



Dimple Tumblers and Carafe made in Dorset by glassblower Emsie Sharp, available singly or in sets

EXPERT

with **Charlotte Starling**

Velvet&Dash
INTERIORS



Stunning looks for Christmas

When it comes to decorating for Christmas my goal is to fill my home with sparkle, colour and fragrance; every sense should be stimulated. A house filled with blooming flowers in December can't fail to cheer you and your guests; hyacinths and paper-white narcissi send out clouds of beautiful scent. Support their stems with a cage of birch twigs, hang them with tiny baubles, and there you have a spectacular table centrepiece. Forage from your garden or hedgerows. I'm a big fan of natural materials, but that's not to say I won't gild the lily! Alliums to artichokes, poppy seed-heads to trusty pine-cones can all be sprayed silver or gold and used in wreaths, on the tree or scattered down the centre of your table. Buy wreaths that are basic and embellish them yourself. Wreaths made from dried hydrangeas, eucalyptus or lichen can be used as a centrepiece filled with candles, for any time of year. Whatever you use, be generous; satsumas piled high make an eye-catching pyramid, and a multitude of creamy church candles, threaded with ivy, will provide an ethereal focal point. The tree is the main event so I say buy the biggest you can. My ever-expanding collection of baubles are in Quality Street colours – turquoise, purple, red, green, orange and pink. Add clear fairy lights and silver rain or loops of beads to give depth and sparkle. It mustn't get too perfectly tasteful though: a blingy Barbie angel sits at the top of our tree – Christmas is the ideal time to indulge in some kitsch!

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glossy magazines, including Woman & Home – but has now expanded into a store selling a series of quality crafts, the vast majority of which are made in Dorset or the UK. “I already work with a glass-blower and a wallpaper and printmaker,” she says. “Early on I wanted to emphasise hand-made, high-quality products for the home and unusual things that are hard to find and Dorset does seem to attract many people making things like that.” Like the products she sells, from the ceramic artichoke candle-holders, to the hand-made, coloured tumblers and the wooden tapas boards, Charlotte provides a bespoke service to help clients obtain the perfect gift. “I try and track things down for them; I'm having some coasters made for one client by a

ceramicist which involves a lot of calls, backwards and forwards,” she says. How does she find her craftspeople? “Mainly word of mouth, friends, friends-of-friends,” she says. “I find so many beautiful things; I found one lady literally working out of a shed in a field, and realised that although many craftspeople produce brilliant work, sometimes they weren't always good at publicising themselves.” In order to help her customers connect more strongly with the makers, Charlotte plans to feature small videos showing, for instance, how the glassware is individually made. She has also launched a wedding list service. As she prepares to add yet more goodies to her site, including wallpaper for panels featuring gold and silver leaf and pottery sheep, Charlotte continues to search for additional talents. “Some of the things I sell are more expensive than High Street prices but they are individual and I think that's what people are looking for,” she says. Her best-seller is actually one of the least expensive items in her shop; rusted angel's wings which you can use to transform pillar and church candles. “People love them because they are simple and so effective,” she says. William Morris would surely approve. *velvet-dash.com



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