with the foundations of a typical martini: gin or vodka.

"I would have one of each kind," she recommends. "I've also made martinis with bourbon. You kind of think of the taste palates of people."



LESLEY LUSTIG'S PEPPERMINT MARTINI

- 1 ounce white-chocolate liqueur
 - 3/4 ounce vodka
 - 1 ounce peppermint schnapps
 - 1 ounce buttermilk for rim
 - Christmas sprinkles
- Dip rim of a chilled martini glass into buttermilk, then into sprinkles. Set aside.
 - Add white-chocolate liqueur, vodka and schnapps to a shaker with ice.
 - Shake and strain into glass. Enjoy!



magical.

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One thing you don't need to think about though, is pairing it with food. Unlike wine, martinis don't pair better with certain types of food. You just want a variety in flavor and appearance.

"Color also helps," she says. "You don't want your whole martini bar to be red, unless that's the theme." Lesley tries to do red, green, brown, pink and white when choosing her martinis.

She is famous for her mini martinis, which comes as no surprise when you listen to the thought that goes into it each year.

"I try to come up with ones that have curb appeal," she says, such as a s'mores martini with a lit marshmallow. "Even the people who don't like real sweet martinis tend to go for that."

Espresso martinis are another crowd pleaser. Her most

requested martini though, is peppermint.

"I do that every year," she says. Most people just use vodka and peppermint schnapps, "but we kind of mix it up a little bit."

To make hers stand apart, she adds Godiva white-chocolate liqueur. For curb appeal, she coats the rim in buttermilk and dips it in colorful Christmas sprinkles. To keep things moving, Lustig prepares portions of the martinis in advance and keeps the mix chilled so that all she has to do is shake up a small batch and pour it into glasses.

This same approach works for home parties, as well. With fewer ingredients and pre-made garnishes, she says, "all you have to do is shake, strain and plop it in the glass."

And now you can wow your friends when you whip up a batch of Lesley's peppermint martinis. 

4. BRANCHING OUT

Story **Janani Pattabi**



Photos **Robin Scholz**

CHAMPAIGN

Houseplants are a wonderful way to add a pop of color to any room and can be a perfect accent to a more neutral color scheme. They're elegant, cozy and loads of fun.

For seasoned plant enthusiasts or "green" beginners, Champaign's Orchid & Vine is worth a look.

The plant store at 1123 Windsor Road had its grand opening in July. Run by plant enthusiast and expert Lisa Duitsman, it aims to procure exotic and hard-to-find plants for collectors and community members. The store's method for sourcing plants mainly comes from observing trends and finding out what people are interested in.

Orchid and Vine often asks its Facebook followers whether they're interested in specific rare varieties before buying. Along with that, the store has a "potting bench" for customers to either re-pot a plant they own or to select a container and pot a newly purchased plant. The store also sells a variety of "plant-y" things, as Duitsman calls them, like containers, journals, candles and glass terrariums.

Duitsman's experience with plants has deep roots, as she's been a florist for 28 years and runs the adjacent flower shop, Abbott's Florist. Orchid and Vine was born out of her desire to expand further in her plant journey.

"We carry a lot of basic plants at the flower shop, but I wanted to expand it and get into ... more unusual" plants, Duitsman said. "The space became available, so I took advantage of it."

Orchid and Vine prides itself on being able to provide unique plants for the more adventurous plant parent. If "fussy" plants are up your alley, then you'll love their gorgeous Hawaiian orchids imported directly from the state; temperamental Alocasias; and the selection of carnivorous plants.

However, for someone looking to get into the plant community or simply wanting something low maintenance to add a touch of life to their home, Duitsman recommends the Sansevieria plants.

"You buy it ... you ignore it, and it thrives," she says.

Cacti are also a great option for beginners.

"You just let them have good sun and you don't have to water them too much," she says. "They do their own thing. Anybody's house could handle a cactus."

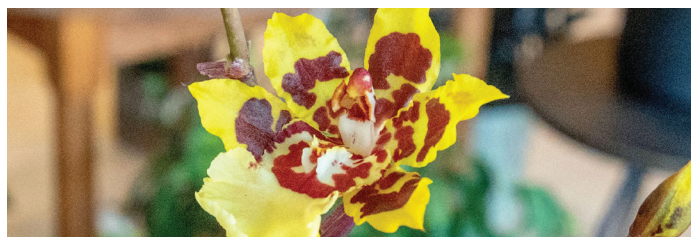
As the weather chills, many houseplant owners may be wondering how to care for their plants. Duitsman says observation is any plant parent's best friend.

"Your houseplants may like a bit more humidity during the winter, so placing them on a saucer of rocks with water in the bottom can help," she says. "Also, most plants, like people, are comfortable in daytime temperatures between 65 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit and nighttime temps above 50 degrees Fahrenheit. To provide that for your plants, keep them away from both cold drafts and sources of



ABOVE: Orchid & Vine owner Lisa Duitsman creates a terrarium at her plant shop at 1123 Windsor Road in Champaign.

BELOW: A wildcat orchid for sale at the shop.



heat such as radiators, ovens, fireplaces and electronic devices."

Research can also help with managing houseplants during winter. Finding specifics on what your plant needs concerning sunlight and watering cycles can help them last.

"Each plant is different. You need to learn about your plant and tend to them individually," Duitsman says. "You can't treat them all the same and expect them to do well."

With the holiday season upon us, Orchid and Vine has begun offering more terrarium workshops. The workshops were a big part of why Orchid and Vine came to be, as Duitsman wanted a space for them to happen.

"We had dabbled in it a little bit at the flower shop over the years and everybody always loved them," she explains. But, "it meant moving things and rearranging for each workshop, so the inspiration was to just have more space."

Anyone can sign up for the workshops either through the store's website or by phone. For a flat fee, attendees receive a container, potting soil and an array of plants and decorations to choose from when they arrive.

"Everybody's (terrarium) turns out a little different, but that's part of the fun," Duitsman says. "Seeing how everybody takes similar materials but makes something unique that they like."

The adult workshops now offer wine catered by the nearby Sun Singer restaurant and wine shop, but they also offer workshops for children, usually on Saturdays. If people are interested in private events, Orchid and Vine can also set up workshops for birthday parties, bachelorette parties or date nights. They hope to put together a "winter-themed" terrarium workshop, complete with blooming bulb plants and small fir trees.

Terrariums can be a great way for gardeners with outdoor plants to continue their hobby during the winter

"Terrariums are nice ... because it feels like you're still gardening and growing things but in your house." Duitsman says.

If you try to make one at home, she has a few tips. First, she recommends going with an open terrarium as opposed to a closed one because it's easier to water and more interactive. Plant selection is also crucial.

"You want to have plants that require the same type of watering," she explains. "You don't want to put a fern in with a cactus or a fern with a succulent, because their watering needs are completely different." 🌵



ABOVE: Air plants are shown on a branch hanging over a humorous sign pointing out the cacti below at Orchid & Vine.
BELOW: A mermaid-tail cactus for sale at the shop.



An advertisement for A to Z Painting & Decorating, Inc. The background is a light blue gradient. On the left, a person's arm in a blue long-sleeved shirt is visible, holding a yellow-handled paintbrush. The text "A to Z" is in large, bold, black letters at the top. Below it, "Painting & Decorating, Inc." is in a smaller black font. Further down, the phone number "217-643-2600" and email "mjt013160@gmail.com" are listed, followed by the website "atozpaintinganddecorating.com". Below this, the text "A Complete Painting & Decorating Service" and "Interior & Exterior Residential & Commercial" is displayed. At the bottom left, there is a circular gold seal with a laurel wreath border, containing the text "2022 The News-Gazette The People's Choice". At the very bottom, a green textured surface is visible, and the text "Serving the greater Champaign-Urbana Area" is partially shown.

Ask the expert

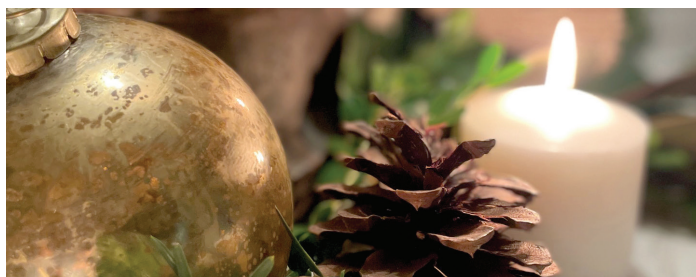
Q: How can I decorate for Christmas on a small budget??

A: With stores overflowing with expensive Christmas decorations and themes that change every year, it's hard to imagine decorating without shelling out a lot of cash. But you can! Just look to nature.

Bringing in natural greenery from evergreens, magnolia leaves, pine cones, acorns and even feathers can create a festive mood in your home. By spending a little bit of money on ribbon and lights as well as simple white candles, you can create a beautiful wreath, table centerpiece and/or mantle decoration that will enliven your home and make it feel very festive.

So, go forage in your yard, your friends' yards or the nearby woods and gather greenery. Then festoon your home with your woodland finds, twinkling white lights, candles and possibly a collected bauble or two, and you will be guaranteed to have a joyous holiday season. *JD*

Karen Devine, owner of Devine Designs and a member of Central Illinois Business magazine's Forty Under 40 Class of 2011, answers reader questions each issue. Submit them at karendevine@yahoo.com.





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