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Helen Stroud mixes informality with formal touches, using antique silverware and heirloom napkins, as well as rattan chargers bought from a discount store in her Thanksgiving tablescape.

**Give thanks for a beautiful holiday table**

**By Susan Fox**  
 Correspondent

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Helen Stroud’s Southern girl pedigree, coupled with her legendary eye for design, gives her an edge when it comes to decorating a holiday table.

Stroud not only happily shares her easy-as-pie philosophy with Coast readers, but also gives assurance to a justifiable splurge — for Thanksgiving or any special event.

As the mother of five and with an even larger extended family, Stroud can always count on a houseful during the holidays.

Her No. 1 rule of thumb: “You want your table to be pretty and the environment relaxed. It’s a once-a-year gathering that should focus on creating memories.”

Stroud fondly recalls her Louisiana grandmother inviting younger members of the family to help select the china and linens for their holiday tables. In fact, Stroud — owner of the French-inspired store, Olivine, in Houston, and a part-time Galveston resident — continues to make family the centerpiece of the holidays, and in more ways than one.


For instance, in decorating her table for this year’s holiday gathering, she plans to use her great-great grandmother’s pre-civil war, coin-silver flatware to pair



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with the embroidered napkins favored by her grandmother.

Stroud will place the embroidered napkins aside her great-grandmother's French china plates so aptly adorned with sea creatures.

Her glassware also comes from family. All will be placed, sans tablecloth, on a rustic table made from "old pier wood" by her daughter, Catherine.

Stroud may decide to place rattan chargers, which she picked up on the cheap from Target or Walmart, underneath the plates to finish off the look of each place setting.

She suggests splurging on flowers.

"Flowers elevate it from everyday," she said. "You know it's something special when you have flowers." On a budget? Grocery store flowers will set the mood, too. Considering dressing them up by adding greenery found in your own backyard.

"My daughter, in fact, likes to fill her vases with just the greenery," she adds, noting it is preferable to keep the centerpiece 16 inches or lower in order to encourage cross-table contact with guests.

Struggling on where to begin with your decor?

"Everything seems to work off the plates, so begin there," said Stroud, who adds that she took her dinner plates — with their soft hints of turquoise and salmon colors — to her favorite florist, David Brown in Houston, to determine what blooms would best complement her decor. On her behalf, he chose show-stopping Voodoo roses for their orange-salmon color — to be mixed with the long and lush waratah and the tiny trachelium flowers.

Stroud prefers to serve her dinner selections — turkey, oyster dressing, fresh string beans, squash cream cheese casserole and Bruce Foods' canned organic yams (her relatives originally opened this popular store in New Iberia, La.) — buffet style. Dishes filled with food just clutters the look of a table, Stroud said.

Susan Fox is a Galveston resident who authors the popular home-design blog, Love Where You Live ([www.thegreenplum.blogspot.com](http://www.thegreenplum.blogspot.com)). If you'd like to share a story idea or comment, e-mail her at [susan\(at\)thegreenplum.com](mailto:susan(at)thegreenplum.com).

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