

The Holiday Herald

Willow Glen, San Jose, California

21 December 2023

Homes for the holidays 2



Yard snowman
Cherry Avenue



House-to-house
Glen Eyrie Avenue

Homes for the holidays 2

Regardless of what holiday you're celebrating this season, many of the customs integral to your celebration likely are influenced by light, both its absence and presence. These two newsletters are dated December 21, which north of the Equator — where 90 percent of humanity lives — marks the winter solstice, the first day of winter, and the year's longest night.

Or, to be complete, its shortest day.

Christmas trees, menorahs, yule logs and Diwali candles (which were lit last month) involve traditions about light during the darkest days on the calendar and hope for the longer days to come. Logically, lights are central to the decorations of the holiday season.

In the case of Christmas, the use of light to decorate and celebrate has pre-Christian origins. Lights were absorbed into the new holiday once the early church decided the solstice would be the time it would celebrate Jesus' birth.

Electric lighting brought holiday decorating out of the candle and fireplace age, allowing the decorator unprecedented freedom to imaginatively expand concepts and adopt new ones beyond limits imposed by the fire-shaped tastes of previous times.

Willow Glen, the part of San Jose where Emily and I live, is a showcase for how people unburdened by limited imagination, limited money, or both, express their feelings about their holidays. To describe their styles as eclectic tests the limits of that word.

People who carry strict ideas about the way things have always been done or should always be done may find it uncomfortable. But the it's-five-o'clock-somewhere crowd, folks who delight in the joyfulness of others, find joy themselves.

It's tough — as you look down the long list of holidays crammed into the waning hours of an old year — to find one where joy isn't as essential as light in appreciating the holiday.



Strings of stars
Trona Way



Cartoon characters
Husted Avenue



Hoop dreams
Cherry Avenue



Hanukkah house
Custer Drive



Following a star and a reindeer

Julio Avenue

Notes on photos

Willow Glen was once a marshy bottomland southwest of San Jose. It became valuable farmland in the mid-1800s after its two streams were re-channeled. In 1865, shortly after Abraham Lincoln's assassination, the new village's main street was named Lincoln Avenue.

The residential neighborhoods that gradually spread from the central business district were first composed of custom-built houses. Years later, the newest neighborhoods were tract houses built on the last of the agricultural land. But the budding town could not afford its own sewer system and voted in 1936 to be annexed by San Jose.

Today downtown is a coffee-shop-and-restaurant district. In December, the residential sidewalks fill with families enjoying holiday decorations.

YARD SNOWMAN — A Craftsman-style house in one of the neighborhoods closest to downtown. Cherry Avenue got its name from now-obliterated cherry orchards.

HOUSE-TO-HOUSE — A common practice of neighbors in the same block is to agree to some sort of decoration that links all the houses. This view is of two 10-foot-tall reindeer — one each in adjacent front yards — linked to Santa's sleigh in the distance by lighted reins. Behind are three more reindeer creating a six-yard link-up. Obviously that's too big of an aircraft to land on one roof on Christmas Eve. Los Gatos Creek, one of the re-channeled streams, flows behind these houses.

RED BOW — Out in the tract-home neighborhoods, a homeowner has turned a naked tree into an nearly invisible rack for hanging stars.

CARTOON CHARACTERS — Damn the PG&E bill; full speed ahead.

HOOP DREAMS — These lighted hoops over the sidewalk are one of the most common ways neighbors tie their houses together through a unified decorating theme.

HANUKKAH HOUSE — A refreshingly cooler alternative to red and green.

FOLLOWING A STAR AND A REINDEER — Santa's at the tiller of this sailboat with Rudolph on the bow under a Christmas star. Most of the year this driveway craft flies a large black pirate flag.

SPANISH ARCHES — We attend one of Emily's yoga friends' annual holiday parties at this house, where she plays Christmas carols on the piano and I handle quality control work at the dining room table.



Spanish arches
Nevada Avenue