

THE FASHIONABLE SET

Tablescaping is the newest creative outlet for hosts who want to truly wow their guests. **Jess O Sullivan** discovers how to get started

With staying in still the new going out, entertaining at home has given hosts the opportunity to let their creative flags fly. But what's the point in devising a mouth-watering menu if the setting isn't just as instagrammable? This is where a carefully thought-out tablescaping can give your gathering the wow factor it deserves. You can of course create a tablescaping on any surface large or small – a coffee table, a mantelpiece, even a dresser, but most people concentrate on the dining table. Event planner Maria Reidy (mariareidyevents.com) is experienced at creating exquisite tablescapes for everything from large-scale corporate events to weddings and private parties and here shares her expertise.

The space

Centrepieces are the focal point of your tablescaping, and these can be as creative as your imagination allows, regardless of budget. Art, flowers, foliage, candles, rocks and antiques are all fair game. However, Maria advises to always work with the surroundings. "Rather than put in something that feels out of place or alien to the space, I put thought into what's already in the room," says Maria. "The table must not compete with its surroundings." Ask yourself; is it a modern contemporary setting, rustic or old world? How are the shapes, structures and setting going to work when people walk in? What is going to be the most visually striking set up?



Oliver Bonas



Fritz Fryer



TOP TIP

Slit a wine cork down the middle with a knife and place a handwritten piece of card in it for DIY place name holders.



Anthology Five

The comfort factor

As much as we'd like our tables to be beautiful, they also have to be functional. "People must feel comfortable at the table so they can enjoy their meal," advises Maria. "I usually measure the seat pad of the chair and measure that against the table, and give a few inches on either side of that, which usually works out at about 60cm per person in total for a very comfortable setting. Then I would sit at a chair at the table before we finish dressing it to see what the diner can see." This is when flower and candlestick height come into play. The most important part of any gathering is for the guests to connect and converse, so the centrepiece should be below or above eye level.

The setting

"I would normally set the plate first and then the cutlery. The plate should be on the table, not half off, especially if you have a decorative rim, as it won't be seen against the linen. Then I would run a measuring tape down the table to make sure each plate is on the same line," says Maria. She advises if possible to serve the starter on a plate on a charger and then remove it when the course is finished.

Light it up

Maria loves to use candles but she has one golden rule: always use good quality candles. "I love tapered candles and I think it's really important to use 100% wax. If you buy cheap ones they may splatter all over your linen and ruin your table." She recommends the range of candles from Article (article.ie) in the Powerscourt Townhouse, Dublin 2. "You can mix and match your candle size and your candlestick height to create layers of light. Start high in the middle and then get lower until you have tealights at the base. It draws the eye to the centre."

What's trending?

Wary of trend-led pieces like gold and rose gold cutlery, Maria feels that when investing in forever items, it's better not to choose trends that will move on. "Invest in really good silver cutlery, and a silver salt and pepper set, as they will never go out of fashion. Newbridge canteen sets are always a timeless gift. I would also focus on the textures, like a beautiful hem-stitched napkin." Yellow and orange are her hot colours for spring and coloured glass is an easy way to introduce pops of colour. "A blue water glass, with white linen and natural florals can be very effective."

Fine foliage

Maria says that if you have a collection of smaller vases or old bottles, such as empty gin bottles, a mismatched look can work well if the colours are pulled together by the flowers. "Blue Drumshanbo Gunpowder gin bottles are really lovely for this. With flowers can be the most effective and very often what you need is right outside your door. Recently, I picked up twigs that had blown down in the storm, and layered them across the top of a mantelpiece with plain ivory candles in between and it was gorgeous."

Don't leave it until last

To make a really wow impact, don't leave the dressing of the table until the day of the party, as you'll be busy organising food or other elements. If you can, dress the table a day or two in advance, because it gives you the time and scope to get what you're missing and you will always be missing something.

Plate IT UP



Stockholm plate, €14 for 4, Argos



Geo Spot Plate, €12, Cath Kidston



Dessert plate set of 6, €101, Amara.com



Limerence Plate by Cat Rodgers, €17.10, Artwow.com



Pip Studio plate, €19.40, daisypark.co.uk



Stoneware plate, €36, Oliver Bonas



Yvonne Ellen animal plate, €12, Amara.com



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Sainsbury's Home



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