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Rustic & Refined

A stylist shares her secrets for no-fuss entertaining with all the frills.

BY KAREN WILHELMSSEN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRET GUM | STYLING BY SYLVIA ASMUSSEN

Styling beautiful
vintage gatherings
is the specialty of
Sylvia Asmussen,

who owns the vintage rentals emporium Madam Palooza in Temecula Valley, California.

“My grandmothers were my inspiration,” she says. “They always opened their doors to family and guests. Everything was always used, from the dishes to the linens. Summers were always fun, using the family backyard picnic table and my grandma throwing her red-and-white checkerboard tablecloth outside with all her dishes holding her favorite recipes for everyone to feast on.”

This love for entertaining and bringing people together is evident in her thoughtful tablescapes. Here are Sylvia’s secrets to successful alfresco entertaining.

- 1 Let your personality show.** “Develop your own style of entertaining that fits you and makes you comfortable,” Sylvia says. “You will be more open to having people over and want to have intimate gatherings if you don’t feel intimidated and overwhelmed.”
- 2 Pick the right palette.** “In my line of work, I have always used a color wheel to help clients choose color palettes and show them that certain colors complement and help accent others. Using this simple tool can open your eyes to how to use color on your tabletop décor as well,” she says.



3

Keep it simple. Creating the menu can be as easy as picking up some fruits, vegetables, cheese, bread or a dessert to add color to the table. You can even prep any food the night before. “Cut up slices of citrus and add them into vases with some votives intermixed.”



4

Use what you've got. "Don't feel like you have to go out on a shopping spree to redecorate your entire home just to have guests over," Sylvia says. "Use your everyday dishes and maybe add the fancy glassware to it to give a pop of panache. Mix in those pretties that are in the cabinets to accent your tablescape."



5

Bring your décor outdoors. "Don't restrict yourself from taking your items from in the home to be outdoors to create another fun intimate gathering," Sylvia says. Here, she hung a chandelier and draped burlap curtains outdoors for a cozy setting.



6

Mix and match. From the plates and silverware to the chairs, nothing needs to match or be a complete set. In fact, when it doesn't match, it makes the look even more charming. "Visit your local thrift shops to add to your mix-and-match tableware, linens and serving dishes; you never know what finds await you there. This will allow you to add variety of looks for the seasons on a budget."



7

Get the layered look. On this rustic farmhouse table, a variety of textures and materials add visual interest to the space. Layer a burlap runner, lace or pretty linens over rustic textures to soften the look. Colored-glass compotes, weathered chairs and salvaged materials stand on their own as eye-catching décor.



8

Finish the look with flowers. "A simple trip to the local farmers market or grocer for flowers will add beauty to your get-together without breaking your budget," Sylvia says.



9

Give new purpose to old finds. Upcycle your finds and get creative about using what you have in new ways. Here, a vintage trophy is used as a vase for a stunning centerpiece.

10

Be a happy host. You should have as much fun at the party as your guests do. "It's about gathering and being with your loved ones," Sylvia says. "The effort you make in creating a special occasion lets them know how much they mean to you."

Sylvia Asmussen is the owner, stylist and creative force behind Madam Palooza. Her services include vintage furniture and prop rentals and professional styling for events. For more information, visit madampaloozaemporium.com.