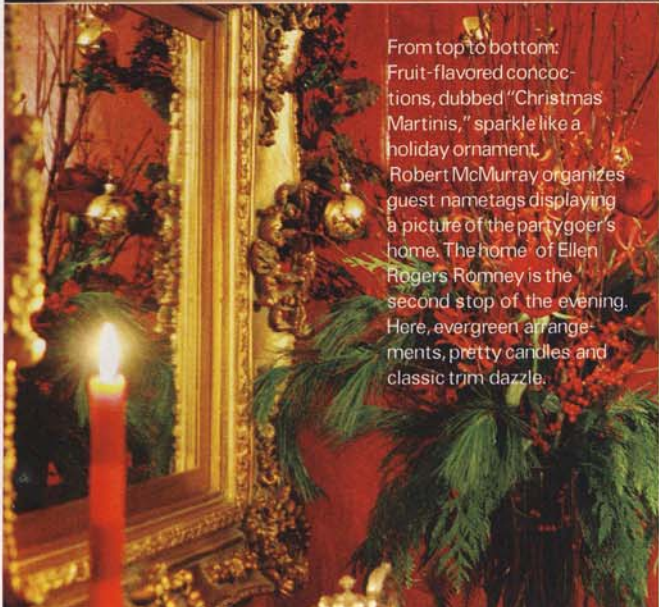


From top to bottom:
The McMurrays' front entryway welcomes with a brilliant nod to the holidays. Inside, a spruce tannenbaum glows with decorative treasures, while treats like this English cheese and cranberry hors d'oeuvres from Papa Joe's entice.

❄️ christmas comes to pilgrim street

In the lane, snow is glistening ... and inside, an annual progressive dinner party in Birmingham makes the season bright.

by Megan Swoyer
photography by Brett Mountain



From top to bottom:
Fruit-flavored concoctions, dubbed "Christmas Martinis," sparkle like a holiday ornament.
Robert McMurray organizes guest nametags displaying a picture of the partygoer's home. The home of Ellen Rogers Romney is the second stop of the evening.
Here, evergreen arrangements, pretty candles and classic trim dazzle.

Yuletide cheer fills the air and several homes on Birmingham's Pilgrim Street during the neighborhood's annual holiday progressive dinner party.

"It's a time to connect," says Patty McMurray, one of three hosts at last year's extravaganza. "We don't see everyone all the time so having a progressive block party allows us to get to know new neighbors and see old ones," she says. Patty joined co-hosts and across-the-street neighbors Ellen Rogers Romney and Shelly Manvel to maestro this three-part festive orchestration, beginning with holly berry-red cocktails and ending with rich and satisfying chocolate fondue.

The evening begins as guests make their way up the walkways at the McMurrays. Commenting on a joyful, lighted scene of a sleigh with wrapped gifts and reindeer ornamentation, several neighbors enter the McMurrays' Wallace Frost-designed 1926 Tudor-style home.

Patty's husband, Robert, greets 40 or so guests, handing them nametags that depict a miniature photo of the guest's home. Putting a name with a face is one thing, but putting a home with a face is quite another. In fact, the illustrative nametags break ice instantly as guests mingle beneath mistletoe.

"So you're the ones in the yellow home?" asks one guest of Molly and Dan Israel, who moved from Troy to the street just four months before the party. "Yes, we had been in love with Pilgrim Street and the yellow house for years," replies Molly, a mother of four.

Steps away, Lori Fricke chats about her newly constructed home. Sheila Eggl, sipping on a brilliant-red cocktail, and neighbor Eileen Conley, dressed mostly in green, create a quintessential Christmas vignette. Appetites swell as enticing hors d'oeuvres fill Patty's cheerful dining room.

Folks sample several treats from neighbor Jim Eggl, who owns the Gravity Bar & Grill in Milford. Earlier in the day, Patty decked out the table with pear-shaped candles in crystal bowls and bunches of red and green grapes. Pinecones and garland woven around an elegant chandelier also make for cheery trim.

In the foyer, a bartender shakes cranberry and mandarin orange-flavored vodkas with different juices to create "Christmas Martinis." Adding more merry appeal, Patty dusts red sugar onto the cocktail glasses' rims. Neighbors toast the season with beverages as red as holly berries.

Meanwhile, the McMurrays' three spruced-up daughters — Madison, Margaret and Kendall — congregate beneath

Counterclockwise from top right: Don Manvel's dessert wines are straight from Austria's Ewald Zweytick Vinyard, of which he is part owner. Ellen Rogers Romney shares holiday stories with neighbors. Dessert hosts Shelly and Don share final plans for their role in the progressive dinner party. The work is done for party planners Patty and Ellen (Ellen's husband, Scott Romney, is in the background).



a classic, old-fashioned Christmas tree with their baby-sitters (two from the neighborhood). The tannenbaum, a healthy spruce, glows with a string of gold-toned beads and ribbon. "We like blue spruce trees because they hold heavy ornaments," says Patty.

Poinsettias & Pomegranate

The progressive party has been a tradition in the neighborhood for many years. "It's been going on for the 10 years that I've been here, and long before that, too," says Ellen.

After an hour or two at the McMurrays, guests meander across the street to Ellen's and her husband Scott's Tudor-style home.

A huge wreath decorated with traditional plaid ribbon, ivy, and red, gold and green ornamentation greets guests. Indoors, poinsettias rule. Especially captivating on Ellen's kitchen-window ledge are tiny clear vases that hold bright poinsettia clippings — a row of red blooms sure to warm up any wintry night. Roses mingling with cedar and white-pine clippings adorn tabletops, all amid a cheerful painted mural in the kitchen that was customized for the family, including children Madison and Griffin.

Ellen and Scott offer a meal that entices, especially the Michigan cherry and Asian-style cabbage salads, and the chicken with potatoes and leeks from the Bloomfield Hills Country Club. "Guests also bring dishes to the homes, so it makes it easy for everyone," Ellen notes.