



This page: Add some sparkle to your table with Marks and Spencer's range, baubles (from £2) sequin runner (£19.50)
 Opposite page: Ensure your table doesn't look fussy with clear glasses, white napkins and classic cutlery
 Above: Freya wine goblet in platinum (£9.95) Canteen napkin in white (£3) Sparkle napkin ring (£5) all House of Fraser
 Right: fork and knife (£3.50 each) Muji

The perfect setting

As the undisputed queen of couture cakes at the Little Venice Cake Company **Mich Turner** is well accustomed to creating showstopping offerings for celebrities and royalty. In turn she's become an expert at setting the table beautifully to provide the faultless backdrop for the main gastronomic event

Setting the perfect festive table has always been a highlight of my Christmas Day. There are many effective ways to decorate the Christmas table that needn't break any banks. I seem to have gathered a collection of festive linens, serving plates and bowls which I look forward to bringing out each year as every piece evokes nostalgic memories. For me, the table sets the scene for Christmas and I take immense pleasure in perfectly presenting every single element.

Only the best will do

Ever mindful of having over-excited little ones at the table, this year I shall be using decorations that are safe, effective, festive and fun. However, an adult Christmas could command the finest china, the most elegant of stemware, fine decanters of margaux and heady scented Christmas candles. Marks and Spencer's Mandarin, Clove and Cinnamon candle (£5) and The White Company's large Winter candle (£48) are presented in practical tumbler glasses which can be positioned on the table or a nearby

dresser to create a festive aroma. Light these a few hours before you intend to serve lunch so the room can be filled with the scent of Christmas.

The desired effect

I particularly like the contemporary effect of all white linen (which can be used year round), white china, Philippe Starck ghost chairs and oversized stemware with a stunning centrepiece of a crystal candelabra. Cargo has a number of beautiful coloured centrepieces available this season (www.cargohomeshop.com). A single piece works well in the centre of a round or square table, or position three along the length of a rectangular table. Accent to dramatic effect by setting an oversized different coloured fluorescent glass bauble on each plate.



Rule Britannia

Throughout this year there has been a huge trend towards Cool Britannia – red, white and blue glitter, think Vivienne Westwood meets Elton John for real rock glam. For a truly Cool Britannia Christmas lunch, invest in some Union Jack melamine beakers from Emma Bridgewater (£4, www.emmabridgewater.co.uk), perfect for every age



they look fun and festive set on a clean white tablecloth but can then be used year round.

Weave a long strand of red tinsel down the centre of the table and stud with Union Jack baubles (£8.95 each, Selfridges) and large red diamond shaped table decorations (£9.50 box of 12, Marks and Spencer). For an added touch of rock glam kitsch add five-inch high red or silver glitter reindeer (£10.95, Selfridges).

Keep the rest of the table simple and uncluttered with plain white china, white napkins and red coloured wine glasses – Marks and Spencer and Cargo have a good selection.

Cutlery should be clean, classical and unfussy – Muji have a fabulous range of brushed or polished stainless steel (right, from £1.95, www.muji.co.uk) – with the essentials laid out neatly for each guest.

For the finishing touch make your own mini Cool Britannia Christmas cakes (left) and place one in the centre of every plate, try decorating them with candy stripes in red, white and blue, finished with a glitter hand moulded sugar rose.



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Left: Add a wintry touch to your table with these crackers (£2.50, Marks and Spencer)
 Right: If you want to splash out on a special centrepiece the Baccarat Zenith candlestick (£3,240, Mulberry Hall) with wine glasses (£50 for a box of two, Riedel) will make your table look elegant
 Below: These pretty tea lights will add a warm glow to your table (£10 for a set of 3, Tesco)



Lighten up
 Advent candles for me were a great way to count down the weeks running up to Christmas when I was a child. I have adopted this idea for my own children and this can form a strong alternative focal point of the Christmas table. Position four white sturdy church pillar candles or Kenneth Turner scented ones (from £12, www.kennethturner.com) on a silver heavy-duty plate. Lay small branches of fresh pine between and

around the candles, together with sprigs of fresh cut holly and berries. Finish with star anise, fresh cranberries, cinnamon sticks and kumquats studded with cloves as these aromas are so indicative of the traditional Christmas.

You can continue this theme of nature by filling two hurricane glass lamps with pine cones entwined with battery operated pea lights. These can be safely positioned on the table and offer a subtle glow as Christmas evening draws in.

Crackers or no crackers?

There is always a debate in our house – crackers or no crackers. While they can look effective on the table I find they take up valuable space and create a huge amount of litter after all the bangs, pops and whistles have expired. Unless you can afford the ultimate in luxury crackers from Asprey (www.asprey.com) or smart crackers from Marks and Spencer, consider instead little boxes of trivia or jokes. These can be wrapped in festive paper and beautifully ribboned and accompanied by an individual wooden nutcracker for every guest. I visit the Christmas market in Munich every year where they have an amazing collection.

Count your blessings

This year, like so many other families I will be spending Christmas entertaining my young family and my in-laws and I am really looking forward to it. After a turbulent year of cost-cutting and tightening our belts I intend my Christmas lunch to require the opposite – a loosening of the belt to indulge in a hearty and well-deserved Christmas lunch. As Bing Crosby suggests in *White Christmas* "count your blessings". And I for one intend to do just that! ■



Smart recycling

We have seen a renaissance of home crafts and an abundance of recycling recently; try to think of some great money saving ideas to involve the children. This year my family will be making our own placemats. Starting with a sheet of A4 coloured card we are using old Christmas cards, wrapping paper and material to create a collage. The children will personalise every placemat before I laminate them ready for the big day. This is a truly memorable and individual way to set the Christmas table that the guests can keep and reuse Christmas after Christmas.

You might also like to consider making your own runner and napkins. John Lewis has a great selection of Christmas fabrics, as do quilting experts Cottonpatch (www.cottonpatch.co.uk). You can order material by the metre or a fat quarter (a quilting term and just about the size of a napkin), which can be simply hemmed with a sewing machine.

For the centrepiece of the table present a home-decorated Christmas cake on a footed cake stand. Bake your own towards the end of November and cover with marzipan and icing the

week before Christmas (see Rick's recipe on p.48). Alternatively Sainsbury's now stock Little Venice Cake Company simple iced celebration cakes for you to decorate yourself. Available as five inch (£9.99) and eight inch (£14.99) these tiers can be stacked centrally to create a two-tier cake. Change the white ribbons for festive red ones, and stack stars stamped out from green sugar paste icing to form a Christmas tree for the top. Use ready filled icing tubes to pipe red, white and green pearls on the cake to create an effective masterpiece. Then dress around the base of the cake with gold and silver foil covered chocolate coins or hand-baked Christmas spiced cookies cut into snowflakes and covered with white icing and edible glitter.