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## Interior designer Rachel Chudley's guide to a festive home

Great music, great booze and beautiful candles are key to a holiday atmosphere, says the London-based decorator



As told to **Lauren Indvik** NOVEMBER 28 2023



My dad is one of 12 children, so growing up there would be about 50 people for Christmas. Back in those days, we'd be at our grandparents' hotel in Northamptonshire. The adults would get drunk, sing, have fun. Our grandpa would dress up as Father Christmas, and the children and teenagers would queue up to get presents. Of course, we knew the presents were from our parents. I think even when I believed in Father Christmas, I knew that it was grandpa pretending.

Two years ago, we stayed [at home] in London for the first time ever and hosted Christmas ourselves, which was so fun. The house we live in has a bar upstairs that was decorated like an English pub by the previous owner, and we turned it into an *EastEnders* Christmas special. Lots of 1980s decorations everywhere.

The best Christmas trees for me are the ones where you have a million different baubles from different eras, different places. I think it's already kind of a gaudy, over-the-top time, so it's best not to be precious about it.

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**For myself, I really want a pressure cooker. I keep getting told about them, and I really want one**

[If you're hosting at Christmas] it's nice to make things cosy — lots of blankets, soft materials, really beautiful candles and candlesticks. Just have great music, great booze, make sure everyone has a full glass at all times, and make the place extremely warm. People should feel they can put their feet up.

Scent is important, too. There's a scent shop on Columbia Road run by Angela [Flanders], she hand-makes all of the candles and scents and there is a candle that smells of orange and is Christmas personified [Angela Flanders Orange Blossom Candle, £38, [angelaflanders-perfumer.com](http://angelaflanders-perfumer.com)].

I usually buy presents for colleagues, family and a small group of cousins that we are close with. For the person who has everything, they get alcohol. My son is one-and-a-half and for children, books go down really well — you can write a nice note in them, and they can be tucked away on a shelf.

I wish I was more of a planner when it came to presents, but I am quite last-minute, I admit. I used to go out shopping and buy lots of clothes and accessories I've found in vintage places and interiors-type things in markets, but it's so time-consuming, so I tend to order things online. [Online marketplace] Glassette is great for gifts, [which was founded by] our neighbours Laura Jackson and Jonathan [Gorrigan].

For myself, I really want a pressure cooker [laughs]. I keep getting told about them, and I really want one! The best gift I ever received was a painting my father-in-law gave me, that he painted himself. I aspire to be a person who gifts art.

*Rachel Chudley is the founder of the eponymous east London interior design studio, known for its inventive use of colour and materials*





Chudley prefers Christmas trees adorned with a 'million different baubles' © Poppy Thorpe/FT



The interior designer used to buy accessories in vintage shops but now orders online © Poppy Thorpe/FT



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