

# FESTIVE & FUN

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PHOTOGRAPH BY STEPHEN CHERRY

**I**t all starts the day after Thanksgiving, when boxes upon boxes of decorations are unpacked and sorted. New elements collected during the calendar year are added to the design theme, and the execution of the extensive holiday decorating plan begins. Over the next several days, the Ocean Reef community home of the Gillis family is transformed into a winter wonderland of color and awe.

Regarded as one of the area's top interior designers, Angie Gillis, owner of A Change of Space in West Ocean City, showcases her talents each holiday season through an extravagant and breathtaking display of festive creativity, character and charm.

"Our home during the holidays has lots of colors, lots of bling and pizzazz," Angie said. "It reflects my personality and I like to share that with lots of people during the holidays. We all work really hard for four or five days and then sit down with a cup of hot chocolate for the kids and a glass of wine for me and just enjoy it. Once we start, we stay pretty focused. If we didn't, it would take about a month to decorate."

*The Gillis family, led by mother and celebrated interior designer Angie Gillis, infuses a world of colors and keepsakes into their holiday décor*



The Gillis residence radiantly glows each holiday season thanks to a large collection of white lights that accent the roofline, columns and landscaping, as well as traditional illuminations featuring reindeer and Santa Claus.





Angie compares the spectacular array of colors and festive atmosphere inside their household to that of Mardi Gras – a jovial variety of vibrant and unexpected color combinations that delight the beholder and symbolize the personalities of the celebrants.

“We try to spice it up,” Angie said. “We use traditional pieces and then go crazy with 15 to 20 different colors and textures. It just comes together.”

Family means everything to Angie, and her two children, daughter Shelby, 15, and son Jordan, 12, play instrumental roles in the holiday decorating experience.

“Shelby is full of life and she loves colors. She really gets excited during the process. Jordan is the little man of the home. He’ll get out the ladder and climb the tallest tree to place the angel on top.”

One of the most significant and treasured aspects of the decorating process is the selection of the primary Christmas tree. The Gillises always make their way to Bunting’s on Route 589 in Berlin for the all-important choice.

“We spend at least an hour looking for the biggest and best shaped tree,” Angie said. “We always have so much fun. Every

year, the trees seem to be getting bigger and bigger. Last year, our tree was close to 13-feet in diameter. It was huge. This year, we’re thinking about getting a 20-foot tree.”

The Gillis’ primary tree is always guaranteed to turn heads – both for its striking collection of colors and its non-traditional decorations.

“It is very festive, but very non-traditional,” Angie said. “It has ornaments that look like sparklers – confetti molded into ornaments – and still incorporates some old-fashioned elements as well. It is full of vibrant colors like hot pink, green, silver, gold and aqua – but it all works. There’s also an angel at the top because of the season’s meaning. We always showcase our personalities but still express our religious beliefs. We never, ever forget what the holidays are truly about.”

Angie shops far and wide for festive and unique decorations throughout the year – from Ocean City to Washington, D.C. and all points in between.

“They might not all be traditional Christmas decorations, but I find a way for it to work,” she said.

Boy, does she ever! Angie immaculately decorates five other distinctively different trees that adorn various locations through-



out the house. The breakfast room plays host to a tree furnished with ornaments representing one of her favorite hobbies – gourmet cooking. In the dining room, another tree showcases all of the ornaments that Shelby and Jordan have made over the years. Shelby and Jordan’s personal trees are set-up in their bedrooms and are outfitted with decorations that symbolize their personalities. For Shelby, it’s pink lights, some “girly stuff” and her passion for her favorite sports. For Jordan, it’s a cool musical theme and sea turtles accented by blue lights.

Another incredible tree is located in the office and features ornaments from trips that the family has taken – together and individually – from Annapolis to Brazil, Jamaica and Europe, including a crystal Shelby brought back and a Blarney stone Jordan acquired during vacations in Europe.

The last tree for Angie’s room is decorated in the colors of her private retreat.

The Gillis family also takes a great deal of pride in wrapping gifts – so much so that opening them comes with slight hesitation due to their beauty. The color themes throughout the house are also reflected in the colors chosen for wrapping papers. Angie said she plans to incorporate more reds and purples into the color palette this holiday season.

Their festive creativity and holiday spirit flows into the kitchen – and out into the community – as well.

“Our home always smells like fresh baked cookies,” Angie said. “We bake for an entire month. We wrap them up in beautiful boxes and give them as gifts – even at the drive-through while we’re getting iced tea. We just love to share them during the holidays.”

Outside the house, Angie’s decorations are just as extensive – and beautiful.

“We decorate the entire roofline in white lights,” Angie said. “The white deer and the sleigh are touches of traditionalism, the bushes are lit, and spotlighting accents other places of interest throughout the yard. When the front doors are open, all you can see are the interior colors.”

Natural greens accent doorways and handrails, benches and even the mailbox.

“It is a very crisp and clean look,” Angie said.

With so many decorations throughout the house, one might think it would be difficult for Angie to pinpoint her favorite – but it’s just the opposite.

“It’s a Hallmark ornament from *It’s A Wonderful Life*, she said without pause. “Of all the things I have collected over the years, that is my favorite one. I got it four years ago, and it reminds me of how fortunate and blessed we are as a family. It is very special to the kids and me. Quite simply, it’s because life is wonderful.”

And so are the holidays at the Gillis residence. **CS**

