





Booze up and get outside, already! We're Minnesotans, so that handy bring-it-on attitude that inspired Minnesota housewares Kouvahn and Tea Keobounhean to throw an outdoor holiday party, complete with sparkler candles in the snow, and hot toddies...plus, hats and mittens, of course. Their nearby 1966 vintage Airstream provides the perfect warming house.

A Minneapolis family embraces the cold  
(with vintage flair)

# BIG CHILL

BY BERIT THORKELSON • PHOTOS BY MAKI STRUNC PHOTOGRAPHY  
STYLED BY ANNIE MADRIGA





Simple adornments make  
the chilly space a little more  
**INVITING.**

**H**osting a holiday party in and around a 1966 vintage Airstream in the dead of winter may seem eccentric to some. But to Souliyah and Tia Keobounpheng, owners of the design company Silvercococon, it makes perfect sense. "I know it's quirky and Minnesotan," Tia says. "But why not embrace the cold? Why not support the myth of our hardiness?"

The shiny, pod-shaped trailer serves as the design duo's mascot, and the inspiration behind their brand. "Silver has modern connotations, and cocoon represents a very old notion of home," Souliyah explains, before connecting more dots—to his wife's well-used loom, for example, and his own memories of his grandmother's silkworm farm in Thailand. The two words together prove an apt moniker for the couple's modernist take on jewelry, décor, and architecture.

Finding beauty in the everyday is more than a business tactic or a holiday-inspired vow for Souliyah and Tia, it's a way of life. The couple met at a lecture on the evolution of the paper clip, for Pete's sake, and named their son Silo, after the Midwest prairie's functional, elegant beacon. Of course they bought a vintage Airstream, while living in Tia's hometown of Duluth, to host sales of Tia's weaving, handmade books, and block printing, plus the work of other local artists in the community. Of course it moved with them to their Minneapolis home, where it presides over the backyard from a bed of crushed rock. And of course after three consecutive seasons of holding campouts, guests, and business meetings in the Airstream, the couple longed to find a use for it in winter.

A "company party" seemed the perfect excuse. The couple's creative collaborators, including a model maker, an interior designer, and a general contractor, start trickling in at about five o'clock, families in tow. All are also friends with similar work setups. They're bundled appropriately, though the Airstream, thankfully, is wired and furnished with a space heater. "We got lucky," one guest comments about the 22-degree day, relatively balmy by Minnesota-winter standards. She's right. Meteorologists predict a cold snap is on its way.

**LEFT** After realizing there were no modern Christmas trees on the market, Tia designed this 3-foot tapered Christmas tree and adorned it with the handmade flat-pack ornaments she designed, as well as vintage green bulbs and strings of popcorn. **RIGHT** Inside the Airstream, designers Tia and Souliyah trim their mod tree with help from their 3-year-old son, Silo.







To add a holiday flair to the chilly gathering, strings of white lights float overhead, children run around with sparklers in tow, and candle-filled, star-shaped ice blocks glow.

The unexpected above-zero temps and the lingering sunset provide ample reason to celebrate. Three-year-old Silo and the other mitten-clad, rosy-cheeked children hold sparklers, which sizzle brighter and crisper in the winter air, as the adults huddle around the fire pit, glasses of two-back Chuck or hot cider in hand. Strings of white lights sparkle overhead, acting as closer, brighter versions of the winter sky's stars. The lights run between garage and Airstream, which serves as the party's warming house.

Candles flicker along the path cleared through the backyard snow, some from within lanterns created by card stock taped into a tube and others in star-shaped holders made of ice. They're simple adornments that make the chilly space a little more inviting and play off the built-in winter-white theme.

Inside the silver cocoon, though, the couple's signature aesthetic shines brighter. It's a restrained, budget-friendly mix of contemporary, handmade, cut-acrylic and plywood ornaments. Hand-strung popcorn and arborvitae boughs clipped off the backyard bushes, for example, mix with vintage pompons garlands, and classic ball ornaments.

The centerpiece is the tree. After realizing there were no modern Christmas trees on the market, Tia decided to fill the void. She designed a full-sized one constructed from cedar. It was a hit, so she created a 3-foot tabletop version, as well as flat-pack ornaments shaped as balls and snowflakes in wood or brightly-colored acrylic, all showcased in the Airstream. (She sells her items online at [www.silvercocoon.com](http://www.silvercocoon.com), alongside her cut-acrylic bracelets, earrings, and necklaces.)

Outside, the last vestiges of daylight disappear, as do the double-digit temps. Partygoers wander inside the family's home for Mediterranean food, comfortable to glimpse the festive scene through the living room's wall of windows on the courtyard. Only a hardy few linger outside for a little more fire time and a game of Pente in the Airstream. "Maybe we're friends because we met through work, or maybe we work together because we're friends, but we all work in similar, small-operation fashions," Tia says. "It's nice to celebrate the fact that we all are still surviving doing things we're really passionate about."

Also nice is the ability to host that celebration, even during winter, around your very own sparkly-silver mascot—perfect for two Minnesotans who make a living contemplating purpose and beauty, the holiday season and beyond. **MH**

BERIT THORAKELSON IS A ST. PAUL, FREELANCE WRITER.  
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