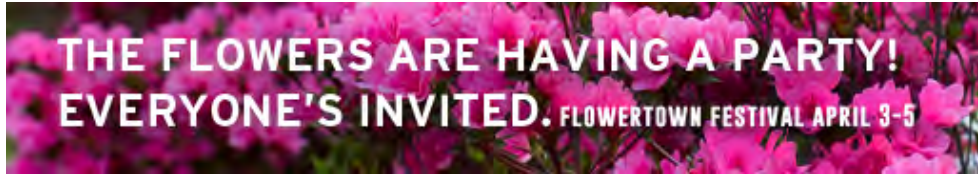


FLOWER



HOLIDAYS & PARTIES

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During the holiday season, floral artist Mila Hirsch welcomes friends and family into her winter wonderland of a home in Birmingham, Alabama

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As a little girl, sitting down for a candlelit Christmas Eve dinner with her extended family in Birmingham, Alabama, Mila Hirsch dreamed of hosting the gathering herself one day. She imagined herself in the starring role of ultimate hostess, taking the reins from her mother when the time was right. Since it was the biggest night of the season, Mila assumed her siblings and cousins shared her sentiments, but fortunately for her, they did not. “No one wanted that chore,” she says with a laugh. “And it was funny, because I thought we were going to fight over who got to host Christmas Eve when we all became adults.”



The Hirsch home, designed by architect Mack McKinney, lights up as dusk approaches. On the exterior (painted Benjamin Moore's China White), an architectural remnant is rumored to have come from a schoolhouse attended by William Shakespeare.

After relocating back home from Manhattan in 2015, Mila's dream came true when she and husband Joe, her high school sweetheart, hosted their first Christmas Eve in their new house, designed by architect Mack McKinney, who had conceived the space with an eye toward how the young family (including son Rex, 6, and daughter Ida, 3) lives and entertains. Put to the ultimate test, the home proved the ideal setting to carry on the tradition. With soaring 11-foot ceilings and a sense of airiness that is hard to achieve in even the most open of floor plans, the Hirsch residence has become a regular celebration destination.

The couple hosts three or four large parties a year, as well as many smaller gatherings. During the holidays, in addition to the Christmas Eve fete, they throw an annual black-tie seated dinner party for around 40 friends. Lingering into the early hours of the morning, it's often a raucous occasion, but that doesn't keep Mila from pulling out her impressive stash of fine china, crystal, and silver.

Many of the pieces of her collection show up not just on her table but on her canvases as well. An artist by trade, Mila has dedicated much of her career to painting flowers carefully arranged in silver and crystal vessels. (Follow [@the_painted_flower](#) on Instagram for examples of her work.) She designs the arrangements herself and then photographs them with a Canon digital SLR.



With an artist's exacting eye, Mila decorated the interiors of the house herself. Here, the family's beloved Papillon, Ziggy, cozies up by the fire in the living room, which is decked with square wreaths, magnolia swags, and orchids in a Sheffield punch bowl.



Mila enlisted two floral designers to help amp up the wow factor—Katharine Davis of Offbeat Blooms, a new face in the local flower world, and Leah Hazzard of 3 Graces Design, an industry veteran who dresses houses in their Christmas best year after year.



In a sterling epergne, a muted arrangement by Katharine Davis of Offbeat Blooms includes dusty miller, roses, seeded eucalyptus, and anemones—homeowner Mila Hirsch's favorite flower. Each place setting mixes treasures recently collected and passed down from family.



Open shelving boasts some of Mila's impressive collection of china and silver.



Mila prominently displays her works throughout the house. Here, a painting of calla lilies is cleverly hung over a favorite antique mirror.

Her painting style, a lifelike interpretation influenced by the Old Masters, reflects her formal training at a handful of prestigious schools, including the Art Institute of Chicago. Her attention to detail on every petal and every sliver of light speaks to the level of perfection she strives for. “Every time I paint a flower, I’m trying to get better,” says the artist, who typically works on a large-scale oil painting for about two months.



“There will be a day when white-and-stainless kitchens feel dated,” says Mila. “So we went just the opposite with black and brass.” The bold choice is a nod to designer Kelly Wearstler, Mila’s former boss and a major influence in her aesthetic.

When asked to take part in a holiday tour of homes organized by a local church, Mila enlisted two floral designers to help amp up the wow factor—Katharine Davis of Offbeat Blooms, a new face in the local flower world, and Leah Hazzard of 3 Graces Design, an industry veteran who dresses houses in their Christmas best year after year. Together the three transformed the Hirsch home into a winter wonderland.

The décor called for a scheme outside the traditional red and green. The result “was icy but still warm,” says Davis, who designed most of the cool-toned floral arrangements in vessels. Hazzard took the lead on the larger installations, such as the garland of magnolia and foraged branches on the banister. “I wanted natural and organic,” she says. “The space is already so amazing—it doesn’t need anything too loud or big and shiny.”

More from Mila’s Home

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Leah Hazzard of 3 Graces Design fashioned a magnolia garland that will dry beautifully and last the entire holiday season. A rare black-and-white abstract by Mila juxtaposes the gilding on the antique console, sunburst mirror, and lamps.

This unfussy approach is echoed in the flocked Christmas tree, which commands attention even without ornaments. Cleverly placed on the skirted octagonal entry table, it appears much taller than its six-foot stature when viewed from the street. With four square wreaths lining the dining and family room windows and a massive 50-inch wreath on a front exterior window, there's no pressure on the tree to be the solo star.



A tableau of greenery, oranges, and pinecones sets a casual tone for the family's outdoor patio.

Merry touches, from Midori ribbon-tied kissing balls to spiced orange pomanders, are found around every corner, beckoning tour goers to marvel at the wonder that is the Hirsch home at Christmastime. Little do they know, the festive decor isn't just for them, but 20 couples dressed in black tie are set to arrive that weekend, followed by a throng of family members on December 24. "Mila and her house are kind of one and the same," says Hazzard. "Stylish, chic, and inspiring but also incredibly welcoming."

MAKING MERRY WITH MILA

Hostess extraordinaire Mila Hirsch gives her tips and tricks for throwing a standout party

CREATE A TABLESCAPE • Foraged materials and flowers are budget friendly, and you can always include produce. I love using pomegranates, pineapples, apples, or any kind of citrus, and you get the tasty benefit of eating them after the party's over.

SET UP A DAY EARLY • How you look and feel is just as important, so get your house ready the day before. This way, there's no mad rush to get dressed, and the day-of focus can be about you.

MAKE A PLAYLIST • Music is so important in setting the mood and the tone of any party, so put some thought into it.



With their children, Rex and Ida, Mila and Joe Hirsch welcome guests through a modern iron-and-glass entry.

ACCEPT HELP • When someone offers, say yes! Even if it's just lighting candles, opening wine, or setting out place cards, it's a win-win for both of you.

BE GRACIOUS • No matter how hard the planning might have been, don't complain about it. Appreciate that people have chosen to celebrate with you, and let them know it's your pleasure to have them over.

By Abby Braswell | Photography by Laurey W. Glenn

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