

THE RITE OF FINE DINING

This winter, set a formal table

By Francine Kaplan | Photography by David Schilling

Ten years ago, fine china manufacturers realized they were in trouble as consumers everywhere became enamored with the casual carefree dining style. The trend has continued and recent years have even seen homes built without formal dining rooms. Many couples do not want to be bothered with more than one set of

dishes. Dining at home has become an endangered tradition, with meals thrown together or brought in from elsewhere. Too often it is a rushed affair, sandwiched between pressing commitments, and gulped down on the fly. But, to every action, there is a reaction, and the civilized antidote to haphazard dining has arrived. In a return to a more luxurious and elegant

lifestyle, setting a classic formal table for special occasions is back in fashion.

Whether it is a romantic evening or a festive family gathering, it is time to rediscover the good stuff. Take grandma's Sunday china down from the attic, or dust off that wedding gift china in the buffet and revel in the fact that you own such finery. Now is the time to show it off.



Beautiful wood dining table, iron chargers and a 36-inch-long, 10-candle horizontal ironware candelabra by Jan Barboglio. Italian artisan-like dinnerware with a free-flowing ruffle is actually microwave safe. All from Antiques and Country Pine of Buckhead.



1. Pewter adds sparkle to any setting with chargers, candelabras, and pitchers. 2. Match dinnerware adds appeal to table setting. 3. Antiqued candlesticks makes a simple centerpiece on a linen runner. 4. Match dinnerware features both aged and shiny pewter finishes, as well as pewter-stemmed glassware. 5. A heavyweight marble apple creates a highlight splash of color nestled in the oyster white Avignon china. All available at Antiques and Country Pine of Buckhead.

Use the Good Stuff

“People are getting back to setting a formal table,” confirms interior designer Clay Snider “Pulling out the good stuff makes any occasion feel more special.” Items that were once considered luxury purchases, such as crisp linens and monogrammed napkins, are now available in all price

ranges. Interior designer Janie Hirsh likes to pick up one detail from a room or table setting and use it to transform a standard white tablecloth into something special. “Have a seamstress add a four-inch band of coordinating material to the edge of the cloth for instant pizzazz,” she says. Choose plush velvets or

shimmering silks for a touch of luxury.

Snider is a fan of classic old-fashioned white-on-white, basing his table settings on bone china and white linens. Then he adds color and interest with a single item. He advises people to follow their own drummer. “If you love what you have,

use it," says Snider. "But throw in something interesting and different like a wild salad plate." Take ideas from catalogs and showroom displays and add a personal twist.

Pewter Power

Can anyone say pewter? The one trend mentioned most often by local designers is pewter. Pewter, a lead-free metal alloy, can be bright and shiny like silver, or, if left untreated, can take on a darkened patina of age. Incorporate it into table designs with pewter chargers, pewter-edged plates, pewter candlesticks or pewter-based hurricane lamps. "I like to use a lot of old and new elements mixed together on a table," says Jimmy Stanton of Stanton Home Furnishings. Stanton combines pewter and items of silvered mercury glass to bring sparkle and shine to a setting. "Add a lot of small votives all around the table and their reflection off these shiny surfaces will make everything twinkle," he says.

Pewter is also showing up on goblet stems and flatware. "Place an all-glass water goblet next to a pewter-stemmed wine glass for a great pairing," says mix master Stanton. Keri Adkins of Antiques & Country Pine of Buckhead likes her pewter aged. "For me, when the finish is flat and not shiny it seems more refined and very versatile," explains Adkins.

Powerful Punch

When it comes to floral arrangements, singular sensations are in vogue. Hirsch prefers going with one-flower designs instead of mixed displays. A huge composition of flowers with tight heads, such as roses or tulips, closely packed in a vase or container will add "wow" factor to a table. "It's classic and works for any season," she says. Here again, white, with just a touch of greenery, is a favorite.

Even if you are using color, keeping the flowers all-of-a-kind and in a single color will intensify the impact. "I'll also do individual arrangements at each place," says Hirsh. Her southern touch is to pack buds into mint julep cups, keeping filler at a minimum. Scattering rose petals around the table is her choice for a quick way to add a little romance to any dinner.

Although glass vases are still classic, keep an

eye out for containers in unusual shapes (squares, columns) and materials (pewter, silvered glass) to dress out a table in fresh style.

Light Up the Night

Tons of flickering candlelight give any room a fairyland look. Scatter votives about the table or put one at each place setting. The variety of holders now available makes them more versatile than ever, but, for the formal table, look for clear glass, silvered glass or other metallic finishes that enhance the sparkle factor.

Adkins continues to mix groupings of different sizes and styles of candlesticks on either side of a centerpiece. She will even take candelabra and surround them with a selection of fluted, architecturally shaped or pewter candlesticks. Two tips to keep in mind: try not to create barriers to conversation and, when grouping objects, think in terms of odd numbers of items.

Perhaps the easiest way to create a centerpiece is with pillar candles. "Pillars give off a wonderful glow and are fabulous looking and easy," says Snider. Because they are being used more frequently, the bases available for pillar candles have come a long way from the basic plate configuration. For the formal table, look for versions that group pillars or elevate them.

Formal twist

"There was a time when I didn't understand placemats," says Snider. "Now, I do." If you have a beautiful dining table, it is a shame to hide it under a tablecloth. Placemats allow the warmth of fine wood to add to the ambiance. Make sure that placemat choices match the tone of the occasion. Shimmering silks or satins with metallic threads or mirrored glass squares or rectangles will enhance a dressy setting. The mother-of-pearl-like capice shell is also a popular option, adding iridescent shimmer to the table.

Join the return to the luxe life by creating a formal setting for upcoming dinners, and let the elegant atmosphere promote magic moments and a feeling of well-being for all who come to your table. ♣

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