

SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

# Southern Living®

## A SPECTACULAR CHRISTMAS

232 Ways To Add Joy, Spirit, and Sparkle

OUR BEST  
COOKIE  
RECIPES!  
FALLING

72  
GIFTS  
MADE  
IN THE  
SOUTH  
(ALL UNDER \$100)

"Christmas is not Christmas until I receive my first tin of pecans from South Alabama."

- FANNIE FLAGG  
page 130

#MySouthernHoliday  
YOU COULD WIN A \$1,000 SHOPPING SPREE!  
no purchase necessary  
PRIZES FOR A LIMITED TIME

Creamy Cakes and Royal Icing and Luscious Pressing

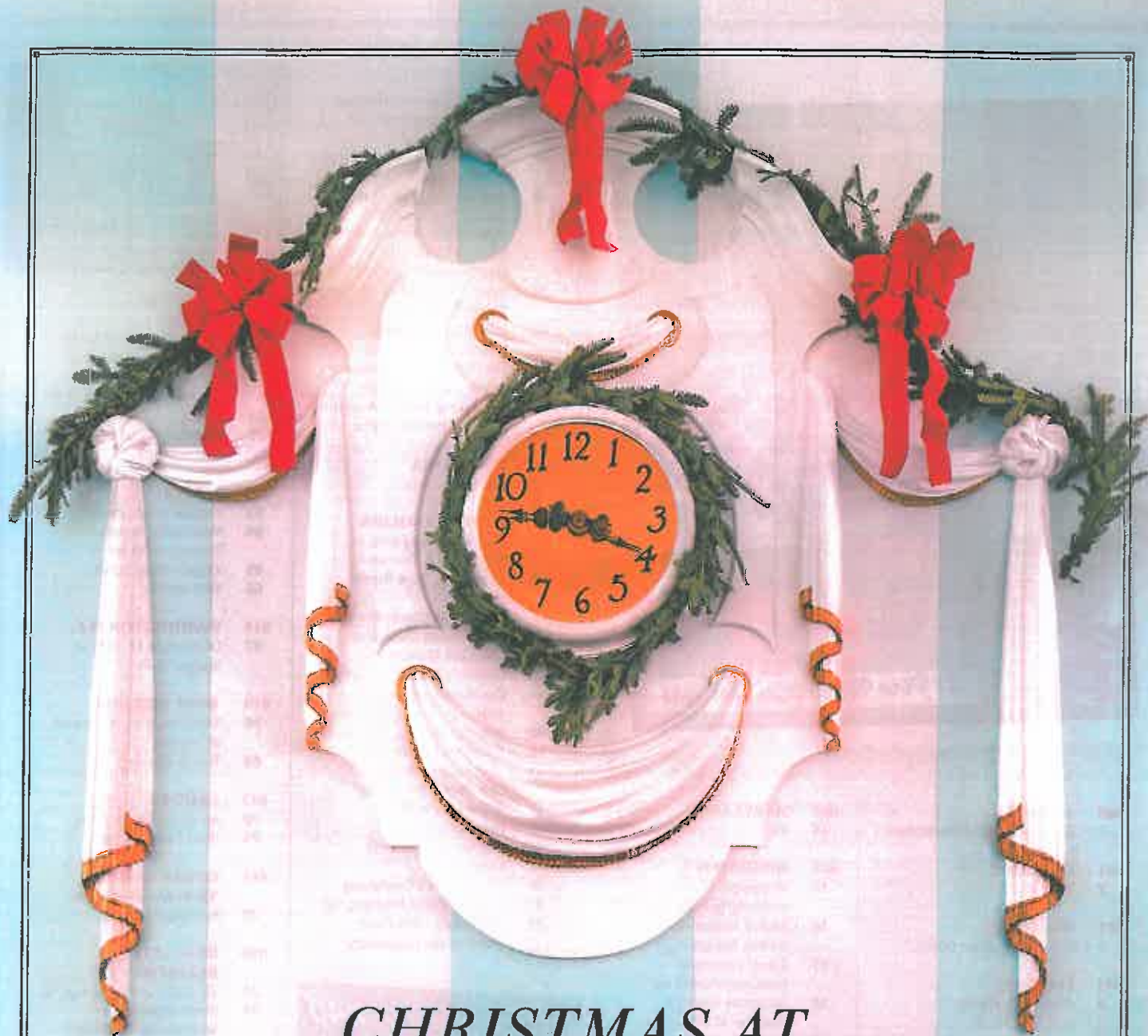
DECEMBER 2016

12  
\$5.99 US \$7.50 CAN  
70989 10400 16

### HOLIDAY HOW-TO

- Four Gorgeous White Cakes
- Three Ways To Trim Your Tree
- One Easy Christmas Dinner Menu





## CHRISTMAS AT *THE GREENBRIER*

Nearly 1,300 guests check into this storied West Virginia hotel on a single holiday night. We go behind the employee-only doors to uncover the magic that keeps the crowds coming back

**THERE'S NOTHING LIKE** this show. Decorated by America's first stylemaker, Dorothy Draper, and kept up today by her protégé Carleton Varney, the hotel is already primed for the holidays with public rooms painted in eye-popping colors like red, green, pineapple yellow, and "Jefferson" blue—the same as the boxes from Tiffany & Co. For the season, busy elves have trimmed over 300 trees,

hung over 120,000 lights, strung miles of greenery, wrapped 20,000 gifts, and given poinsettias a coat of fairy dust. Pulling this off takes planning and a touch of brilliance. So when *SL* asked for their best hosting ideas, the gracious hotel invited us to follow those responsible for making the magic happen. Here, the staff's unguarded secrets for helping you re-create this kind of holiday hospitality in your own home.





## Greeting Guests

JAMES POTEAT

RESTAURANT

The plane was late, and the family arrives feeling tired. As they walk in, they see James Poteat, who believes in treating guests as family. "To me they are," he says. "So I ask, 'Can I help with anything?'" His other secret weapon? A card for a complimentary ice cream cone (redemptible at the restaurant), which puts a smile on any child's tear-stained face.





## Mastering a Drink

**HENRY HILL**  
BARTENDER

If artisanal beer is the fall beverage trend, mixing innovative cocktails is the Christmas trend. "We spend a couple of weeks inventing new drinks with holiday spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, and allspice and nut-flavored liquors like Frangelico to update the classics, and then we do a tasting together," says Hill. "For an easy one, make a Manhattan and add cinnamon and pureed apple. If you mix in a little lemon juice and honey to the apple, it removes the tartness." Another of Hill's favorites: the Queen of Hearts, made with citrus vodka and muddled strawberries. (A muddler is an inexpensive bar tool that mashes fruits and herbs to release their flavors.) "Experiment," Hill advises. "Start by adding one new ingredient that you like to give a cocktail a holiday twist." Your guests will be wowed by these little touches.

# Decorating a Tree Quickly

**BETSY CONTE**

DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Conte adorns the 75 themed trees and can do each one in about 20 minutes. How is that possible? Ribbon. She uses 4- to 6-inch-thick wired ribbon to create gravity-defying bows and a 10-inch-thick ribbon to make these garlands. The ribbon goes on first, and then she stuffs ornaments around the ribbon. "If the tree is against a wall, skimp on the back side's embellishment," she says, to save time and conserve decorations. See more of her smart trimming method below.



### STEP 1

#### Start at the Top

"I work my way down a tree. Don't start in the middle, because going up and down will disturb the decor or even break ornaments. And wear an apron, because evergreens prick clothing."



### STEP 2

#### Consider Scale

"Using decorations that are too small is like a woman in a majestic outfit wearing tiny earrings. Perfect the balance by using large ornaments (8 to 12 inches) for an 8-foot tree and smaller ones for a tabletop tree."



### STEP 3

#### Hang 'em Right

"To create a color story, group ornaments to draw the eye in. This tree has red, gold, and white accents. Don't hang orbs on the branches' edges, because they might fall off. Tuck them farther into the tree."



### STEP 4

#### Include Froufrou

"The sparkly dimension softens the tree and makes the whole ensemble dazzle, sort of like popping the collar on a shirt. My favorite froufrou is ting ting—long glittery branches available at crafts stores."



### STEP 5

#### Finish the Ensemble

"A tree is never fully dressed without a skirt. In showy spots, use brocade or red velvet. If your skirt or decorations start getting tired looking, try using them on the back of the tree, or donate them."

*"To make sure the tree is perfect, step 8 to 10 feet away, and eyeball it for balance. Notice that I didn't just put one star; I put two. That's very Dorothy Draper."*

—BETSY CONTE







## Prepping a Guest Room

**KATIE DOOLEY**  
HOUSEKEEPER

If your company is traveling to see you, there is nothing nicer than preparing a lovely room where they can plop down and unwind. Dooley believes it's important to set the room up right with a beautifully made bed—her technique takes about 10 minutes. The trick to a polished bed: good “hospital corners.” Dooley uses her knee to prop the mattress up a tad so she can fold the sheets underneath it extra tight. Then, to tackle the rest of the room, she likes products that smell clean—such as Spic and Span—because guests love to walk into a fresh-smelling room. Much of The Greenbrier's furniture has been lacquered, and “a little Windex makes it really shine,” says Dooley. Using abundant mirrors was another Draper tactic, and all overnight visitors will appreciate finding both a full-length one and a well-lit makeup mirror in a guest room. In fact, these rooms have two full-length mirrors facing each other, a smart touch that ensures complete visibility, which is such a help when getting dressed for holiday cocktail parties. And don't forget the kids: Stockings hung over their beds make the little ones think, “Santa does know that we're here!” Even blasé teens appreciate having their own quiet Christmas-morning moment before going downstairs.







**GIFT WRAP STATION**

If you're running a little behind, give your guests space to wrap presents. Gather all the supplies they could need (extra ribbon, scissors, tissue paper, and paper) in one spot.



## Shipping & Assembling Gifts

ED TOLLEY

PHOTO

"The smartest thing to do," says Tolley, "is to ship ahead. With the rising costs of checked luggage, this not only makes travel easier, but also saves money. Tolley advises using a lower, ground service instead of a Next Day Air option. He says, "If there's no rain, you won't get your stuff no matter what you paid." His other bit of wisdom: Choose the shipping company with a distribution center closest to your final stop, so nothing gets stuck two countries away. Tolley receives the toys and puts them together. He does just about everything with a rubber mallet, a Phillips screwdriver, and a set of adjustable pliers. (Yes, having a neighborhood Tolley around would also be useful.)





# Wrapping Presents

ELAINE HOLLANDSWORTH  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF RETAIL

The secret to her gift wrap artistry: big beautiful bows—not narrow, twinelike ribbon. “For adults, you can use a gift bag or even a bag from a nice store and put a bow on top,” says Hollandsworth. “Kids’ gifts must be wrapped so they can bust them open.” She chooses a new gift wrap color and pattern every year; last year was red and chartreuse. “This will pull all of your presents together under the tree with your own special signature,” Hollandsworth says. Her no-fail gift? “An unexpected food treat like The Greenbrier’s famous frozen peaches [\$25, [store.greenbrier.com](http://store.greenbrier.com)]. These are really great treats in December!” she says.

## HOW TO TIE A GORGEOUS GREENBRIER-STYLE BOW

Master this easy figure eight technique, which works just as well on presents as it does for a wreath or the top of a tree—just increase the length and width of the ribbon.



### STEP 1

#### Start the Loop

Make the top half of your first figure eight bow while also leaving a bit of ribbon below the loop.



### STEP 2

#### Finish the Loop

Pick up the remaining length of ribbon, and make the bottom half of the figure eight loop.



### STEP 3

#### Continue Looping

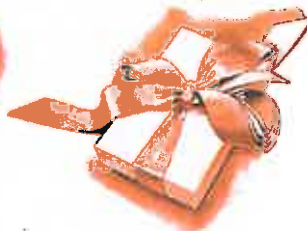
Cinch the center of the loops with one hand. Keep alternating figure eight loops until you have at least four loops on each side.



### STEP 4

#### Cinch the Bow

Knot the bow in the center with a separate ribbon. If long enough, this ribbon can also be tied around the package.



### STEP 5

#### Trim the Tails

Secure onto the package, and cut the tails’ edges into either sharp diagonals or inverted Vs. Center the bow, fluff the loops.



## Displaying Poinsettias

CURTIS WEBB & GARY WYKLE

DIRECTOR OF GROUNDS & GREENHOUSE MANAGER

Passé? Not at The Greenbrier. Maybe you can't pull off this 600-poinsettia creation at home, but there are other great, stealable ideas around the hotel. The team builds tabletop trees by stacking poinsettias on upside-down flowerpots and then surrounding them with another circle of plants. This can also be done with empty boxes for a modern, geometric effect. You can even create sparkly blue poinsettias. Spray white ones with food coloring, and then sprinkle them with glitter while they're wet. Let your kids help!

## 238 YEARS OF THE GREENBRIER

"Guests started coming to take the medicinal sulphur waters in 1774," says Hotel historian Robert Cunte, who oversees archives documenting two centuries of social history, including visits from 26 Presidents, foreign dignitaries, and industrial plutocrats. In the quest for the first pulp mill, why was a New York lady hired to give the place a name?

Take it to 1947: Dorothy Draper was America's premier decorator, and her knowledge of the South came from *Gone with the Wind*. Conlethui Jones, "she made her staff watch it over and over." A filmmaker from the film still winkles in the tavern, reminding us that deep in the Allegheny Mountains, Southern romance had to wait.