

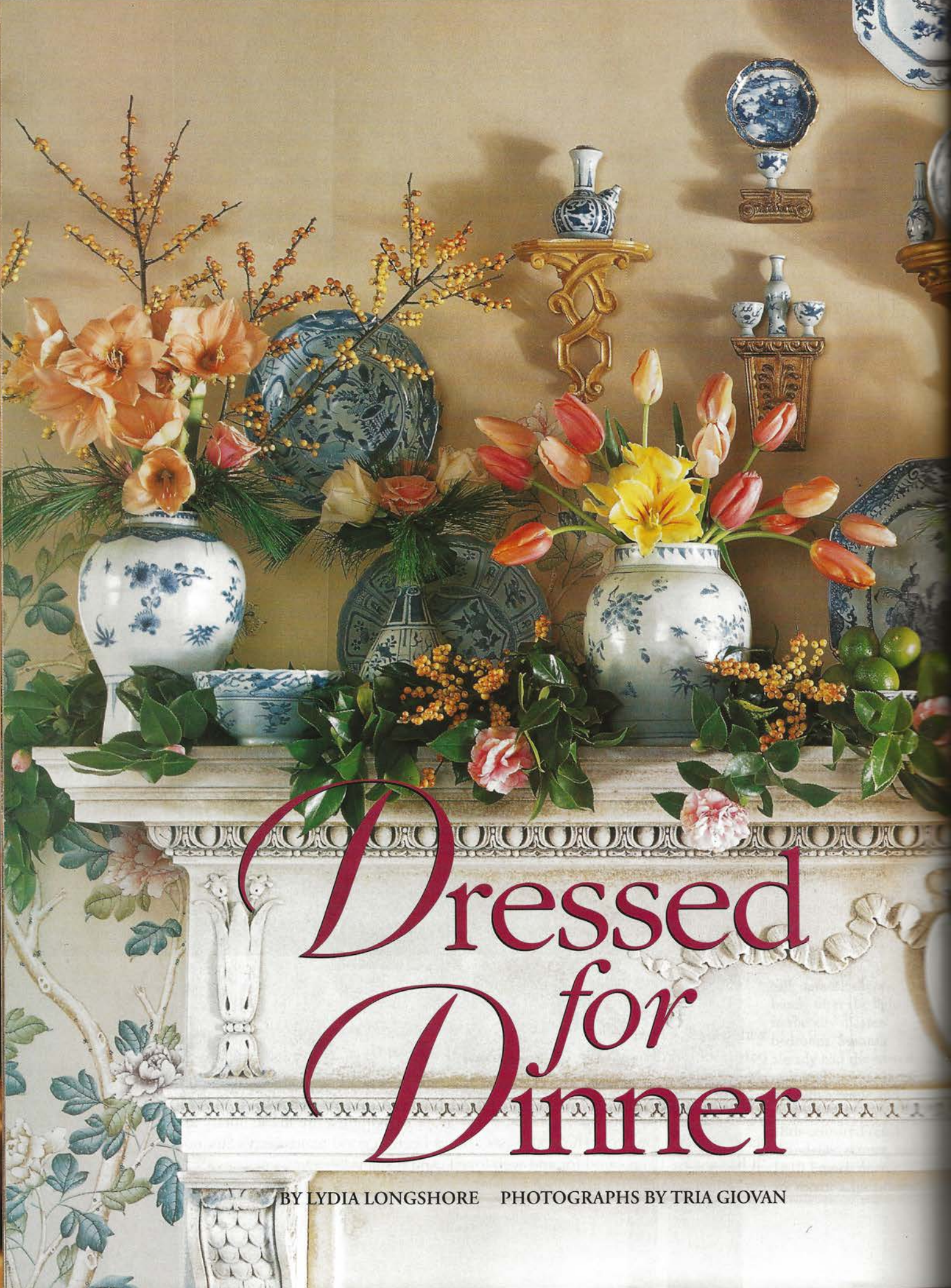
Southern Accents

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Set for the
Holidays





Dressed for Dinner

BY LYDIA LONGSHORE PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRIA GIOVAN

Peggy Sewell's Dallas home is filled with the scent of fresh blossoms in preparation for her family's annual Christmas party. Taking inspiration from the peach and yellow wallpaper in her living room, Sewell and Dallas floral designer Carol Garner set the mantel with Chinese urns full of yellow and peach amaryllis, peach tulips, and yellow ilex berries.



A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black turtleneck and a long, flowing black skirt, stands in a room. Above her is a large, ornate chandelier. To her right, several decorative plates are mounted on the wall. In the background, there is a wooden cabinet and a small table with a striped cloth.

Every year, Peggy Sewell celebrates the holiday season by welcoming family and friends into her splendid Dallas home for a dinner party that's opulent, festive, and decidedly fresh

The last day of school before the Christmas holidays always has special significance for Carl Sewell Jr.

and his sister, Jacquelyn. Each year, the Dallas teenagers race home and drop their backpacks in a room that more closely resembles a floral wholesaler than a kitchen. All the while, harried caterers, floral designers, and workmen range throughout the house. This year, when the two find their mother, Peggy, she is perched on top of a ladder draped in a bay leaf boa. Guests are scheduled to arrive in a few hours, but already the house is buzzing with festivity.

"We've been doing this party for seven years," says Sewell. "When our children got old enough, we wanted to have people over during the holidays. We invite my family from New Orleans, Carl's family from Texas, and lots of our friends to help us celebrate the Christmas season which, for us, starts the day the children get out of school."

When guests enter the two-story foyer, they are greeted by a 14-foot-high Christmas tree and music from

Sewell strolls the loggia, where orange trees and a bay leaf garland frame an impressive tableau. A giant porcelain basin holds purple hyacinths, tufts of mood moss, votive candles, and a jaunty statue bearing a lady apple-filled standard. "Peggy has wonderful things, which makes our work really easy," says Garner.







In the garden room, a garland of pears, kumquats, and boxwood showcases the unexpected color scheme that Sewell and Garner use all over the house. An African violet fills the biscuit box between two English alabaster urns brimming with kumquats. Garner combined lavender hydrangeas and orange tulips to create a vibrant focal point on a nearby coffee table.

ROSES

ENJOYING

In the breakfast room, where Sewell's love of blue and white has full play, English and Dutch Delftware mixes with French and Italian faïence and toile for maximum impact. With old-world grandeur in mind, Sewell and Garner fashioned a towering topiary swathed in ribbon, like an inedible *croque-en-bouche* of gold-painted pears interspersed with blue hyacinth blossoms and white euphorbia.







Every Christmas Eve, the family gets together for a formal dinner in the dining room. Monumental candelabra strung with crystal beads and decked with cranberries set a theatrical tone. A tole box filled with French lavender, roses, hydrangeas, and white tulips forms a centerpiece. Nestled among the porcelain on the sideboard, above, are hydrangeas and lilies of the valley.

several violinists positioned on the staircase. "We want it to be a feast for the senses as well as the eyes," says Sewell. "We use all fresh decorations and Kenneth Turner candles. The smell is intoxicating."

Dallas floral designer Carol Garner is Sewell's partner in this lavish endeavor, and the two women work together with a symbiotic energy. Creative details like cranberry bobeches and kumquat garlands are the fruits of their labors and give the house a quality of fantasy. Using Sewell's extensive collection of blue and white porcelain as a launching pad for ideas, the pair create a nontraditional holiday scheme with bright bursts of orange, yellow, and pink all over the house.

The party takes place both indoors and out. The tree and the violinists set the stage in the foyer; outdoors is a tented seafood bar with a jazz saxophonist. In the dining room, says Sewell, "I like to serve formal party food," such as beef tenderloin and poached salmon. In the living room, a piano player entertains guests who gather around the fireplace. In contrast to the classical Christmas music delivered from the stairway by the violinists, the living room revelers enjoy sing-along tunes such as "White Christmas" and a rollicking version of "Jingle Bells."

At the end of the night, as smaller children fall asleep in their parents' laps and older children enjoy a special-occasion sip of champagne, the saxophonist joins the pianist in the living room to serenade the diehards, who are reluctant to end the evening. "Some people sit by the fire, some of us dance," says Sewell. "We never want the night to end." ♦

For design details, see Sourcebook.

