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MIX MASTER

Local tastemaker Ruth Runberg shares her insight into creating a unique table setting for any occasion.

Written by Catherine Ruth Kelly
Photography by Brie Williams

“Entertaining can be stressful, especially when you don’t have the right things,” explains Ruth Runberg of R. Runberg Curiosities. “But when you have enough supplies in your arsenal, you can have fun playing with combinations of colors, textures, and patterns, and create a beautiful table and a memorable experience for your guests.”

Runberg’s well-stocked arsenal of entertaining supplies includes her varied collections of linens, china, silver, and glassware. Her etched brass chargers were a souvenir from a trip to Morocco. Her sterling-silver flatware, in a pattern she chose at age thirteen, was gifted to her piece-by-piece by her aunts. And her colorful glass tumblers were mouth-blown by an artisan on the island of Murano in Venice.

LEFT: Runberg’s dining room also serves as a library for her extensive collection of textile and design books. She has read all of the books cover to cover and references them frequently.

TOP: The intricate design of the soapstone votive holders offer an exotic flair to the festive table. The bread-and-butter plate and the centerpiece tureen are both Herend Chinese Bouquet.

BOTTOM: Runberg is seated on a Fernando Laposse sisal bench, dyed using a traditional Aztec technique that derives bright-pink pigment from crushed cochineal bugs. The sofa is a family heirloom that she had recovered in a Jennifer Shorto fabric.

So where does Runberg begin when setting her table for a special occasion?

“Start with something you love and build on that,” she advises.

Her holiday table was inspired by a Gregory Parkinson block-printed textile. “I love the rich colors and



LEFT: Vintage blue-and-gold midcentury chairs surround the dining table, draped in an Anokhi floral block-print tablecloth. The gravy boat—Gold Aves by Royal Crown Derby—is an essential serving piece for a holiday dinner. The gravy ladle is by Kirk Stieff Repousse.

BELOW: Runberg’s carefully curated table setting includes a variety of colors and patterns. A Gregory Parkinson block-printed textile serves as a runner atop the Anokhi floral tablecloth. Sterling-silver goblets stand next to mouth-blown glass tumblers, made by a world-renowned artisan in Murano. Kirk Stieff Repousse sterling-silver flatware flanks hand-engraved Moroccan brass chargers and Meissen Rich Court Dragon dinner plates. Miniature bowls, hand-carved in Jaipur from a single piece of stone, serve as salt and pepper cellars.



“NOT EVERYTHING ON YOUR TABLE HAS TO BE FORMAL OR FANCY OR EVEN TABLE-RELATED.”

—RUTH RUNBERG

thought they would complement my dining-room walls,” she says. The textile wasn’t quite large enough to cover the table, so Runberg folded it into a runner and layered it on top of a floral tablecloth with compatible hues.

Runberg started experimenting with the table setting a week before her gathering, swapping out plates, goblets, and vases to visualize what would work best. Favoring an eclectic mix, she typically includes unexpected items such as figurines or shells.

“Not everything on your table has to be formal or fancy or even table-related,” Runberg shares. “Sometimes



ABOVE: Runberg’s daughter, Mae, assists her with table preparations. Runberg’s dining room also serves as a library for her extensive collection of textile and design books, which she references frequently.

LEFT: Lobmeyr crystal champagne cups and Leontine Linens cocktail napkins await the guests' arrival. The bud vase is a vintage Chinese snuff box. Runberg bought the green Richard Ginori floral vase at Elizabeth Bruns.

RIGHT: Runberg sips from a Lobmeyr crystal champagne cup while lounging on an antique Heriz rug beside her vintage Italian marble coffee table. A leaded glass tray displays part of her seashell collection. An etched lassi glass serves as a vase atop an Hermès orange plate.

BOTTOM: Runberg, in her living room, stands in front of a framed photo she took in Essaouira, Morocco, in 2008. The sofa, by Edward Wormley for Dunbar, is covered in a Schumacher mohair velvet.



I turn a seashell upside down and use it as a salt cellar.”

Runberg always adds fresh flowers to her table and throughout her home when entertaining. “The chicest entertainers use flowers from their yards, even if you just clip some pretty branches or greenery or herbs,” she says.

Runberg emphasizes that the most beautiful table settings are the most authentic. “Once you determine what you innately love and are drawn to, selecting items you will treasure and use forever will come naturally and make your table feel complete.” ♦

