

SEBASTOPOL » *Holiday Home Tour returns after 2-year break during COVID-19 pandemic*



CHRISTOPHER CHUNG / THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Patti and John Blount sit with their English sheep dog, Watson, in their home in Sebastopol. The home is part of this year's Sebastopol Holiday Home Tour.

The holidays in every room

By **MEG MCCONAHEY**
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

It was as if elves had scurried into John and Patti Blount's Sebastopol home and turned every corner into a Christmas scene worthy of the jolly old man himself.

The couple sat back, amazed and delighted, as their family home on a quiet street was turned into a holiday attraction. A tree and a few scattered decorations wouldn't do for one of the prime stops on the Sebastopol Holiday Home Tour. No space was overlooked, from the banisters wrapped in

garlands to the hallway with a tabletop tree to the laundry room with sparkly snowflakes falling from the ceiling.

The house is a mini Christmas theme park, with a different concept in each room. There is the library reminiscent of a British manor house, the family room overtaken by teddy bears and a bedroom done up to suggest a mountain lodge surrounded by snow.

After a two-year COVID-19 break, the home tour is back. For \$40 per person, you can visit five

IF YOU GO

Sebastopol Holiday Home Tour

When: 6-9 p.m. Dec. 9; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 10

Cost: \$50 for Friday Night Tour and readmission on Saturday; \$40 for Saturday only. Children enter for \$10.

Artisan Boutique: Handmade crafts, vintage collectibles, ornaments and more. Open during tour hours with no admission. 1782 Pleasant Hill Road, Sebastopol

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homes in the Sebastopol area, each delightfully done up for the season. Homes are open the evening of Dec. 9 and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 10.

Now in its 10th year, the Holiday Home Tour supports school scholarships for students at Pleasant Hill Christian School, 60% of whom receive some financial aid. The scholarship fund is named in honor of Jacob Cochran, a Sebastopol boy born with a rare genetic disorder called Hurler syndrome. Known for his red hair and quick smile, Jacob was a visible and beloved member of the community. He died in 1998 at age 11.

The fund was initiated by Jacob's mother, Donna Cochran, who oversees her Artisan Boutique throughout the weekend at the historic Pleasant Hill Christian School, parts of which date back to 1908.

The boutique features gifts and items for the home, including dried flowers in sun catchers, napkins, terrariums, clay ornament kits, laser-cut wooden cutting boards, tea cup Christmas scenes, candles, vintage finds, pottery, photography and more.

Although the tour went on hiatus for two years during the pandemic, the decorating committee decided to bring it back this year by popular demand.

"We had people clamoring for it. We'd go into town and people would stop and say, 'Oh, are you going to bring it back?'" said JoVonne Bolt, a veteran member of the decorating committee whose kids attended Pleasant Hill school.

The tour is a chance to ogle festive household bling while trolling for clever decorating ideas to try at home.

Decorating multiple homes right after Thanksgiving, when their own homes are crying out for Christmas cheer, is a big project.

"We continue to do it for the joy of friendship and community," Bolt said. "It's just fun to decorate, and we love the school."

Many holiday styles

Each stop on the self-guided tour is different, underscoring the diversity in styles when it comes to expressing holiday merriment.

One home is a contemporary farmhouse inhabited by multiple generations of the same family who are rebuilding their lives after the 2017 wildfires. Their home reflects their Romanian and Scandinavian roots and sits on property with an orchard. Another featured home has a



Outdoor-themed decorations fill a room dedicated to Lake Tahoe in Patti and John Blount's home in Sebastopol on Monday.

unique black-and-white kitchen and a wine-themed Christmas tree.

For a completely different take on Christmas, there is home filled with handmade Christmas treasures and heirlooms celebrating three generations of family military service and firefighting.

A fourth home, in Graton, mixes traditional and modern elements with nostalgic farmhouse touches and a spacious backyard where the family has hosted two weddings and a baby shower.

A little decorating help

Some homeowners on the tour relish the challenge of decorating their own homes, like Rachel Seidler, a member of the decorating committee whose own house is on this year's tour. She takes on a new theme each year.

But the Blounts were open to some help from the elves. There empty nest, a multilevel home with a second-floor kitchen, has many rooms. Neither John nor Patti have the crafting bug, although John, a retired dentist, does a lot of DIY projects. They were happy to let someone else take over.

"What stories can you tell? It needs to make a statement," Seidler said of decorating other homes on the tour.

The Blounts' home is very traditional, so the decorating committee seized on a British theme. The 9-foot Christmas tree, chosen to be in scale with the high ceilings, is a salute to British royalty. Whimsical ornaments pay tribute to both Queen Elizabeths, Henry VIII and even



The library and music room in Patti and John Blount's Sebastopol home is decorated for Christmas with a British theme.

the new King Charles. Some of the ornaments are appropriately in scale with the tree, which is bedecked with large bows in Union Jack red.

One secret to a bold look is to double layer the bows, scrunched and wired together, which spread and fill in large spaces in the tree branches.

JoVonne Bolt's husband, Dennis Bolt, an artist and crafter and also part of the tour decorating crew, said when they come into a home they first assess the architecture, existing decor and personalities of the homeowners before deciding on a theme.

"We try to look at the homeowner and ask, 'How do we amplify their existing decor?' No one decorates their house on a normal basis worthy of 200 people coming through. We have to up the volume. So we try to

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A tree is decorated with old movie stills in a hallway leading to the home theater room of Patti and John Blount's home in Sebastopol.

ic holiday films. The Christmas tree is decorated with snack bar candy boxes like Junior Mints and Jujubes.

None of the items purchased for the Christmas home makeover were very expensive, the decorators said. What is important with any display is that it reflects who you are and what you like.

Bolt suggested that people "shop your own house" for things to incorporate into a vignette. Take inspiration from what you have. The Blounts' family room has several folk art paintings with teddy bears, so the design team gave that room a teddy-bear theme with lovable bears throughout. A bedroom with a big pine four-poster bed sparked the idea of making it into a room reminiscent of a Lake Tahoe ski cabin.

Work with family photos or heirlooms, the team suggested, as Christmas conjures so many memories for people. And think about how you might cleverly repurpose old objects.

"For my own home, I have been crafting and crating things," Seidler said. She and her husband are a team, with her dreaming up ideas and him helping with fabrication.

"We have three doors my husband cut down into the shape of Christmas trees. He made stands for them and now they are on my front porch," said Seidler, who this year is sprinkling stars throughout her home as a unifying theme that tour goers will pick up on.

"You've got to think outside the box," she said. "Don't just go to Home Depot and buy everything in the same color and throw it up. Be imaginative."

You can reach Staff Writer Meg McConahey at 707-521-5204 or meg.mcconahey@pressdemocrat.com. On Twitter @megmconahey.