In the morning sun, ice crystals twinkle like ornaments on the deep-green pine branches. Freshly fallen snow covers the outdoors in a soft blanket of frozen fluff that glistens as though Mother Nature has decked the boughs of the great outdoors for the holidays. Lake Country residents are decking the halls of their homes as well to welcome the joyous season.

For one Lake Country family, Christmas planning is a year-round activity. All the rooms in their main house and guesthouse are decorated exquisitely with hundreds, or closer to thousands, of holiday treasures collected over decades of travels across the nation and around the globe. The feeling of the holiday decor is elegant, yet warm and inviting. In a fun-loving way, Art and JoAnn, property owners on Pelican Lake, take decorating and holiday traditions very seriously. They love to share the joy of the season with neighbors, friends, and most of all, their family.

Christmas is more than magic and tinsel. It is the traditions of family and friends gathering to share joy and cheer, according to JoAnn. The spirit of Christmas shines from within her heart and can be felt the moment you walk through the doors of her lovely home. Perhaps it is the welcoming scent of cinnamon that greets you when you enter the foyer or the shining faces of the many Santa figurines set throughout the other decorations. Or perhaps it is the yuletide music softly echoing in the background. The combination of holiday spirit and charm within this home would likely bring a smile to the face of Scrooge himself if he were to cross the threshold.

JoAnn is passionate about the customs involved in the decorating process. She tries to wait until mid-November to begin the magical transformation by pulling the many boxes of collectibles down from the shelves in the garage. Everything is categorized and organized by collection type and color scheme. It is a time-consuming project, but one that brings her great joy. Taking the items out of the box one by one and reminiscing over each piece is a special part of the tradition. She remembers where each piece came from. Some were gifts, some were purchased, and all are very special.

BY VIVIAN CLARK PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICK HAMMER
"I usually wait until after Thanksgiving to put up the tree," says JoAnn. It takes at least three days to finish the project. While she enjoys the scent of a freshly cut traditional tree, the family finally had to break down and purchase an artificial tree so it would hold the weight of all their ornaments. Each year she adds more. She is an avid collector of Christopher Radko ornaments. In addition to bringing home a new one for her own tree, she also purchases one for each grandchild's collection. She also enjoys the whimsical, heavily glittered ornaments of Patricia Breen.

Keeping traditions alive is important to this family and more so when enjoyed through the eyes of the children, she says. The traditional pickle hunt brings giggles ringing through the house. There is an antique German ornament in the shape of a pickle. The pickle ornament is hidden somewhere on the tree. "The first thing the children do when they come to visit," says JoAnn, "is run to the tree and look for the pickle. Whoever finds the pickle first, opens presents first."

Every room, even the kitchen and bathrooms, receives a festive touch. There are Santas and baubles and ribbons and bows—oak leaves and acorns and pheasant feathers and pinecones. They are all treasures. "An idea starts out and then it becomes more," she says. "That is how the collections are begun. I keep my eyes open all year-round for items that fall within my color schemes."
The guesthouse is more than a home away from home—it is an extension of their home. "I come down here every day," says JoAnn. "I just love it here." The holiday decorations in the guesthouse are arranged with the same loving care as the main house.

While it is a favorite place for family and friends to stay, Art and JoAnn often entertain in the guesthouse. It is fully functional, complete with a large kitchen and three bathrooms. Every room is decorated, whether they plan to entertain or not, and they encourage guests to explore.

A juniper wreath welcomes visitors at the door and a huge stone fireplace takes center stage in the living room. Warmth beckons from its twinkling glow and encourages guests to warm up and ward off the frosty air. Ropes of garland cascade along the mantel in gentle swags, flanked by the nostalgic stockings hung by the chimney with care.

The floor plan of the guesthouse is open, inviting, and a casual setting. The up-north lodge look is enhanced by Victorian elegance. Santas and old-fashioned figurines are reminders that this is a time to be jolly. The vintage decorations recall the charm of Christmases past.

Two of the family's favorite traditions are sledding and ice-skating. When the cheeks of the merry-makers are rosy and red, the family troops indoors to continue the jubilation with hot cocoa or a holiday toddy.

The kitchen has the amenities one would expect, including space to prepare the most elaborate dishes. After a day in the brisk outdoors, JoAnn is ready to dish up some more fun and a serving of holiday cheer in the dining area. A soup supper is served, followed by a very special dessert. Guests pop open English Christmas crackers (small party favors that burst with a popping noise when the ends are pulled) and a large box of Godiva chocolates is passed around the table—the youngest child makes his selection first. "We haven't any girls, darn it!" laughs JoAnn. "Everyone has to wear their paper crowns while we eat chocolates. The box makes two or three passes around the table before we hear the first 'no, thank you.' And then we play bingo."

The design of the guesthouse is simple. "It is not grand, but it is comfortable," she says. To bring in as much light as possible the windows are "extra long and extra tall. And there are lots of them."

One unique feature of the guesthouse is that "if you could draw a line down the middle and fold it in half, each side would match identically."

When it is time to nestle into bed, the smaller bedroom of the guesthouse brings visions of candy canes and is as fresh as peppermint done completely in red and white. The matching twin-bed quilts lend nostalgic charm to the spirit and theme. "I love the color red," says JoAnn.

The master bedroom of the guesthouse is white-on-white simplicity, except for the quilt made by JoAnn's mother from Art's old shirts. The twinkle of holiday lights on the bedroom Christmas tree adds a festive touch. Ordinary elements create elegance, she says. The room even boasts windows high above the bed. The morning light is reflected off the snow outside and bounces in to greet the day.

Placing a Christmas tree in every room, including the baths, guarantees that guests will enjoy sweet holiday dreams.

Whether decorations are done in natural clusters of pinecones and wildlife or heavily glittered glass ornaments and Victorian Santas, the magic of Christmas seems more alive when it is trimmed in a bit of holiday cheer.