

Autumn Alfresco

With crisp days and cool nights ahead, we ask New York-based event designer Augusta Cole how she approaches setting a fall tablescape.

BY MARGARET ZAINEY ROUX | PHOTOGRAPHY BY VICKI GRAFTON



An autumnal table captures the beauty of its surroundings at Glenstone Gardens in the Virginia Hunt Country. Floral designer Shawn Cossette of Be Just in Charlottesville created a "runner" from a seasonal bounty of persimmons, pears, mushrooms, foraged foliage, and flowers including marigolds, scabiosas, spent zinnias, dahlias, and garden roses.

FLOWER: Tell us about your entertaining style.

Augusta Cole: It is definitely rooted in an appreciation for interior design, antiques, and tradition—all things that I learned about early on from my mother and grandmother. I believe the greatest gatherings marry an elegant setting with fresh design touches, an abundant menu, and great music. I aim to treat my guests to a total sensory experience!

How do you like to entertain, specifically in the fall?

When the days become shorter and the temperature drops, I embrace the opportunity to entertain outdoors. The glow of the autumn light and the feel of the fresh air allow me to create an ambiance that is warm and cozy.

Share how you make it feel warm and cozy—without all the seasonal fall kitsch, of course!

I try to convey fall through color and texture. An earthy palette of golden yellows and chocolate browns with pops of coral, burnt orange, burgundy, and apricot feels rich, as do textures with weight like wool, suede, and tweed. When setting a fall table, I like to incorporate chargers, tumblers, vessels, and serveware made from natural materials such as clay and wood to add even

more depth and dimension. Layering them with fresh flowers, foliage, and seasonal fruit, including pears, pomegranates, persimmons, and crabapples, expresses the spirit of abundance that is synonymous with the season. For me, the tablescape is perhaps the most important component of the event's décor. When you set a table that is visually captivating and physically comfortable, your guests will want to linger around it longer.



Walk us through your process for creating a tablescape.

I always start with a “star” element, like a patterned tablecloth or set of plates, to help establish the color story and guide the rest of my selections, including the napkins, glassware, vases, and candles. From there, I let the pieces fall into place. There is really no formula per se, but balance and restraint are key. You don't want the eye to focus on one thing in particular—you want it to dance around the table and admire the moments that are independently beautiful and simultaneously cohesive. I love setting a table using a mix of elements from the various collections I have acquired over the years.

Tell us about your collections. Where do you source them and what do you look for?

I do a lot of shopping when I travel. The pieces I pick up at shops, galleries, and markets are special reminders of the places I've been and the people I've met, and they always make a fun topic for dinner table conversation. Two of my newest collections include custom Murano glassware brought back from a recent trip to Venice. One set is bubbled with loose, colorful murrini in a pinched style, and the other has a more traditional swirl. Aside from one-of-a-kind pieces, I'm drawn to antique and vintage finds, as well as those that feel good in the hand. Oversized, medium-weight linen napkins with tonal embroidery and etched crystal stemware are classic options, while flatware and serveware with mother-of-pearl or marble handles are fun and unexpected.

You truly have mastered the mix! Can you share a few tips?

First and foremost, have fun! The table is meant to engage and inspire, so don't hesitate to play around with elements of different patterns and provenances. At my table, you'll often find heirloom silver flatware flanking whimsical ceramic plates from Italy and Morocco or a basketweave charger beneath my fine china. When layering, prioritize pieces with meaning rather than those that match. A tablescape built from cherished elements shines brighter than one that adheres to a prescribed aesthetic.



Laboratorio Paravicini's “Daisy” plates bring a sense of whimsy to the sophisticated table. The green charger from Be Just serves as a buffer between the plate's design and the hand-printed floral motif on the custom Décors Barbares tablecloth.