

Rustic Cottage Tucked Away in the Mountains

photography by Henry Sagalow



Christmas-time in the Tomashowski household is a joyous time. Tucked into the alpine wonderland of Kyle Canyon, the family shares with us both how they celebrate the Holidays, and the love of family.

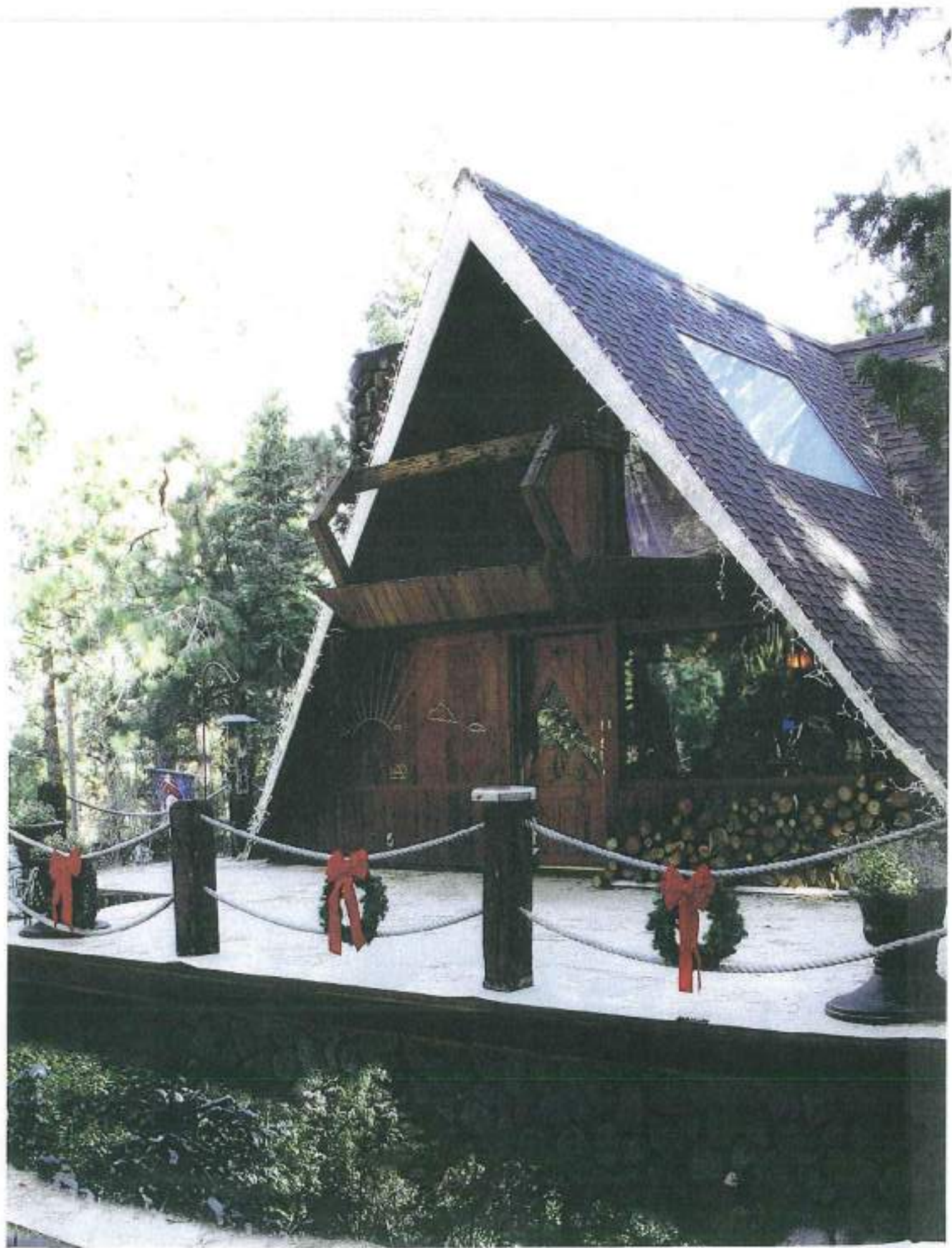
Gary and Angie, together with Katie, Brandon and Taylor, begin the festivities early in the season by putting up lights during Thanksgiving weekend, and making a handmade ornament commemorating their family for that year. The tree is a family memory tree. Angie prefers simple decorations with natural ornaments in keeping with the surroundings. Their home on Mt. Charleston is the only home the Tomashowski children have ever known; Katie graduated with Honors last year and is now following in her parents' footsteps, learning the Real Estate business as a 3rd generation Realtor (Angie and Gary own Mt. Charleston Realty).

The exterior is just as festive as the interior as they put up LOTS of wreaths, providing plenty of magical backdrops for their annual family photo Christmas card. Each year, Angie and the girls roll pinecones in peanut butter and seed for bird feeders, so their feathered friends can feast for the holiday as well.



For human consumption, the Tomashowski's usually serve a traditional turkey dinner with a jealously guarded stuffing recipe she refuses to share. However, we coerced and cajoled until she finally gave up the secret ingredients (see recipe page 92).

Recalling their first Christmases together in their mountain home, Angie and Gary reminisce about "the first stocking, the first little doll, the first Hot Wheel car... each of our children's first Christmases; the continuity of Christmas ritual from cradle to graduation in the same home."





Some of their time-worn traditions and memories include: "When my oldest daughter was old enough to enjoy Christmas, we placed an orange and an apple in the toe of her stocking and we've done it with the other two children also. It's the feeling of traditions we parents can enjoy, and in turn hope that our children will continue once they have their own children. Christmas doesn't have to be all about expensive gifts and all of the holiday parties. Just sit back and enjoy the feeling of love. After all, that's what Christmas is all about.

"One of the most ingrained memories for us," she continues, "is having each of our three children when they could barely walk and having them experiencing their first snow, placing them in deep powder and feeling what it is, their expressions, awareness and curiosity of falling snow, feeling it on their face for the first time. Like a puppy in the snow.

"Together, making snow angels, leaving cookies and milk for Santa Claus and carrots for the reindeer. Creating special homemade Christmas cards for our family. Baking Christmas goodies for friends and neighbors. Opening a few presents on Christmas Eve. Sledding, making snowmen, snowballs, playing in and shoveling snow. Seeing Santa's footprints (baby powder) on the living room floor. It's a bonding time watching the fire and telling stories.

"One year, on a particularly memorable Christmas Eve, there [were] perfectly shaped, slow-falling snow flakes. The interior of our living room was filled with a warm crackling fire and numerous large, colorful Christmas lights running from beam to beam. The perfect Christmas song was playing - 'White Christmas' by Bing Crosby. The front door was open to enjoy the holiday music. The bright red, yellow, blue and green Christmas lights illuminating ... the inside. The exterior Christmas lights highlighted the snowflakes outside. All of us were dancing on the deck. It's one of our most cherished memories."



These lovely candle holders are simple to make. Place seasonal greenery in bottom of a mason jar. Fill to near top with water and then top with fresh cranberries and a floating candle. Enjoy!

The Tomashoski family tradition of putting oranges into Christmas stockings dates back to the times of St. Nicholas, himself. The story says that St. Nicholas overheard some young maidens who were upset because they were going to be sold off into slavery because they did not have enough money for a respectable dowry, therefore no husband could be found for them. After the girls had washed their stockings they had hung them to dry by the fire. The next morning they found enough gold coins in their stockings for a very adequate dowry. It is suspected that the coins had been thrown into the window or down the chimney and had landed in the stockings. The gold that St. Nicholas is known for throwing has been represented by gold balls, therefore making oranges, and even apples, today's symbol of the gold. St. Nicholas Day is celebrated on December 6th.