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# homemade THIS DELAWARE FAMILY'S CHRISTMAS IS ALWAYS for the holidays



**MADE FROM SCRATCH**



**f** For those who seldom entertain, the tasks that go along with planning an event—hand-lettering place cards and topping hors d'oeuvres with a uniform number of caviar eggs—may seem as challenging as searching for a perfect last-minute gift on Christmas Eve. But for a master hostess like Jennifer Abramczyk, there's nothing more exciting than transforming her and husband Jon's 1928 Colonial residence into a homemade Christmas adventure for a family that offers hospitality nonstop.

The Abramczyks serendipitously stumbled upon their Wilmington, Delaware, house nine years ago. Situated in the same subdivision three blocks away from their much smaller home, it was built the same year. As a couple who loves to entertain, extra space was at the top of their wish list. When they learned that the owners of the larger home they admired wanted to downsize—voilà: the two families swapped residences.

After relocating, Jon and Jennifer decided structural alterations should come before aesthetic touches. "This place was built when houses were staffed," says Jennifer. "And since I am the staff, a number of things had to change." They chose architect John Milner, whose firm specializes in restoring and adapting historic structures. The house was in good shape, with large living and dining rooms and enough bedrooms and baths. But Jennifer, an accomplished cook undaunted by serving dinner for 40, needed an expansive kitchen plus a butler's pantry where she could house a massive collection of china, crystal, and serving pieces.

After Milner completed the addition, the next step was to add vitality to the interiors, using plenty of blue and yellow, the couple's favorite colors. A presentation that Jennifer attended at the nearby Winterthur Museum led her to the design team of Courtney Coleman and Bill Brockschmidt. The duo seemed to understand color, lush fabrics, and tradition, but in a 21st-

**Right:** Jon and Jennifer Abramczyk host many events throughout the year at their 1928 brick Colonial home, including an annual Christmas dinner party.

**Opposite:** In the living room, wooden ornaments crafted by Jennifer's mother hang from the home's most spectacular Christmas tree. Jon's childhood train set works its way around the tree's base, adding nostalgia.

**Above:** An atypical holiday color scheme of marine blue and yellow adds to the festive spirit enlivening the rooms.

**Preceding pages:** Lemons and greenery are combined in pyramid form to create miniature citrus trees on the table. The dining room can seat 24 guests, making formal dinners grand and special.





The Abramczyk house is filled with decorations handmade by members of their family—like the garland, wreath, and needlepoint stockings that add Christmas joy to the living room mantel.



**Right:** A tree adorned with dried hydrangeas and berries is set by the architect-designed fireplace. **Above:** The kitchen is the nucleus for party planning. Jennifer borrowed a tip from her grandmother to ensure no guest is served the same menu twice. "I make a list of who is invited and the menu that was served, so repeat guests are always surprised." **Left:** An exterior space was incorporated and enclosed in the renovation, providing the family with a casual, light-filled eating area. **Below:** Jon and Jennifer with daughters Raley, 12, and Annie, 9. Creations such as a tree made of toy blocks and miniature wooden ornaments add to the personality of the Abramczyk Christmas.



century way that is comfortable for the children—Raley, 12, and Annie, 9. The results are refreshing all year, and most especially at Christmas, when the tried and true red and green combination gets the old heave-ho in favor of the house's yellow, marine blue, gray, and coral color palette.

As the holidays approach, Jennifer gathers Christmas supplies. She adorns an oversized wreath in the living room with dried hydrangeas, pomegranates, oranges, and magnolia leaves. In the entry hall, a magnolia garland winding up the balustrade has lemons and coral ribbon. "With the fruits and magnolia leaves, I get in my share of Southern references," explains Jennifer, a Texan married to a Pennsylvanian of Polish heritage. "Our holidays combine Southern, New England, and Polish traditions."

Music and food are at the heart of their holidays. At the living room's vintage piano, Jon, an accomplished pianist, plays carols and guests sing along. In the dining room, where walls

and leather chair seats are a saturated marine blue, Jennifer festoons her chandelier with yellow satin ribbons. "I call it the Christmas Maypole," she laughs.

Cooking with others is part of their entertaining, so they need an efficient space. "I frequently invite girlfriends over to cook one main meal and several side dishes together," Jennifer says. And at Christmas, her large working space is key for her creations, which include a special cookie tree.

During the holidays, Jennifer and Jon achieve their primary goal: creating memories and traditions for themselves and their children. "We make ornaments—like characters that show our girls' soccer numbers or heroes from their favorite stories," says Jennifer. "We work hard to make our Christmas our own." ❧

Architect: John Milner

Interior designers: Courtney Coleman and Bill Brockschmidt

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