

Simply Festive

Time together and a few fun touches with decor make the season special.

BY JODY GARLOCK | PHOTOS DANA GALLAGHER | PRODUCED BY KARIN LIDBECK-BRENT



“I don’t go over the top with decorations,” says Sophie Dowling, *above left*. Pom-poms add a bit of flourish to stockings and a garland draping the mantel, *above*. The Dowlings decorate the tree, *opposite*, as a family, choosing from ornaments the kids made, some purchased on vacations, and a few new additions.





You never know what might spark a tradition for Sophie and Charles Dowling's family. Nine years ago, it was the "happy dance." When the couple told their oldest son that he could put the angel on top of the tree, the excited 4-year-old busted a few moves. Ever since, their kids—Henry, now 13, George, 11, and Mary, 9—have taken turns doing the tree-topping that kicks off the family's holiday celebration. "It's the simple things that make Christmas meaningful," Sophie says.

The Dowlings' 1924 Tudor-style home in Greenwich, Connecticut, has become a perfect place for the family to enjoy uncomplicated pleasures. Working with designer Lauren Muse, Sophie lightened rooms to make them welcoming to both kids and adults. "Tudors tend to be dark, but I wanted to make ours fresh and young," she says. "No room is off-limits to the kids."

The youthful spirit ratchets up during December. Candy-laden gingerbread houses that Sophie and the kids create show



The cozy family room, *opposite*, is where the Dowlings read Christmas stories and Mary makes her final pitch to Santa. "The notes she leaves are precious," Sophie says. In the dining room, *this photo*, glass and silvery accents, including pinecones and deer that play into this year's naturals theme, add low-key luster.

Pinecones, berries, and botanicals usher in a carefree holiday feeling. **“I like simple and natural,”** Sophie says.



A flocked pinecone wreath and a big planter of berries brighten the front door, *top*. For easy-make bouquets, Sophie puts berried twigs in a vase, *above*, sometimes adding magnolia leaves. “I like something different than poinsettias,” she says. Botanical postcards decorate the tree, *left*. Ribbons threaded through punched holes turn them into ornaments. ■