

A Loving Table: Creating Memorable Gatherings

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Kimberly Schlegel Whitman and Shelley Johnstone Paschke's coffee table book *A Loving Table* expresses the joy of gathering with families and friends for lavish meals. Full of gorgeous pictures and delights of colors and textures to feast on, the settings represent a broad array of linens, sculpture, flatware, and unexpected items.

The book derives its conceit from the many hostesses who spend years welcoming family to their tables. It claims inspiration from the women in Paschke and Whitman's families and friend groups, who have long acted as ladies of the house, ushering people into various entertainment situations. The represented parties include a Vietnamese Christmas Eve, a 100th birthday party, a mother-daughter luncheon, and a Mardi Gras brunch.

Each occasion is led by a different hostess; short essays introduce these women and their accomplishments in life and hostessing, followed by a series of lush photographs and occasional recipes. The descriptions are direct; there are short quotes used to represent each particular woman's philosophy of entertaining. But it's the photographs of the women's tables that prove most worth viewing: each represents its own distinct aesthetic vision of the family table. There are traditional settings with monogrammed linens, crystal stemware, pheasant plates, and calligraphied place cards; there's also a Bohemian extravaganza, where a sinuous snake design curls across plates and carved mushrooms shadow the settings across a black marble table. In some settings, spots of whimsy, including a fruit with a jaunty bow, a swan salt cellar, and a small snail sculpted at the edge of a utensil, make the tables more unique and eclectic.

A Loving Table is an elaborate, luxuriant hostess book whose photographs of table settings are worth second and third looks; some may inspire new family traditions.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (January / February 2022)

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