Connecticut Cheer

AT THEIR FALLS VILLAGE RETREAT, BUNNY WILLIAMS AND JOHN ROSSELLI WELCOME CHRISTMAS WITH OPEN ARMS, EMBRACING FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND REJOICING IN TRADITIONS BOTH OLD AND NEW.

In the barn's great room, a German wood stag head and a Regency convex mirror, both from John Rosselli Antiques, hang over an English mantel. OPPOSITE: Bunny Williams and John Rosselli with their dogs, Annabelle and BeBe.

INTERIOR DESIGN BY **BUNNY WILLIAMS** AND **JOHN ROSSELLI** | PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MAX KIM-BEE**
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"I THINK YOU ESPECIALLY LOVE CHRISTMAS if your childhood memories are good ones," says Virginia-born designer Bunny Williams. On that score, she was fortunate: Her childhood home in Charlottesville always featured magnolia branches and a freshly cut tree, and her mother spent weeks making wreaths for the church bazaar. "I adored watching her decorate," she says.

In Williams's own space—the much-documented farmhouse in Falls Village, Connecticut, she shares with her husband, über–antiques dealer John Rosselli—she carries on the same traditions. The holiday festivities take place primarily in the barn, where the 30-foot-high ceilings accommodate a dramatically tall tree. "The most exciting part is bringing out all the things I've collected over the decades," she says, "and the memories that go with them."

Among her treasures are ornaments acquired during the couple's travels to Italy and Mexico and the beloved crèche pieces she arranges on the limestone-topped console in the conservatory, where the Christmas feast is served. The crèche was inspired by the Neapolitan Baroque version on display at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. "The faces of the figures are so magical," she says. "The pathos in them is amazing." Her own display takes three days to compose and is augmented with bits of moss and branches arranged to look like trees.

The barn's beige-and-red palette "works out well" for the holidays, Williams notes. Custom sofa in natural linen. The mahogany butler's tray table, Scandinavian wing chair, and lamps are from John Rosselli Antiques. The room's pillows are in antique textiles and Robert Kime fabrics and from John Robshaw. LEFT: The tree features cherished ornaments the couple has amassed on their travels around the world.

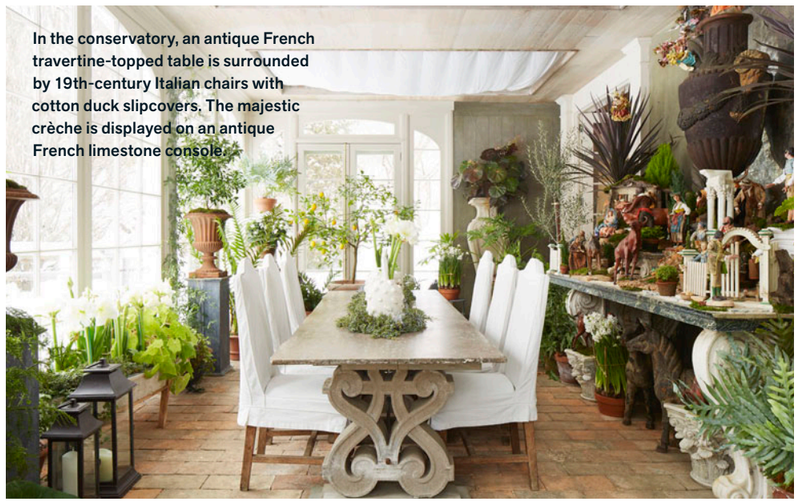
More greenery culled from the property bedecks the mantel and the dining room table; the staircase is adorned with a lush garland with swags accentuated by a collection of hand-carved wooden bells. Everywhere, including the guest bedrooms, there are pomanders and "things that smell good," such as the amaryllis and paperwhites she starts forcing just after Thanksgiving.

Best of all, there's a full house of friends and family to enjoy the bounty. "We make a point of including people who don't have family at the holidays," Williams says. "It makes things much more jolly." The table holds as many as 18 for a sit-down lunch that doesn't begin until midafternoon. First, there is the early-morning opening of presents accompanied by coffee and a single yummy bite—perhaps a blueberry muffin or a bacon-wrapped sweetbread. Rosselli, an avid cook, is in charge of the lunch menu, which generally involves a bird of some kind, a squash casserole, baked oysters, and an apple crisp made with fruit from the couple's trees. Afterward, they might watch a movie and make late-night turkey sandwiches.

Though she is devoted to all the rituals that mark the day, for Williams the key is to keep inventing fresh ones. "It's fun to do something you haven't done before," she says. But what matters most, just as when she was a child, is the joyful spirit of the holidays. "I have always looked forward to Christmas as a special time." □

The conservatory's crèche features antique Italian pieces and a modern plastic beagle, in honor of the dogs that Williams's father used to raise; 18th-century French urn.

Decked out with a lush garland, the staircase has treads of reclaimed hand-hewn planks and a hand-forged iron railing by Morgik Metal Designs.



In the conservatory, an antique French travertine-topped table is surrounded by 19th-century Italian chairs with cotton duck slipcovers. The majestic crèche is displayed on an antique French limestone console.

An upstairs bedroom was formerly a hayloft. The 18th-century mahogany English bed is topped with a canopy of antique Indian textiles. The English tiered side table and the wing chair, re-covered in a Robert Kime fabric, are from John Rosselli Antiques. A Tibetan silk tiger rug lies on a sea-grass carpet. For more details, see Sourcebook.