



Green Thumb | Filled with delicate paperwhites, vintage McCoy and Hager vases (THIS PAGE), exemplify decorator and homeowner Michelle Morgan Harrison's fresh take on traditional holiday decorating. Silver, sage and ivory comprise the palette of her restored 1885 New Canaan Colonial. **Spelling Bee** | The reverse side of Morgan Harrison's playful homemade Advent calendar (OPPOSITE) spells "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town." See Resources.



Silver Belle

THE HOLIDAYS ARE THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR FOR A DECORATOR WHO BRINGS HER SOUTHERN LEGACY TO SEASONAL INTERIORS AND ENTERTAINING

BY SOPHIE DONELSON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURA MOSS





SSOME PEOPLE APPROACH the holidays with a to-do list. Michelle Morgan Harrison has a PowerPoint file. Her recipes are typed, collated by prep time and slipped into the clear sleeves of a three-ring binder that keeps everything splatter-proof.

Wait. That might give you the wrong impression. What if I told you that Michelle Morgan Harrison was a warm, Southern-born gal with a ready laugh and a passion for sweets more commonly seen in 7 year olds?

The New Canaan decorator is both. And her house, a restored 1885 Colonial in the center of town, wears the contradiction as eloquently as its owner. Though Morgan Harrison's aesthetics were honed as a stylist and editor at *ELLE* and *Mirabella*, and later while directing visuals for Saks Fifth Avenue catalogues, it wasn't until she moved to New Canaan and bought the once-dilapidated house that she created Morgan Harrison Home, a full-service interior design firm.

Each spring, a handful of people knock on her door to inquire about the home's exterior and door paint. "The door color I don't give out," she admits. That's because the sage is her signature color, popping up on the home's walls and accessories, and threading through the seasonal décor.

Come the holidays, the home Morgan Harrison shares with her husband and kids, 3 and 8, strikes an easy balance between elegant and ebullient. Decorations are silver and sage. Presents are sheathed in dove-gray paper with ivory ribbon. Greenery is, quite simply, green. But waltz into the dining room and you'll see where the former New Orleans resident cuts loose. There, cluttering every mantle and table, is a patisserie worth of delectable handmade candies and sweets.

"Cherry tops, pecan tassies, lemon tarts, sugar cookies—elaborately decorated," she says. "Mini cupcakes, red velvet cake, seven-layer chocolate cake and snowballs, which are angel food cake with white icing and coconut." This is her Southern legacy. "The cherry tops were a recipe from my mother; they were in the *Times Picayune* in the 1960s. Those recipes always had names like, 'Mrs. So-and-So's Cherry Tops.'" In time, you'll read about Mrs. Morgan Harrison's Mini Cupcakes, the color of their icing as enticing as their

It's A Wrap | Gifts wrapped in gray paper and stacked three boxes high adorn the base of the living room Christmas tree, which is flecked with glittering ornaments. Other sparkling mercury glass accessories from Shabby Chic and Pimlico reflect in the mirror-topped low table from Dovecote. **Sock Hop** | Sage and ivory handmade wool stockings, accented with wool poinsettia leaf detailing, hang from the staircase (LEFT). The staircase, painted in Benjamin Moore's Silver Sage, also fits within Morgan Harrison's color palette. See Resources.



Welcome to the Jungle | An oversized schoolhouse light is re-imagined as exterior entrance lighting (ABOVE LEFT). Greenery from Elise Nursery dresses up Morgan Harrison's front door, painted her signature sage, and an archway in the yard (BELOW RIGHT). **Tour De Force** | For the 2007 New Canaan Homes for the Holidays House Tour, Morgan Harrison gave traditional holiday decorations her personal touch; silver bells in various sizes suspend from coat pegs in the mudroom (BELOW LEFT) and silver and gold accents give the living room tree a touch of glitter (ABOVE RIGHT). See Resources.





Sweet Things | Come the holidays, Morgan Harrison's kitchen churns out homemade delights, including cherry tops (BELOW LEFT), a recipe of her mother's, poinsettia cake (BELOW), mini cupcakes and elaborately decorated sugar cookies. **Good Medicine** | While the dining room's vintage farm table displays these delicacies (LEFT), the sideboard holds an array of apothecary jars filled with meringues (ABOVE). **Driving Miss Daisy** | Served in sugar-rimmed martini glasses, the sidecar (OPPOSITE) makes for a festive cocktail. See Resources.



'MINI CUPCAKES AND snowballs.'
THIS IS HER *Southern legacy*





THE PALETTE OF
sage and silver
 PREVAILED
inside and out

taste. "Everyone knows me for them."

A few years ago, Morgan Harrison used her considerable baking prowess to host a dessert party. "I thought, 'I don't have to cook!'" she recalls. "So there was no savory food and everyone got so drunk." Now, a revised menu includes hundreds of miniature crawfish pies, a cut spiral ham with brioche rolls, and crabmeat and cocktail sauce on baguettes to temper the effects of cosmopolitans and sidecar cocktails.

Hosting 100 people for the evening is a piece of cake (red velvet, please) compared to Morgan Harrison's 2007 holiday feat: decorating her home for the New Canaan Homes for the Holidays House Tour. The benefit, which takes place every other year, pairs an interior designer with a local homeowner and a theme. Since Morgan Harrison is both, she worked double duty to illustrate "a fresh take on tradition."

"I did what I normally do, but enlarged it," she says. That meant a wreath for every window, a tree inside and out and a holiday 'moment' in every room in the house. This required a PowerPoint presentation, the help of friends and many a trial and error.

The decorator's color palette is so refined that there's little room for misstep. Scoring yards of sage ribbon in a pleasing shade was an odyssey, as was finding a French gray paper for wrapping presents. The rolls arrived—they were putty, not gray—and Morgan Harrison improvised. "The color was the same as the library walls," she says. "So we wrapped all the books on the shelves." The effect is stunning, if styled. But her husband, who was an English major, didn't so much take to the look.

The stunt illustrates Morgan Harrison's deftness with thrifty supplies. Paper and ribbon take on new life. Apothecary jars, purchased for a song at HomeGoods, are elegant *en masse*. Bell ornaments, laced with fresh ribbon, add a sweet note to a mudroom nook.

For the finishing touches, Morgan Harrison enlisted her old fashion-world friend, floral designer Michael George, who has a storefront in Pound Ridge, NY, and a Manhattan shop that caters to clients such as Calvin Klein. "Michelle's aesthetic made my job a snap. I just followed the architecture of the home," George insists. He warned against over-flowering. "It can attract too much attention in an already beautifully appointed home. I just added strategic touches."

Swags of princess pine accented mantles, white lights traced the roofline, and an outdoor tree was festively decked with a garland of pinecones. The palette of sage and silver prevailed inside and out, save for one detail, says Morgan Harrison. "The cherry tops. They were the only red in the house!"

Gray Gardens | When a roll of wrapping paper arrived in the wrong shade, Morgan Harrison improvised. The paper, which matched the library walls, was used to cover books (OPPOSITE), complementing glittery deer from Pimlico and miniature houses from Christmas Traditions and HomeGoods. **Smart Choice** | Silver matte and glitter balls compose a sparkling holiday wreath in the library (ABOVE RIGHT). Poinsettias flank a chair from Anthropologie. **The Shining** | The kitchen (RIGHT) is treated in the same color and material palette as the rest of the house. A vintage Swedish mercury glass pendant hangs above the Rohl farmhouse sink and fixtures. See Resources.

