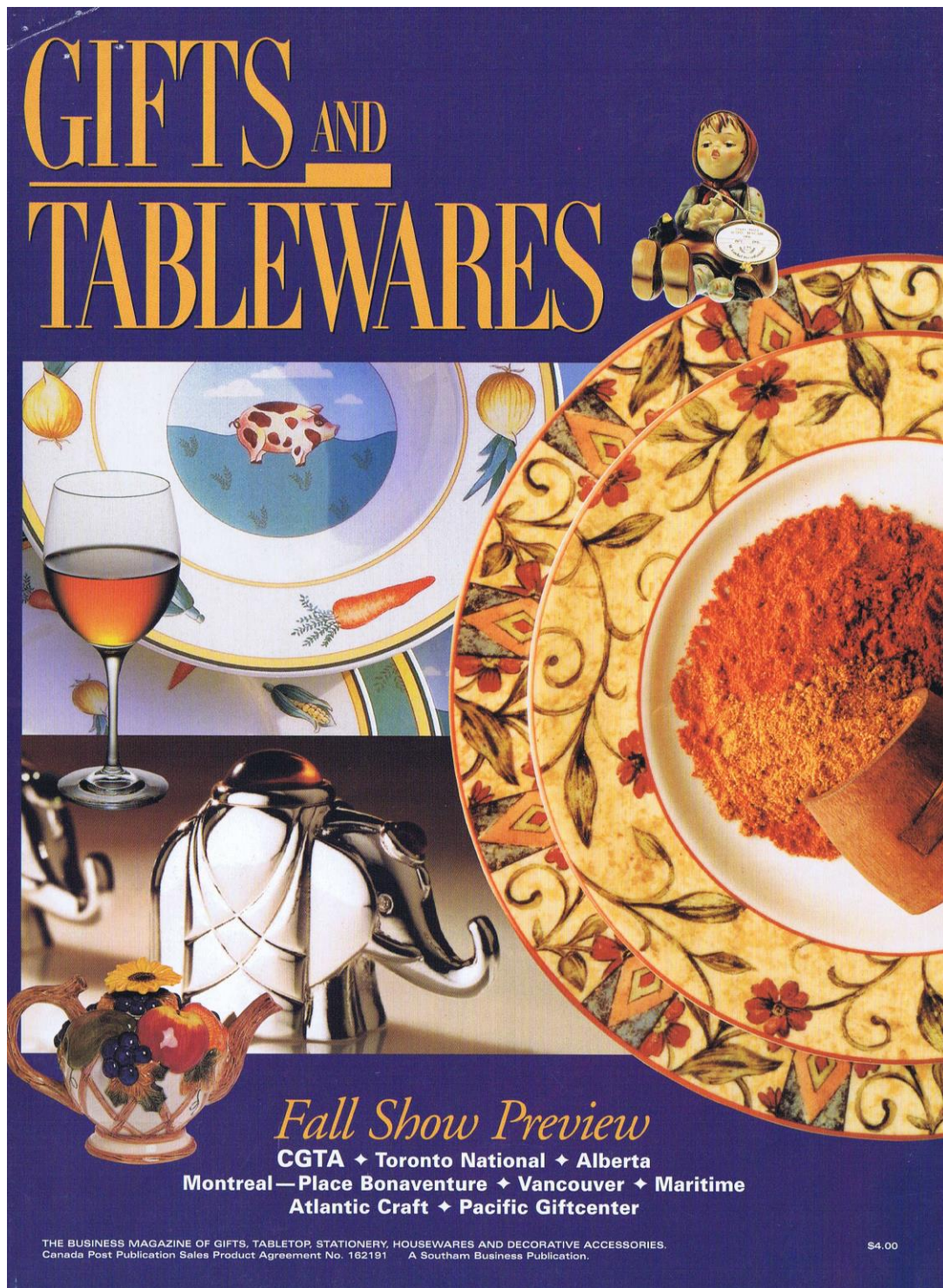


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Tradition *WITH A TWIST*

Creating attention-grabbing Christmas displays is particularly challenging. However, combining something new, different and fun with traditional symbols can help gift and tableware retailers win the holiday display wars.



BY LINDA MCKENDRY, VMPC

QUESTION FROM READER: "With the Christmas season approaching I'd like to do some interesting displays that aren't typical. Any suggestions?"

ANSWER FROM LINDA: There's more competition visually at Christmas time than at any other time of the year. If windows never had lights before, they have them now. Christmas trees, and wreaths with bows and berries, abound. Everyone is scrambling to get the buyer's attention at this frenzied time of year. You can do lots to attract the attention of your customers at Christmas and my advice is to mix the traditional with some non-traditional elements—in other words, add a "twist." But be cautioned, if your displays fall too far out of line with traditional expectations you won't appear to be in the spirit of the season and your audience may not consider your products.

All displays begin by asking good ques-

tions. What statement or story is my product line trying to tell? How can I give this a holiday twist? For example, if you are selling anything to do with entertaining such as tableware, flatware, linens, glassware, candles, music, gourmet food, and home furnishing accessories, then you need to display them in a way that evokes the warmth, fun, closeness and fellowship of family and friends. This means finding a way to take tangible items and give them "emotions."

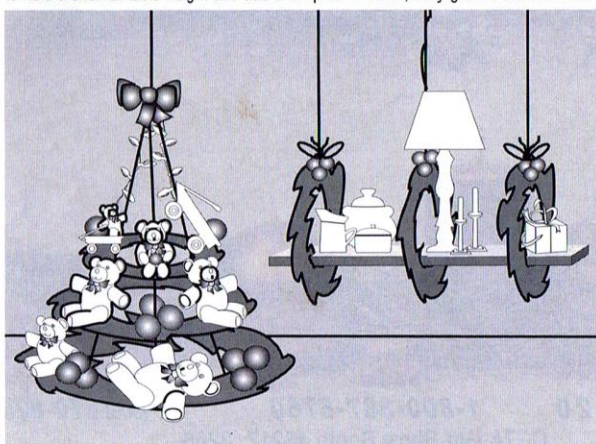
Display items to look as if you're ready to entertain a gathering: place everything on a shelf, table, or risers to look like guests are just about to arrive. A perfectly laid table with coordinating center pieces, linen and stemware is a beautiful display with traditional Christmas sprigs tucked around candle holders and in napkin rings. But the twist comes in creating a display that looks like you just had a party, you enjoyed everything, and you're just having too much fun to clean up yet. This

doesn't mean that the dishes have dried gravy on them. But it could mean that glasses are half full, napkins are separated from their perfect little holders and gifts are opened here and there—use your imagination. This is called "controlled chaos," it's unexpected and it makes everyone stop and take a second look, especially if the rest of the store is in immaculate condition. Add balloons, streamers from the ceiling, party hats and noise makers to sell for New Year's events.

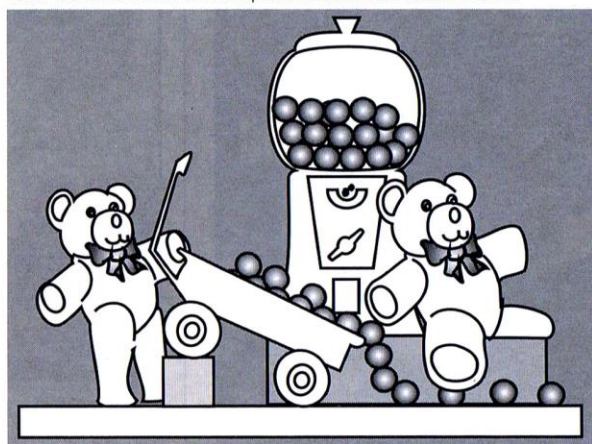
Remember, a little goes a long way. You don't need tons of gaudy tinsel streamers to make a Christmas display. A sprig of holly here, a touch of red velvet there and a little strand of curled golden ribbon peeking out of a gift box that looks like it was just opened—all make little Christmas statements right at the eye level and point of sale.

But if you want to make a grand statement let a theme of similar color, pattern and style explode in your entire store. Let's say you de-

Christmas displays for light 'n height: Artificial evergreen wreaths on sturdy wire frames have endless possibilities when hung to create risers or shelves. Hang them vertically to hold a shelf at table height and add a lamp for a warm, cozy glow. Perfect for dis-



playing tableware. Hang ever-increasing sizes horizontally to create a Christmas tree shelf unit and intertwine lights. This works well with toys, dolls and soft plush animals which can themselves be dressed up with Christmas bows and/or ribbons.



cide to go with black, white and gold, in a harlequin pattern with an Art Nouveau style. This can be achieved with black, gold and white ribbon, balls, and garlands tucked or swaged around white Christmas pine boughs bending over shelves, creating props or backdrops for products. Place a doll, dwarf, or harlequin jester dressed in black and gold in feature spots such as a front window or eye-level shelf to enhance your theme. Surround products with black, gold, and white wrapped gift boxes using diagonal diamond or Art Nouveau designs on the wrap. The white pine boughs, balls, ribbon or gold garland are all the traditional elements.

Last fall in one of my seminars, I did a demonstration to make the transition in a front window from late summer, through fall and into Christmas by changing only the props. It began as a purple, yellow, ivy and white summer theme, that featured pansies and coordinating patterns on a whole variety of gift items. My grand finale was to place some giant purple and white poinsettias and oversized purple Christmas balls in the window, replacing ivy vines with evergreen garlands and adding white lights to frame the window. Not one item used was a tradition-

al Christmas product but the whole window took on a beautiful and very original Christmas twist because of the purple. It still looked fresh, sophisticated and even had a formal touch because of the china and white linens. A touch of gold here and there brought out the warmth of Christmas to contrast with the cooler colors of the poinsettia, balls and evergreen boughs.

If you explore some of the suppliers that sell Christmas props you will get a lot of inspiration when you see Christmas items that are in the colors and patterns of the product lines you are carrying. So stop worrying that you don't have a whole lot of things that look great displayed with red, green and gold. The beautiful brown textures of real logs, and garlands of natural colored nuts, with plain brown wrapped gift boxes tied up with copper ribbons can take on a touch of a down home Christmas and can be perfect props and risers for outdoor items, or more quaint, hand-crafted merchandise.

Fantasy, fashion, or the familiar are the three areas to pick from depending again on the image of your shop, your product line, and your target market. Stick to all the traditional symbols that have always said "Hol-

iday Season" but give each display a "twist" by doing something new, different, and fun—while sugar plums, shaped like dollar signs, dance in your head!



Linda McKendry with assistant Becky Parisius during one of her display workshops.

Professional visual merchandising consultant Linda McKendry offers full, on-site consulting and instruction for retailers, wholesalers, distributors and manufacturers. (Early, daily or contract rates are available.)

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Only a few? Group tightly.

(original ads replaced by illustrations suitable for topic)



Garden Shop is selling trees, not Christmas ornaments. Penguins enhance outdoor theme.



Christmas floral enhances features on the Lancôme Packaging & POP



Evergreen in a jungle!
Lion colored balls!



Take your cue for the props from the Products!

