



a Very Vintage
HOLIDAY

COLLECTING, DECORATING, AND
CELEBRATING ALL YEAR LONG



BOB RICHTER

HOW TO RUN A
SUCCESSFUL

Party



Introduction

THE IMPORTANCE OF CELEBRATING HOLIDAYS

In a world where many seem to be divided, holidays have a way of bringing us together. They give us the opportunity to put our differences aside, open our hearts, connect, and be at our best. The warmth of the Christmas season, the joy of Easter, and the gratitude of Thanksgiving are annual opportunities for a renewal of sorts. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that decorating, celebrating, singing, gift-giving, and so many more activities lift our spirits and can even renew our faith in humanity.

As a kid, I knew holidays were very important in our home. They gave us something to look forward to and a special reason to be joyful. Times were not always perfect, and, like every family, we had our struggles and losses. Sometimes those hard times were happening right before a holiday, but sure enough, after dialing up some spirit, decking some halls, and opening our hearts, things were invariably better.

I collect vintage holiday items all year long and decorate for every holiday I celebrate. In most cases I use decorations that either belonged to my family or resemble ones that once did. These objects have great emotional value to me and conjure up what I refer to as the 3 Cs: Comfort, Connection, and Continuity.



Objects like the Christmas stockings my brother Johnny made for our family bring me great **comfort** because they've been part of my life for a very long time. I obviously have a great **connection** to them, as my brother made them with his own two hands and surprised us with them decades ago on a powerfully happy Christmas morning. Each time I see them, my heart is happy. The **continuity** comes from the fact that they are now in my home, as opposed to my mom's home. Some people, like my brother, have passed on, and some family members, like my partner, Sefton, have been added. So the stockings don't always go to the same person they once did, but we use them, love them, and make them

relevant every year. Of course we also put an orange in the toe of each stocking, just like Mom always did.

I have examples like the stockings for just about every holiday, and I'll share them with you. Chances are, you'll relate and have your own versions of these wonderful vintage ways. A few include wearing a new outfit to church on Easter Sunday, creating handmade Valentine's cards, and pressing leaves and decorating with them for Thanksgiving. Did you do these things? I sure did—and I still do. These are family traditions. And traditions really help unite us on holidays throughout the year.

Those vintage ways and traditions extend to cooking and baking, of course, and I'm really excited to include some of Mom's recipes for holiday favorites like her pineapple filling for Easter or her spiced tongue cookies for Halloween. The smell of these things cooking in my home brings back a floodgate of memories and is a treat for the senses.

We were also a very crafty family, and by the age of seven, I was making Christmas ornaments with my mom. I still have them, and as I grow older, they have become more and more valuable to me. We also made decorations for Easter, and most other holidays. The same went for gifts. I learned to sew and quill, and I even made hair combs for my sister. I also made framed creations



Here I am experiencing what I call "tree glee" on my fourth Christmas. This is the tree my big brother created for me as a surprise. I still have the ornaments and the Santa that was underneath the tree.

for all family members. Many of them are still hanging on their walls.

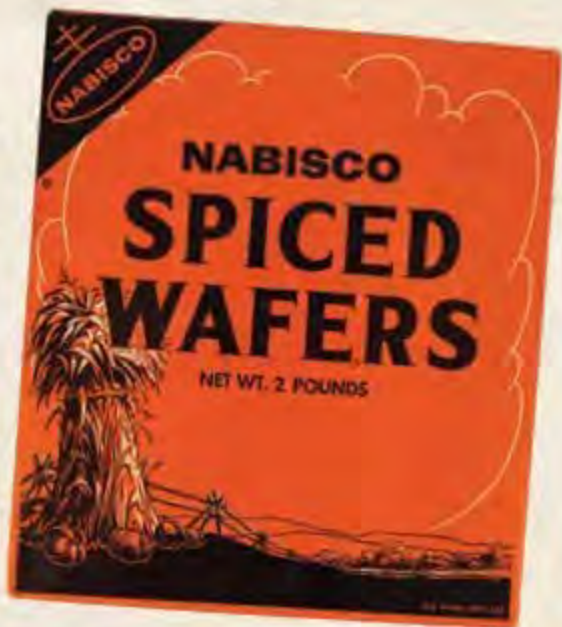
While I don't make as many decorations and gifts today, I always manage to do some. Similarly, I am always grateful when I receive someone's handmade or home-baked creation. To me, they are the greatest gifts of all. They represent time and creativity—and that person's hands were literally in every bit of the item's creation.

At the same time I started making ornaments and gifts, I began to collect vintage decorations I found at auctions and charity sales with my dad. This was after Dad gave me a beautiful box of vintage ornaments and said, "It's time you started collecting something . . . and I know you like Christmas." Well, that was the beginning of the collecting and decorating that has now become my life's passion and work—and yes, it extended from Christmas to every holiday.

In fact, many of the holiday decorations I use now were ones from that original box from Dad; still others were ones I bought when I was a kid. I am always on the hunt, and my collections have grown by leaps and bounds. As many "new" vintage pieces as I find, I'm still partial to those that belonged to my family (like my grandmother's antique Santa ornament or my nana's trio of choirboy candles). They really do bring comfort, connection, and continuity to my life.

Unwrapping them every year is like seeing old friends. I do, however, use my old things in new ways, and I like to mix up my decorating every year with new themes and displays. As of late, and as you'll see in this book, just about every holiday gets a tree. Trees aren't just for Christmas anymore!

The very first tree I had of my own was decorated for me as a surprise by my brother, Johnny. I still have the ornaments, and I often





use them now in different displays. The light-up Santa that was under that tree is the only piece of Christmas I display all year long. When he's not adding joy to one of my holiday vignettes, he's a night-light in my bathroom. Each time I see him is an opportunity to tap into that powerfully happy memory of when Johnny first surprised me with him.

While I decorate a lot for each holiday, I know not everyone does. Sometimes just a pumpkin on the front stoop or a shamrock cutout on the fridge is enough to conjure up those holiday feelings. I also know someone who doesn't decorate a tree any longer, but she puts her mother's ornaments in a crystal bowl on a side table. Every time she passes them, she thinks of her mother.

Like the beloved song "We Need a Little Christmas" implies, when you build it, they will come, and you can include yourself in that group. Contrary to popular belief, I'm not always jolly, or even always in a holiday mood, but once I start decorating, there's a spring in my step—and the rest falls into place.

And when things fall into place, we share memories, and we make memories. That's what holidays are all about in my book. In fact, I'm going to share some with you now. My hope is, as I do this, I can encourage you to do the same. Enjoy *A Very Vintage Holiday!*

CHAPTER

I

Celebrating Holidays

THE VINTAGE WAY

As America's Vintage Lifestyle Expert, I work to keep the best of the past alive while living and being present today. Sometimes that means making subtle changes to traditions or using vintage objects in new ways (an old family tablecloth becomes a Christmas tree skirt, or old Valentine's cards become decorations for my Valentine's Day tree).

That said, as much as I love the vintage objects I use to decorate and celebrate, the vintage ways are equally important to me. In some cases, they are traditions like hiding Easter eggs or handing out candy to trick-or-treaters. In other instances, they are how we do things, like putting cloves in an orange at Christmas like Mom always did, or saying a special prayer at the Thanksgiving dinner table.

When we use treasured objects, many of which are family heirlooms, and engage in vintage ways, we are keeping love alive. These simple and meaningful acts and moments are how we continue to tell our stories, to bring back memories and make new ones.

In this chapter I'll show a variety of holiday objects and talk about their meaning and how they live on today.

I've tried my best to narrow the holidays down to the ones I celebrate and decorate for the most. Of course there are others, which don't always have as many visuals but are still dear to me. Ever hear of Fastnacht Day? That's the day before Lent (like Fat Tuesday) when Mom would make German doughnuts.

I have such great memories of Mom picking me up at school and bringing me home to make the *fastnachts*. She'd make her own dough and then drop each dollop into a pot of boiling oil. Then she'd let them cool, fill them with her homemade jelly, and top with powdered sugar. That's pretty much it. An opportunity to eat some majorly delicious carbs—and another powerfully happy moment in my life!

These memories all have one thing in common: They represent a time when I slowed down and connected with loved ones. For that reason alone, holidays are wildly important. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that many of these vintage ways are an opportunity to experience *mindfulness*.

Examples include carving pumpkins, dyeing Easter eggs, and lighting a Christmas tree. When you're doing these things, you can't be texting or scrolling social media. They are opportunities to be present and make memories.

Being present and connecting with family and friends is what holidays are all about, and that's why I love them so much.

Of course, even when we celebrate the same holidays as others, customs and traditions can be different, but the messages of love and connection are still the same.

When I was a kid, I had a giant coloring book called *Christmas Around the World* and I LOVED it. I, of course, colored in it all year long. I have distinct memories of enjoying it over summer vacation. The reason I loved it so much was that it helped me learn about all the different ways people celebrated my favorite holiday in other cultures. For example, in Italy, instead of Santa they have Befana, the good witch who brings gifts; in Norway they decorate special trees for birds and other animals (my family does this too!); and in Australia, since it's summer, they often have picnics at the beach on Christmas day. I recently found an uncolored vintage copy, so I may just break out my crayons and go to town!



I was raised as a Lutheran, and so when it comes to the holidays of other faiths and cultures, I don't claim to be a great source of knowledge. That said, I do make it my business to know about as many of them as I can. What I've found is that holidays like Passover, Hanukkah, Purim, Diwali, Kwanza, Ramadan, the Lunar New Year, and so many more are all about being present and connecting with family and friends. Most have religious roots, and for that reason they are held in a sacred light, like so many of the holidays I know, love, and celebrate.

My partner is Jewish, so I've had the great privilege of learning about holidays I didn't grow up celebrating. I did, however, go to a great elementary school, where we learned about many of them. I know "The Dreidel Song" by heart, and I learned how to make potato latkes in fourth grade. I was excited to share these tiny connectors to our celebration of Hanukkah as I learned much more about the celebration. Aside from the religious framework and the prayers and songs, I soon realized that the much-loved family menorah at Hanukkah and seder plate at Passover provide the same comfort, connection, and continuity to me that my holiday objects do.

In fact, what holidays show me is that we really are all more alike than we are different. That understanding has the power to break down walls and replace them with windows. I invite you to look through my book and see how much of your family's past and present you can recognize—in both the holidays you celebrated and the holidays you didn't.

My absolute favorite Christmas album of all time is *John Denver and The Muppets: A Christmas Together*. It was one I played over and over as a kid, and I still do to this day. There's so much wisdom and joy and true holiday spirit in that album. It always has me laughing and crying and singing along.

One of my favorite holiday songs on the album is "The Christmas Wish," sung by Kermit the Frog. He explains that it doesn't matter what faith you follow, as long as you believe in love. That's all we need to enjoy this magical time of the year.

It's sung by such a profound frog!
It's the way I feel, and I'm so grateful
to Kermit for putting it into words
for me. So, with that in mind, the
common denominators you'll see
in every chapter of *A Very Vintage
Holiday* are not only how I decorate
but also how I celebrate, how I honor
my faith, family, and friends with
traditions, old and new. My hope is
that you'll relate to some of these,
and that they'll bring back fond
memories of your own.





That said, it's very important to me to also honor the traditions and faith of others since, at our very core, we're more alike than different. The Christmas spirit that dwells in my heart is all about peace on Earth and goodwill toward men, women, animals, and all living things. With that in mind, here's what you'll see in the following chapters.

SIX WAYS I MAKE EVERY HOLIDAY A VERY VINTAGE HOLIDAY

1. Carry on a tradition and/or start a new one.

Traditions are at the core of most holidays. They are the things that connect us and continue to imprint memories upon us. Some are very intentional, like dyeing Easter eggs. Others can be happy accidents, like the Christmas I left the tape recorder I got that year from my grandparents on "record" so it picked up our conversations under the tree. We used that same tape recorder to capture Christmas mornings for decades on audiocassette. I still have those tapes and enjoy listening to them. Today, instead of cassette tapes, everyone gets a little moment captured on video for posterity.

Life goes on, and sometimes traditions must change. If older parents have been the ones to host Thanksgiving, often that baton is passed to the children. Or, as families change, many now celebrate "Friendsgiving" and gather with their adopted family. Even as traditions change and evolve with us, some things can stay the same—for example, your grandmother's stuffing recipe, your grandfather's favorite prayer, or watching the big game together. In these bits that stay the same, we often find that comfort, connection, and continuity. So even if your grandmother or

grandfather is no longer on this physical plane, they are very much a part of things. In this way, they live on during some of our happiest most connected times.

2. Use family decorations (or ones like them).

I'm very fortunate to have decorations that belonged to both my maternal and paternal grandmothers. They are among my most cherished holiday items. My paternal grandmother's blown Father Christmas ornament and purple "Silent Night" Shiny Brite ball are very dear to me, and they go on my largest tree every year. Similarly, my nana's choirboy candles are among my most cherished holiday decorations. She always put them on the buffet in the dining room, and now I put them near a favorite photo of her on the sideboard.

Other things were lost or broken, and I've found their counterparts at flea markets and other vintage venues. Just because they didn't actually belong to my family doesn't mean I can't enjoy the memories and feelings they evoke. For example, my mom always had a wonderful ceramic jack-o'-lantern on display every year. Her friend Ellie made it in ceramics class, and we all loved it. At some point it was broken and thrown away. Still, I never forgot that wonderful light-up fellow, and when I saw ones like him at flea markets, I started buying them. Now I have a whole collection. When I see them, I'm transported right back to happy memories of Halloweens past.

If you didn't get special family decorations, go out and find ones like them at flea markets and share the memories they bring back with your loved ones. This is another way the spirit of our family and wonder of our childhood can be with us at these very special times.

3. Make, bake, or mail something.

I grew up in a very crafty family, so handmade gifts are my personal favorites. As a kid I was encouraged to make gifts and cards and was taught how to do everything from embroidery to quilling to decoupage. There's an awful lot of heart in a homemade gift, and I cherish the ones I'm given. I am fortunate to still have crafty and artistic friends, so whether these items are cards or ornaments, hats or scarves, I love them all. Every year Mom knits me something, my sister sews me something, and my dear friend Sharon draws me something. To me, these are some of the loveliest gifts of all.

As a kid, I made holiday ornaments and strung popcorn and cranberries for the Christmas tree. When I do those things now, the memories come back,



and the good feelings start to bubble up. I strung popcorn and cranberries this year for a tree in my dining room, and it made me think of so many happy times doing the same thing back in my childhood.

The same goes for baking. Every year Mom and my sister Robin bake. And bake and bake and bake. I get about thirteen different kinds of cookies, and in addition to enjoying the way they taste, I have come to realize that baking and cooking really are expressions of love. The same goes for those handmade items. Consider a handmade gift or home-baked item this year. It is a magnificent way to show someone they are loved!

Also under this category would be sending physical greeting cards. A “Happy Birthday” text just isn’t the same as an actual written card sent in the mail. I’m a sentimental saver; I have cards from all holidays past, and they are wonderful to enjoy on a cold evening. In fact, often weeks *after* Christmas, I reread all my holiday cards before putting them away. It’s a nice way to wrap up the season.

4. Give your time and be present.

Time is the most precious gift of all. We’re all busy—especially so at the holidays—so I have come to greatly appreciate when someone gives me their time. Perhaps it’s to watch a movie, share a cup of hot cocoa, or just enjoy a long, overdue phone call.

This could even be attending church services or going shopping or wrapping gifts together. Other joyful, connected moments might include going to see a holiday concert or a play or sporting event. Any way you slice it, the gift of time is often the piece of the giving pie that means the most and makes people happiest.



Giving your time doesn't have to include just your friends and family. Some of my most beloved holiday memories are ones where I volunteered to help others. I find these opportunities most rewarding, and they make me feel more connected to my community. They could include playing Santa for a family in need or visiting those who don't have any biological family.

5. Share a meal.

Whether it is around the kitchen table, on a picnic blanket, or in a restaurant, dining together is a key ingredient in celebrating holidays the vintage way. In a world where many families don't all gather 'round the dining table together each night, holidays help us stop and be intentional about sharing a meal (or two or three or five) together.

Make it extra special by having flowers and candles and using your good china. These touches make even the most ordinary meal special and memorable.

While you're all around the table, why not ask each person to share something they are grateful for (we do this at Thanksgiving), proud of (we do this at Passover), or intent on manifesting (we do this on New Year's Eve).

6. Do something interactive.

At some point during every holiday, usually later in the day after opening presents or the big meal, my family plays a game. Whether it's *Trivial Pursuit*, *Skip-Bo*, or *Taboo*, we connect and laugh and make memories. The same goes for jigsaw puzzles. They are very vintage and help create a common goal and lots of time to talk and connect.

My family is very big on classic Hollywood films. Since most holidays have some films devoted to them, we usually watch favorite ones and laugh, cry, and sing along at the same parts every year. I'll list some of my favorites in the following chapters.



Singing is also a great way to connect. Whether it's a sing-along of holiday carols or a karaoke birthday party (yes, I've had more than one of those!), people loosen up, have fun, laugh, and create memories that bring us all closer together. And don't forget about singing in the car (I always did with Mom), singing in church (I was in the choir and loved every minute of it), and yes, singing while decorating the tree ("The 12 Days of Christmas" is a good one for that!).



A common denominator of these six categories is *mindfulness*. With the holidays typically being a very busy time, these activities can help us slow down and connect. What a gift that is, in and of itself! Here's the real challenge: Try your best to put down your phone and just be present in all the above. You'll be amazed at just how wonderful it all is when you're not worried about posting a picture to social media the very moment it's happening. Take the photos, certainly—but post them later!

In each of the following chapters, I'll share my experience and ideas about how to tap into these vintage ways and make every holiday *A Very Vintage Holiday*.

BOB'S RULES FOR A VERY VINTAGE HOLIDAY DECORATING

Many people have told me they are inspired by the way I decorate and have taken some of my ideas and made them their own. This of course makes me very happy; it's the greatest compliment ever!

Here are the rules:

1. There *are* no rules.
2. Don't worry about what other people think. Decorate for yourself and your family.
3. Have fun!

Now that I've gotten that off my chest, here are *some guidelines* for how I decorate. You'll see these play out in the photographs in this book. Since they are only guidelines, think of them like items on a salad bar: Take what you like and leave the rest!



BOB'S SIX VERY VINTAGE HOLIDAY DECORATING TIPS

1. Let color and symmetry be your guides.

My living room has a lot of blue and cream, so it's a nice basic palette. When I add black and orange, it starts to look and feel like Halloween. As much as I add decorations with these colors (jack-o'-lanterns, etc.), I also bring items from other rooms, such as vases, that are orange and black. I try to balance the colors in all the spaces, and by the time I'm done, the room is transformed.

I grew up in the family business, which was interior design, upholstery, window treatments, etc. There Nana trained me to use color to tell the story. She also taught me an appreciation for balance, which becomes very important when you

have a lot of decorations like I do. Symmetry helps bring harmony. Sometimes I get wacky and do an asymmetrical display, like my kitchen island of jack-o'-lantern blow molds for Halloween, but I still rely on color to make it cohesive.

2. Go for a feeling and a look rather than a period.

My Independence Day decorations hail from many eras, but the red, white, and blue unite them, and the feelings they evoke when I put them all together are joyful, patriotic, and celebratory.

3. Embrace modern technology and new items to make things easier and safer.

While I love all things vintage, I really do enjoy living today. I take advantage of items like LED tea lights with built-in timers and new artificial pre-lit trees. They make less work for me and help me enjoy the fun parts of decorating.

This Christmas I used those LED lights inside antique fairy lamps on a tree in my dining room. Originally these lamps used real candles and thus were not the safest or easiest choice for holiday decorating. I get the same look with less worry and fuss, and I am grateful we live in a time where these choices are so readily available. And while I love the look of vintage tree lights, in addition to safety concerns, when they burn out, the whole string goes out. I happily use mostly new lights and spend a lot less time changing bulbs. More time for me to enjoy my decorations rather than trying to keep them lit!

4. Use old things in new ways.

I use Nana's bird clothespins as Christmas tree decorations and one of Mom's Christmas earrings as a lapel pin. I use mixing bowls as tree stands and sugar bowls to hold candy. If something has sentimental value, use it! Just because something belonged to your grandmother doesn't mean you have to use it the same way she did.

I also love color-blocking with everyday objects to add a holiday feel (red and white pottery for Valentine's Day; orange and black glassware for Halloween). Even though these objects on their own have nothing to do with the holiday, when grouped together, they make a very festive impact.

Since there are no rules, consider using decorations made for a specific purpose in a new way. My latest favorite examples of this? For St. Patrick's Day I used one of those crepe paper table centerpieces as a tree topper, and it looked amazing! For Halloween I used an old paper cut out meant to put on the wall in the center of a pumpkin wreath; it created a one-of-a-kind piece that was so easy to do and brought me tons of joy.

5. Add something fresh or natural.

Plants, cut flowers, or branches of the season literally add life to your decorating. They invigorate everything and add a very inviting energy—sometimes even a lovely fragrance.

I try to bring cuttings in from my yard and local farms for every holiday. I have many live Christmas trees, and the smell is magical. I typically leave the tree undecorated for a while, just so I can enjoy its majesty. This taps into the activities around the winter solstice, where bringing greens inside was part of the ritual to honor the change in seasons.

Adding bits of nature is a great way to bring a greater dimension and even a metaphor to your decorating. So every Easter I have hyacinths and tulips, and every Thanksgiving I have pressed leaves and bittersweet. It is very vintage and very comforting.



6. Add fun, decorative things in unexpected places.

Mom always put a rubber pixie on the wall phone in our kitchen, and it made me so happy. I have holiday decor all over my home, and the kitchen and bathroom are included in the fun.

A friend once told me I inspired her to put a Christmas tree in her bathroom. She was worried people would think she was odd, but when she saw that I did it, she followed suit; it became her favorite tree of all that year. Per my “rules” above, don’t worry about what people think. Decorate in ways and in places that make you happy. We spend a lot of time in the bathroom, so it seems the perfect place for holiday decor!

This year for Halloween, I put a vintage store display hand in an old box near all the candy. I added a few LED tealights, and it was the star of my decorating vignettes. Let your imagination take the lead, and have fun!

In addition to my decorated spaces, in each chapter I’ll showcase some favorite items from my collection and talk a little bit about what makes them special.

Now that I’ve shared my tips for vintage ways and decorating, without further ado, let’s get onto the holidays! I’ve decided to let the calendar be my guide, so chapter 2 will kick off a full year’s worth of holiday celebrations. Drum roll, please. . . . Let the decorating and celebrating begin! Here comes A Very Vintage Holiday!



Bob's Must-Have Helpers for A Very Vintage Holiday

My displays rely largely on my imagination and the tips I've shared in this chapter, but I also need a few practical things to help bring my visions of sugar plums, jack-o'-lanterns, shamrocks, and more come to life. These are a few of the essentials:

- **Fishing line.** Since it is both strong and invisible, fishing line can make objects appear to be floating, flying, etc.
- **Wax adhesive.** Meant for keeping candles straight in their holders, I use this for myriad things to keep them straight or secure.
- **Vintage cans and canisters.** I use these to raise objects and vary heights in my displays.
- **Twist ties.** I use these to fasten lights, hold tree toppers in place, etc.
- **Thumbtacks.** Most of the vintage cardboard cutouts I use have a small hole in the top meant for a string. I use that hole for a tack to hang each one rather than putting tape on the back, which can cause damage.
- **Power strips.** I plug in a lot of things, and power strips make it easy to turn many items on and off with one touch.
- **LED tea lights.** I have mentioned these. They are wonderful, and I use them everywhere. The better ones have a built-in timer, which is a real time-saver.
- **Sturdy ladder.** I do a lot of climbing, so I need a very good ladder. A big thanks to my sister Robin for getting me an excellent one!
- **Packing tape.** I often roll a piece of packing tape into a ball to level something or keep it in place.
- **Paper clips.** They hold 3-D paper decorations in place and can act as a makeshift hook for hanging just about anything.