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AROUND THE HOUSE: Five tips for setting an inviting holiday table



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Wednesday and Thursday, the San Francisco Design Center Galleria will be filled with tables creatively decorated by top designers and caterers from San Francisco and beyond. It's the annual benefit for Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS, with a Table Hop & Taste on Wednesday and the Gala Dinner on Thursday. Marc Blackwell put together the table shown for Beringer, one of the event's national sponsors this year, and was kind enough to share a few tips for do-it-yourselfers:

- Make a centerpiece from what's in your garden and refrigerator. For instance, arrange oranges among eucalyptus branches or set asparagus or artichokes in glass containers.
- Always have a light source on your table. Votives with individual aluminum holders are an inexpensive alternative to fancy candlesticks, and they can be arranged or scattered.
- Leave the wine (he, of course, recommends Beringer) and water on the table so guests can feel free to serve themselves.
- Mix family heirlooms and keepsakes with new things for a modern combination.
- Try mixing service styles as well. For example, have amuse-bouches waiting at the table when guests are seated, then serve the next course family style and the next plated. "This adds interest and fun," Blackwell said. "It also takes a lot of work off your plate. Because here's the most important part: When you have a great time, so will your guests."

For more information about the Design Center events, go to www.diffastf.org or call Randall Shields at (415) 597-8164.