

A Relaxed Holiday, Naturally

BY HEATHER LORDSELL PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN REED FORSHMAN PRODUCTION BY ALCIA STEVENS



Shells and starfish on the mantel fit right in with the beach look of Shannon Gele and Tom Burke's family room. Shannon sewed the Christmas stockings from an old matelassé bedcover.





the winter holidays creep closer, staying calm is no small feat: so much to do,

so little time. Shannon Gale, though, remains remarkably upbeat and unruffled, thanks to a simple strategy: Keep it real, keep it relaxed, keep it natural. "I do it my way," says Shannon, who lives in Wayzata, Minnesota, with husband Tom Burke and young sons Sean and Aidan. "The holidays are supposed to be about comfort and joy, not about spending gobs of money and feeling totally crazed."

Growing up in Tiburon, California, a bucolic bay-side town north of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, Shannon savored the outdoors, from swimming in the ocean to hiking in the mountains. "For me, that's what beauty's all about," she says. "It's always been my greatest design inspiration."

Her laid-back approach works well in the family's 1960s saltbox house, which has a palette based on sand, sea, and sky. Sofas and chairs sport white slipcovers; vintage garden furniture graces every room. During the holidays, the glow becomes even brighter as Shannon decks every space with evergreen branches and boughs, pinecones and twigs, leaves and dried hydrangeas, gathered from the two

On the living room Christmas tree (left) silver ornaments and beads mingle with starfish hot-glued to hangers, a nod to Shannon's California roots. A mercury glass lamp and candlesticks add shimmer. Simple greenery on the front windows (above) ushers in casual cheer.



Instead of relying on purchased holiday decorations, take a simpler approach: Scour your yard for natural treasures.



acres of forest and wetlands around her house. "You don't have to go shopping to find wonderful decorations," she says. "My favorite ones come from my own backyard."

White poinsettias fill flea-market urns that frame the living room fireplace, and lacy paperwhites adorn tabletops. Shannon plants dozens of the paperwhites in November for minimal cost and by the holidays has a bounty of long-lasting, fragrant blooms. "I collect all sorts of pottery, so I'm always trying them in different vessels, from pots and pitchers to bowls and compotes," she says.

Shannon builds on this foundation with luminous accents: crystal, glass, mercury glass, mirrors, antique silver. "They give rooms sparkle, shine, and excitement every day," she says. "But at holiday time, they become absolutely essential to the mix." This down-to-earth approach is just part of what drives Shannon's seasonal decorating. As

In the entry (left), a bouquet of evergreens, silvered eucalyptus, and dried hydrangeas from the yard sets a welcoming tone. Silver accents give the neutral living room (above) a spare, sparkling holiday flair. Rustic branches in the fireplace ground the elegant components.

The dining room (far right) becomes "wrap central" at Christmastime. A giant roll of white butcher paper, bought for about \$75, serves as Shannon's primary gift paper and lasts several years. Shannon adorns packages (below) with plain grosgrain ribbon and a handful of natural toppers from her yard. Sean decorates a batch of holiday cookies at the counter between the kitchen and family room (right).



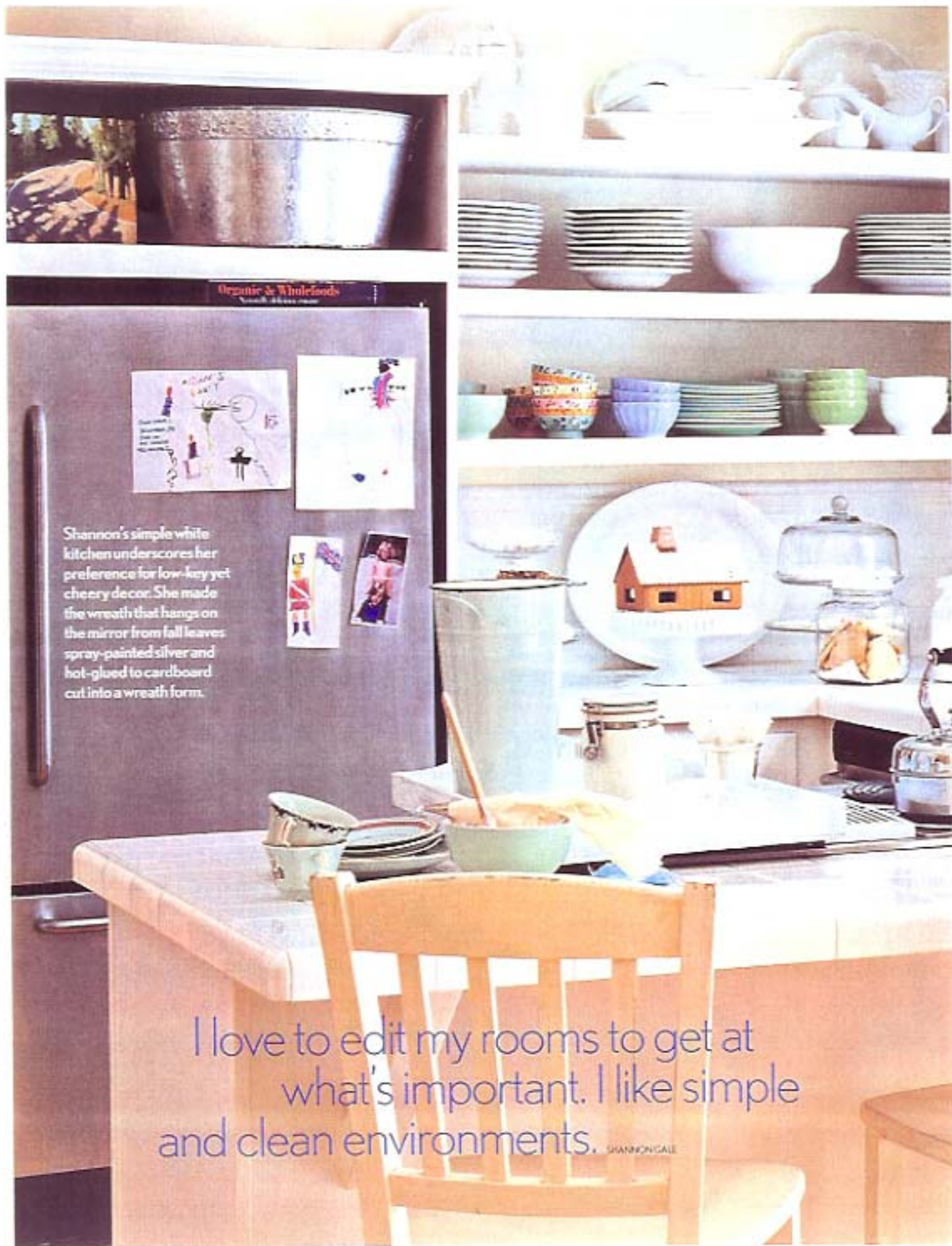
a stylist—first for movies and videos in Hollywood (where she met Tom, a former actor who is now in advertising), and currently for print ads in Minneapolis—she understands the importance of change and the allure of the unexpected. She tinkers constantly with her interiors, moving things around, repainting, refurbishing, and upgrading. She applies the same strategy to her annual holiday decorating ritual.

This season, Shannon brought in notes of understated glamour, using patina-kissed silver as her primary accent. She chose mainly silver ornaments for the tree, tucked tabletop-size tinsel trees into the kitchen, and fashioned silvery shades for the dining room chandelier. She draped a nostalgic glitter banner across the family room mantel, set old julep cups filled with utensils and evergreen sprigs on the kitchen windowsill, and massed antique sterling bowls and compotes on the dining table. The resulting sparkle is delicate and subtle.

It's also well-edited, another of Shannon's secrets. "I look for a pleasing variety of shapes, sizes, and functions," she says. "And I try never to crowd things. I want a mood that is calm, relaxed, and unfussy."

As for the element of surprise—that mysterious little something that lifts design from good to great—Shannon has that covered too. This time around, she





Shannon's simple white kitchen underscores her preference for low-key yet cheery decor. She made the wreath that hangs on the mirror from fall leaves spray-painted silver and hot-glued to cardboard cut into a wreath form.

I love to edit my rooms to get at what's important. I like simple and clean environments. SHANNON CALE





paid homage to her childhood memories with whimsical displays of seashells and starfish. These sculptural treasures adorn mantel garlands and hurricane lamps in the family room off the kitchen, fill an ornate silver bowl in the living room, dot tabletops, and brighten the Christmas tree.

In the snowy sub-zero Heartland, more than a thousand miles from the ocean, the effect is as warm and wonderful as summer sand between the toes. "It reminds me of home, which is really nice during the winter holidays," Shannon says. "You can take the girl out of California, but you definitely can't take the California out of this girl." ☺

Shannon's easygoing holiday spirit continues through the doors of the boys' bedrooms: A small tree sparkles on Aidan's bedside table (above).

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