

## Sunday Best

AS SHE SETS A CHEERY AND CHIC TABLE FOR A CELEBRATORY LUNCH, NORTH CAROLINA-BASED INTERIOR DESIGNER MA ALLEN CALLS FOR ALL HANDS ON DECK—EVEN THE SMALLEST ONES

By Margot Shaw • Photography by Anagram Photo



Interior designer MA Allen and her three children rejoice in the results of the group table-setting project.

**F**or designer MA Allen, any family meal is a special occasion and therefore warrants a table setting with silver. So you can only imagine that a tablescape collaboration for a celebratory Sunday luncheon would yield an exceptional display.

Inspired, gracious living is a family tradition for MA. Her fondest memories are of times spent in New York with her grandmother, a Pratt Institute graduate and talented artist, doing art projects that involved mixing patterns, textures, and materials. MA also gleaned a can-do creativity from her mother,

whose talents encompassed all the domestic arts, including cooking, flower arranging, and hand-sewing. However, MA found inspiration from more than just the women in her family. The designer's father collects fine art and has an extensive silver collection. And apparently, that yen for collecting silver is in the family's DNA, as MA's 7-year-old daughter, Lil, was bequeathed all her grandmother's silver. "Lil has more silver than I do," MA says. "It's a bit of a rub."

Throughout the designer's childhood, her parents regularly entertained at home, so you could say MA was weaned on



ABOVE: The antique sideboard from MA's father provides a convenient and beautiful surface for the bar. A cut-glass heirloom punch bowl serves as a wine cooler. "I love all things Southern, but I will not be serving punch," MA confesses.



ABOVE AND TOP: MA collects all different patterns of James Kent *Dubarry* chintz plates and mixes them with more formal patterns as she creates settings featuring a wild and wonderful mélange of tableware and glassware.

setting a pretty table, serving delicious fare, and learning impeccable table manners—all the while surrounded by beautiful antiques. Fast-forward to her present home, where she dwells happily amid her own collections with a personal style that touts a modern spin on the classics and a confident use of color. Her husband and children especially enjoy and appreciate the intriguing environment she shapes for them. "We use the dining room a lot," says MA. "And that's really a child-driven decision. My kids know that eating in the dining room signals that thought and love were poured into the effort. They like the idea of 'making something to show you I love you,' as they've heard Daniel Tiger from *Mister Rogers* say."

A backdrop of highly saturated teal walls punctuated by gold-colored klismos dining chairs from Maison Jansen sets the stage for bold color choices and fearless pattern mixes in this Sunday celebration dreamed up and implemented by MA and her children. The designer selected

one of her favorite finds, D'Ascoli, an Italian fashion and table linen company, for the place mats and napkins, as well as her outfit for the occasion. The linens' intricate screen prints in electric hues with spot embroidery keep the visual party going and play well with the mix of color, size, and pattern in MA's china and glassware.

Bowerbird, a local floral design group, was called in to contribute the floral aspects of the table. Using mono-color/mono-bloom arrangements with flowers of varying sizes, shapes, and colors, the florists created enough movement to blend with but not be eclipsed by the kaleidoscope of linens and tableware.

From heirloom silver baby cups and an antique sideboard gifted by her father to hot-pink candles and a Kelly Wearstler mid-century-style chandelier, MA leaves her artful touch on every detail of this tableau. She has created not only a fitting homage to those who so powerfully influenced her aesthetic but also an excellent legacy for the next generation. Daniel Tiger would certainly approve. ✨