

FIT FOR A

Queen LUNCHEON

How to host a lavish Christmas luncheon with antiques you love year-round.

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MARK TWAIN DIDN'T CALL IT THE GILDED AGE FOR NOTHING.

The Victorian period was one long, drawn out feast for the eyes. At no time of year was this love of extravagance and stunning visuals more apparent than Christmas.

Thanks to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, we now have beautiful vintage decorations, delicious holiday dishes, Christmas trees and grand luncheons like the Victorian-style one held for the British royal family every year at Windsor castle.

These days, you don't need a centuries-old castle in order to treat your guests to a Windsor-worthy Christmas feast. Here's a round-up of all you need to celebrate this Christmas Victorian-style.





Photo/Eugenia Uhl



While a Victorian place setting could include more than 100 pieces, it is a bit extravagant today. However, going a little heavy on the dishware will make a big impression on your guests.



Photo/Hillary Black

The food should be just as lavish and extravagant as every other aspect of your Christmas luncheon.

THE AMBIENCE

The bigger the room, the better. You'll need plenty of space for your guests and extravagant Christmas spread. Ideally, the room should include windows, a fireplace and high ceilings.

Whatever room you choose, it should be lavishly decorated. Dripping chandeliers, luxurious wallpaper, classic paintings in elaborate frames and gilded mirrors give any room an authentic Victorian appearance. A dark oak table long enough to accommodate all your guests should be the focal point; arrange matching French or Baroque antique chairs—either plain or upholstered for flair—around the table.

Above left: The idea of a dining room was introduced during this period, and it quickly became the room of choice in which to entertain guests.



Victoria and Albert were known to hang Christmas trees from the ceiling. Follow their lead and add foliage and vintage ornaments to your chandelier.

GET THE LOOK

Dining during the 19th century was as much about breathtaking visuals as it was the food.

• **MIX DARK AND LIGHT:** The dark wood of the oak table and antique French chairs are beautifully offset by a crisp, white linen tablecloth. Layered red and gold runners add some color and make for a great segue into the décor.

• **CENTERPIECE:** Red pillar candles add to the nostalgic holiday atmosphere, complementing the red accents scattered about the table and making the centerpiece pop. Combined with a Christmas tree-inspired chandelier, it's perfect lighting for a Victorian holiday feast.

• **ANTIQUÉ DISHES:** In true Victorian fashion, set the table with all the dishware needed throughout the meal. If there was ever a chance to showcase all your prized antiques in one place, this is it. The white china, with its gold trim and

winter scene gives the table a touch of extravagance. Crystal stemware adds a light frosting to the wintery table setting without obstructing the centerpiece.

• **FIREPLACE:** The table is situated next to a cozy fireplace to warm the bodies and souls of holiday revelers. The mantle features white flowers nestled among evergreen boughs to complement the table setting. Add candelabra with a dash of red in the form of tapered candles to complete the look.



Photo/Liddy Baars

Above: Everyday antique objects like this snuff box and pair of pince-nez glasses are great additions to a Victorian-inspired centerpiece.

THE CENTERPIECE

During the Victorian era, the ability to throw a wildly successful party determined your social standing. As such, Victorians took entertaining very seriously. A large portion of a soiree would take place at the dining table, so the lady of the house focused her attention there.

The pièce de résistance at any good Victorian table setting is the centerpiece. A festive runner makes a great backdrop for your centerpiece, typically a lavish floral arrangement including berries, pinecones and evergreens. White, gold and silver baubles and ornaments add a bit of holiday sparkle, while tapered candles in intricately carved candlesticks add a bit of height.

Your centerpiece need not be made entirely of seasonal decorations. Mix it up with some of your favorite, year-round antiques. Anything goes: snuff boxes, birdcages, perfume bottles, porcelain figures. Just make sure the items fit the color scheme dictated in your centerpiece.



Crystal stemware adds some height and gives your table setting a frosted look.



THE DISHES

The rest of the table is reserved for the opulent array of dishware. Victorians felt that each food should have its own special dish and utensils. That could mean up to 80 pieces or more per setting. All of this would be set out prior to the meal and remain on the table until each course was finished.

Above left: Take a tip from the Victorians and go a little heavy on the dishware.

Left: Pull out all your fine china. Porcelain was all the rage during the Victorian era.



The romantic scenes etched into each piece of this silver antique tea set are sure to transport your guests back in time.



Photo/Hillary Black

FESTIVE ACCENTS

Decorations should be festive, yet sophisticated. Evergreen boughs accented with pinecones, berries, and dried flowers evoke a Dickensian ambience. Embellish these nature-inspired dressings with silver and gold ornaments, tinsel, and garlands. Throw in some white pieces for a more subdued look.

Christmas is a time for family, so don't forget the kids. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert always included a table laden with gifts for the children. Assemble antique toys on a small bench or table for a "Santa was here" appeal.



Above: Victorians truly believed that God is in the details. Elaborate centerpieces, intricately folded napkins, elegant dishware—everything has its place in the overall theme.

Right: Include antique pieces you enjoy year-round in your decorating scheme.



Photo/Hillary Black

According to Mrs. Beeton (the Victorian Martha Stewart), food must be served in the appropriate dishes. Break out your stemware and make sure that everything from wine to cocktails, desserts to jams, are all presented in their proper vessels.

ARRANGING FOOD DISPLAYS

While Queen Victoria served her guests 50 turkeys and a 350-pound joint of beef, a roasted turkey or glazed ham will suffice. Raw or stewed oysters, an assortment of pates, breads, meat pies and puddings are menu must-haves.

Round off your meal with a smorgasbord of desserts, such as bûche de Noël, or Christmas log. Spread a layer of butter cream atop a rectangular sponge cake and then roll it up. Cover the roll in butter cream icing and decorate to resemble a Yule log.

Add a bit of color to your dessert table with a fruitcake and decorated gingerbread cookies. Assemble petit fours, chocolates, and assorted cookies on tiered serving trays. And no dessert table would be complete without homemade pies!

Right: Nothing says Christmas like a wreath of evergreen sprigs. Add a few berries, dried flowers, and pinecones for a touch of color.



Photo/Hillary Black

FRENCH GARDEN HOUSE VICTORIAN CRANBERRY HOLIDAY CAKE

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups sifted all purpose flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 ½ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ cup butter
- 1 egg {beaten}
- 1 teaspoon grated orange peel
- ¾ cup orange juice
- ½ cup light raisins
- 1 cup chopped, whole fresh {or frozen} cranberries
- ½ cup chopped nuts {optional}

Preheat oven to 350°F.

- **MIX:** Sift flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and baking soda into a large bowl. Cut in butter until mixture is crumbly. Add in the egg, orange juice and orange peel all at once. Stir just until mixture is evenly moistened.
- **FOLD:** Add in raisins, cranberries and nuts.
- **SPOON:** Spoon mixtures into a greased 9 x 5 x 3 loaf pan.
- **BAKE:** Bake at 350°F for 1 hour. Cool on wire rack.



Photo/Lidy Baars

For more elegant holiday inspiration from antiques dealer Lidy Baars, visit frenchgardenhouse.com.

