



TRENDS AND TRADITION

PHOTOS AND STORY BY MELANIE REKOLA

Ahh the Christmas tree – all aglow with glittery baubles and bows, shining brightly in the hearts of children and adults alike. But have you ever wondered where this icon of tradition came from?

In the Beginning

Though the custom of decorating Christmas trees is thought to have originated in Germany 1500-1600 with roots tracing back as early as the Seventh Century, there are many similar pagan traditions, often to celebrate the winter solstice, that predate even these early findings.

Ancient Egyptians, Chinese and Hebrews all used evergreen trees, wreaths and garlands as decorations about the same calendar time as our current Christmas celebration. Tree rituals were also common among the pagan Europeans. Scandinavian customs included trimming live evergreen trees outside with food for the birds and decorating the house and barn with evergreens at the new year to scare away the devil. The use of red berries, apples, green garlands and bits of silver were typical. This celebration was centered on the rebirth of spring

(and life) after the cold winter months. The use of green, particularly in the coniferous trees and swags, were used to symbolize new life.

In Christian custom, legend has it that the fir tree's triangular shape was used to describe the Holy Trinity of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By the 12th Century a fir was being hung upside down from ceilings in central Europe at Christmas time as a symbol of Christianity. The use of the traditional colours of red and green had red symbolizing Jesus' blood and green symbolizing his birth. Edibles such as apples, nuts and dates were used to decorate the tree and candles were added to demonstrate "a depiction of the stars." Similar to the pagan tradition, this festivity is also focused around a celebration of new life. *Continued on page 88*

decorating

Real vs. Artificial

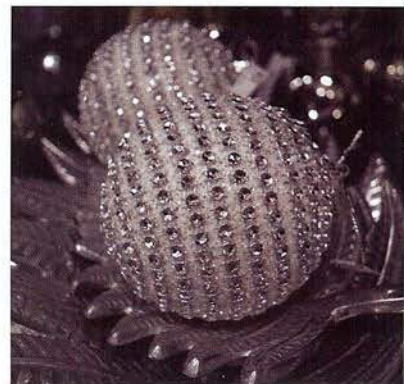
Though evergreens such as spruce, pine or fir are traditionally used for Christmas celebrations, since the 1950s, artificial Christmas trees made from polyvinyl chloride (PVC) have become very popular. Artificial trees are no doubt very convenient but contrary to popular belief they cause the most environmental damage. They are non-recyclable and fill up our landfills. A single-farmed Christmas tree absorbs more than one ton of CO₂ throughout its lifetime. Additionally, each acre of trees produces enough oxygen for the daily needs of 18 people. As long as a real tree is recycled afterwards and isn't trucked in from a distant place, it's the clear choice where Mother Earth is concerned.



The Modern Day Christmas Tree

Over time, decorations became more extravagant. Tinsel was invented in Germany around 1610 and at that time real silver was used! Wafer thin strips of genuine silver were used for tinsel right up to the mid-20th century. Shiny balls replaced apples, and twinkling lights replaced candles. An angel or star was added to top the tree.

Today, Christmas trees truly come in all sizes and colours imaginable. No longer are we limited to the traditional colours of red and green. Sparkly ornaments of hot pink, turquoise and even black are commonplace! Modern decorator trees are so fully adorned there is actually very little tree showing at all. Theme trees are common, even such signature trees as the "Ladies Shoe Tree" (a tree decorated with tiny, glossy replicas of women's shoes), "Island Peacock Tree" (a tree decorated with peacock feathers, shells and colours of the tropics), "Pink Lady Tree" (a tree dressed in all shades of pink) and more! And for some fashionistas, this means a different theme every year.



The lyrics sung in North America to the German tune *O Tannenbaum* begin "O Christmas Tree," giving rise to the mistaken idea that the German word *tannenbaum* (fir tree) means "Christmas tree." The German word for Christmas tree is actually *Weihnachtsbaum*.



Christmas tree trends seem to follow fashion trends. For instance, this year's trendy Christmas trees are the "Emerald Green Tree" (a tree sporting a variety of green shades and colours) and the "Poppy Red Tree" (a blend of flowers and poppy red/peach seen in the fashion world of late.)

Like clothing fashion, a timeless decorating approach of classic with a bit of trend thrown in for variety keeps you up-to-date and your budget in check. This simple method lets you keep your well-loved classic treasures but still leaves room for fun and adventure with current themes and colours. And to keep your Christmas décor feeling warm, don't forget to use some natural greens mixed with everything glittery. This truly original classic is always in style! **OH**

Melanie is a certified horticulturalist and landscape designer