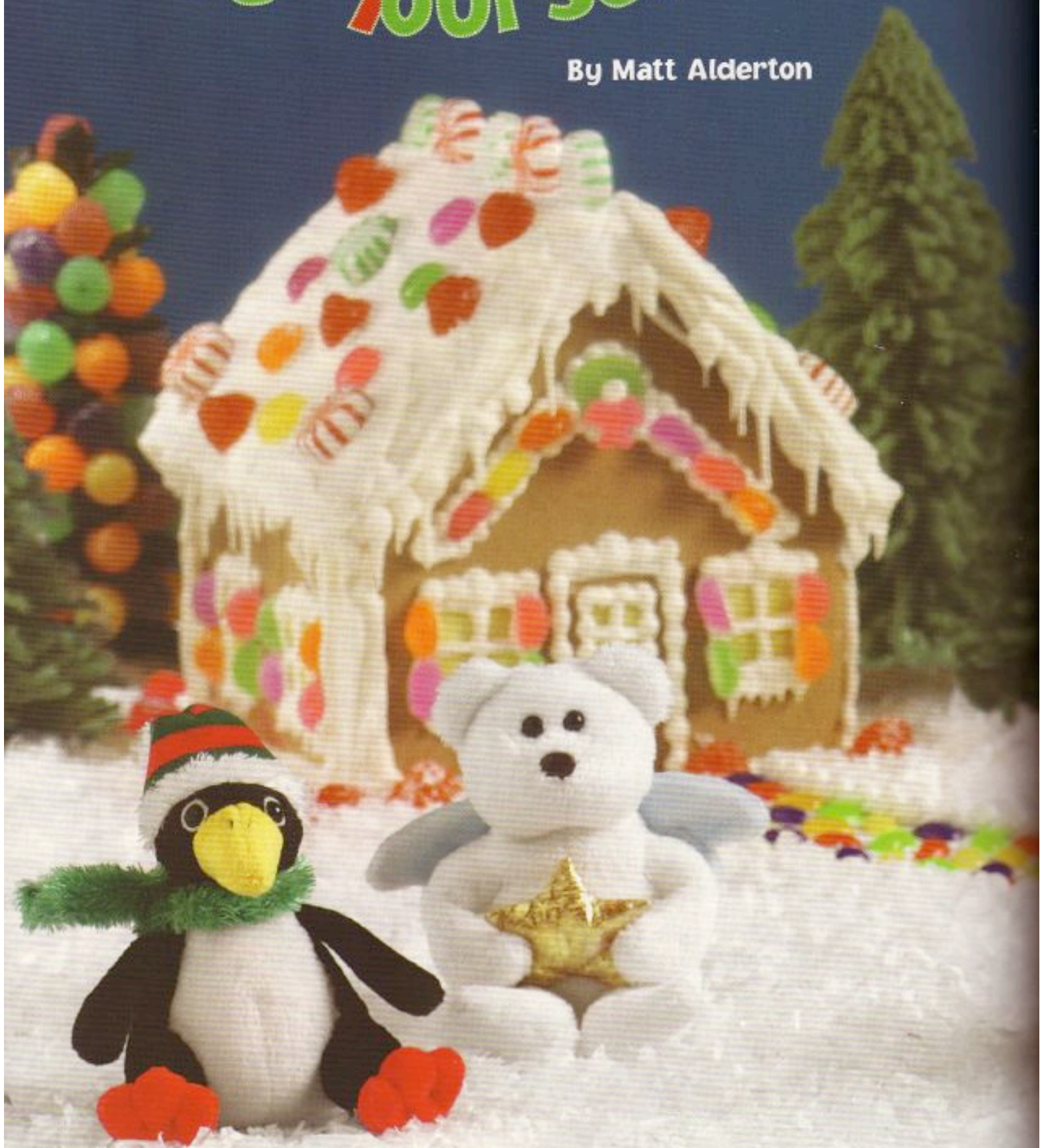


Have Yourself A Very

By Matt Alderton



Beanie Christmas

How to deck your halls, Beanie style

Christmas is a special time of year for Dolores McIntyre. Her two children are grown and she has spent the last 31 years working at a bacon factory in Washington Court House, Ohio. The holidays — and her Beanies — give her something to look forward to every year.

"That's my only vice," McIntyre says of her collecting. "I don't smoke, I don't drink, but everyone's got to have a hobby."

McIntyre, 66, has been collecting Beanies for five years. She collects only bears and dogs but has managed to fill three curio cabinets with her collection, which is 513 Beanies strong and still growing. Following Sept. 11, 2001, she got the idea to put two of her favorite things, Christmas and Beanies, together in order to celebrate her country. She decorated the entire top half of her Christmas tree with patriotic Beanies. The result was a yuletide display inspired by her national pride.

"I just go crazy with Beanies," she says. "I truly enjoy them and by displaying them, I get to enjoy them that much more."

McIntyre's holiday display includes a dining room centerpiece with a sled, four Holiday Teddies and three Roxie reindeers. She also decorates a Christmas wreath with Beanies and puts a flower arrangement featuring Snowgirl in her living room. Her crowning achievement, however, is her 6-ft. tall Christmas tree, which she decorates with 82 Beanies.

"I put it up from Dec. 1 to Jan. 1," she says. "I get to look at my Beanies on my tree for a whole month."



The Ultimate Holiday Display

One of the most famous Christmas displays in the country belongs to Marshall Field's department store on State Street in Chicago. For nearly a century, the store has enthralled holiday shoppers with its gigantic Christmas tree and its innovative Christmas windows.

Holiday planning at Field's is an enormous effort. Its Christmas tree, located in the famed Walnut Room, stands 45 feet tall with more than 15,000 lights and more than 1,200 custom ornaments. A display of those proportions takes a lot of time — and a lot of hands.

"From concept to completion is about 18 months," says Amy Meadows, visual marketing manager at Field's flagship store. "I would estimate that we have at least 75 people contributing to the effort."

Last year, the Walnut Room tree was adorned entirely with Waterford crystal. This year, however, Field's is partnering with Jim Marvin, who has designed several trees in the White House, to decorate the tree with a special collection of ornaments based on the White House trees of the Kennedy era.

The theme for this year's Christmas window, which encompasses an entire city block, is Snow White. It will tell the story with custom-sculpted, fully-costumed mechanical figures, using projection screens to represent the "mirror, mirror on the wall" and a special apple aromatic effect when Snow White eats the bad apple.

While animated figures and 15,000-bulb light strings aren't an option for most homeowners, Meadows believes the principles that guide holiday decorating at Field's can translate into any home.

"How we approach design and execution is not unlike the way I recommend homeowners approach [decorating] their homes for the holidays," she says. "We keep our themes tight. It is very much the same philosophy that one can and should use when showcasing one's collections in your home for the holiday."

In fact, Meadows likens the products in Marshall Field's displays to the collections that people such as McIntyre incorporate into their holiday décor. "Our collection is our merchandise," she says.

When you are presenting a collection, she urges, the key is to edit for effect. "When we do our gift-giving window with all the beautiful products we recommend you purchase for the holidays, we're not going to get one of everything. We're going to make sure everything we use is all white and crystal. It says, 'My goodness, if they have that much wonderful product in just white and crystal, imagine what else they must have in red and green and gold.'"

Meadows recommends selectively choosing Beanies when decorating for the holidays. Pull your punches, she says. For instance, choose to display only Beanies from a certain year, or of a particular color or type. Also, don't be afraid to crowd your Beanies.

"There is a natural inclination toward spreading your collection out," she says. "I think a collection has its greatest impact when it's concentrated in a handful of areas."

Finally, Meadows encourages collectors to carefully choose their theme, whether live greenery, gold or red balls, or holiday ribbon.

"In order to best show your collection you need to create as neutral or as uniform a backdrop as you can," she advises, "then the variety within the collection stands out. Otherwise it has to compete visually with all the other types of ornaments and garland you're using."



The Christmas tree at Marshall Field's on State Street in Chicago is 45 feet tall. It features more than 15,000 lights and more than 1,200 ornaments.

Beanie Magic



Every year, Dolores McIntyre creates a Christmas sled with Beanie Babies for the centerpiece on her holiday table.

Whether decorating a modest Christmas tree in your living room, or an enormous window display at a landmark department store, holiday décor ought to make you feel good.

So says Dayle D'Ann of Chicago, who heads Dreamspinners, Inc., a design, production and installation company that specializes in event decorating and design. D'Ann and her partner, Judy Ippolito, have done their share of holiday decorating for clients throughout the Chicagoland area. And the secret to a successful display, they say, is to do it your way.

"Every person has their own dream that they want to see,"

D'Ann says. "Use whatever it takes to please your eye and give you the most joy in the displaying and sharing of your special hobby!"

Classic holiday elements, such as lights and scents, like cinnamon, gingerbread or pine, can add a traditional feel to even the most contemporary collection.

D'Ann recommends adding that traditional element to your collection by using green or red fabric or ribbon to create bows or poufs for your Beanie Babies. Greenery, too, will add a natural Christmas feel to your display.

"If you use evergreens ... the Beanie Babies will become ornaments with their own special colors, which will be the unexpected treat to the eye," she says. "Do the same to your Christmas tree and create some Beanie magic!"



Dolores McIntyre decorates her Christmas tree each year with 82 different Beanie Babies, which she gets to admire for one full month, from Dec. 1 to Jan. 1.

10 Tips and Tricks for a Very Beanie Christmas

1. Use small or low-wattage lights on your tree to prevent singeing your Beanie Babies.
2. Use artificial greenery to keep your Beanie Babies free of sap and clear of pine needles.
3. Use Beanie Babies as stocking stuffers or in a gift exchange with friends — they're just the right size!
4. Dress up your Beanie Babies for the holidays by adorning them with holiday-colored ribbons and bows.
5. Pick your favorite Christmas-themed Beanie Baby, such as Halo, Blessed or Star, to top your tree in place of the traditional star or angel.
6. Construct a special nativity scene using your favorite Beanie Babies.
7. Use Beanie Babies in your gift-wrapping, tied to the ribbon or in place of it.
8. Use bear- or animal-shaped cookie cutters and make Christmas cookies modeled after your favorite Beanie Babies.
9. Use your favorite Christmas-themed Beanie Babies with flowers and pinecones to create a centerpiece for your holiday table.
10. Let the kids decorate a miniature Christmas tree using teenie Beanie Babies or Jingle Beanie Babies.