



Ken Fulk's Snow White-inspired creation for the Dining by Design AIDS benefit featured two great big, gnarly trees for what came close to a full-out theatrical performance.

Photos by Eric Lurie / The Chronicle

All set for the holidays

Designer tables full of inspiration for special meals at home — but those trees probably won't fit

By Susan Fornoff
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The annual Dining by Design showcase of designer table arrangements and room settings always sends guests away wowed and inspired by the creativity on display in so many small spaces. So this year, The Chronicle scoured the Design Center Galleria for ideas we could try on our holiday tables at home.

And then we saw the table Ken Fulk created front and center for 7x7 and California Home + Design magazines in a woody setting under two gnarly trees. The centerpiece on the table consisted of Snow White encased in glass (supposedly dead, but we caught her ... er, him ... breathing). Hanging from a limb, there was the evil Queen in a frame, inviting passers-by to bite into her apple. And around the table wandered the Seven Dwarfs. Seriously. Seven little men.

"Where do you get seven dwarfs?" Fulk said, answering the unasked question. "Craigslist."

The asked question was: What on earth was he thinking?

Answer: "Oh, we were going to do some sort of Muir Woods-based thing with the California red-

woods, and I said, 'Blah, blah.' Last year we did the beach club with live models, which was fun, and suddenly I thought, 'A fairy tale! Theater!' Any designer can make a beautiful table, but I wanted it to be theater."

The campy kind. Snow White remained in the coffin, surrounded by guests at the \$500-a-plate gala dinner. When dessert arrived, Fulk planted a kiss on her/his lips, and she/he finally arose.

It was easily the most over-the-top creation ever at this floating AIDS benefit (held by Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS, a.k.a. DIFFA), and would seem to offer little in the way of ideas for the typical home. Yet Fulk offered up food for thought far more tasty than the Queen's dreaded apple.

"I would say the message is, don't be afraid," the clearly imaginative (and then some), young San Francisco designer said. "Especially now, when people don't want to spend money and aren't getting out of the house for dinner, it's time to be creative. Why not be a little adventurous?"

Short of hiring nine actors to people the place settings, here are a few other ways to welcome guests to the table.

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Add pop with a vivid color:

Anyone whose eye was caught by the Tim Murphy Design Associates table for Herman Miller, a swirl of blue and white from tabletop to floor to walls, above, might have been dizzied by the display — except that vases on the table were filled with bright orange calla lilies that both grounded and transformed the space. With the much more austere Gensler display shown below (mostly white with neutrals), it was red that punctuated the statement — on berries and linens.



Make your own chandelier:

The lightbulb of inspiration took Academy of Art design students in a dazzling direction: A chandelier made of about 1,000 plastic water bottle bottoms threaded onto strings and dangling from circular bases around red lightbulbs. (The challenging part, they said, was cutting the bottoms to about an inch or so. If you try this at home, start collecting the bottles with the sexy, curvy bottoms, rather than the staid, flat ones.)



More designer table tips for you to try at home on the **Back Page**

Mix silver and gold:

Patrice Cowan Bevans set a gold table with gold, silver and Tiffany blue accents and surrounded it with silver chairs. Elegant — yet because of the mix, not intimidatingly so.

