



Little girls—and their moms—enjoy a classic
STEEPED IN





tea party in a Manhattan townhouse.

TRADITION

BY DENISE GEE PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLLEEN DUFFEY



Top row from left: Party hostess Susan Zises Green calls her collection of 19th-century majolica "a feast for the eyes."
 ■ A hand-painted soup service is especially beautiful cradling a meaty Lobster Bisque. ■ Susan arranges flowers in her elegant but comfortable Upper East Side townhouse. ■ The dining room is the scene of a first annual event—a tea party where Susan's granddaughter, her granddaughter's friends, and their mothers can enjoy the finer things in life. ■ Susan with (from left) Haley Sheridan (standing), Eve Pennington, granddaughter Isabelle Krugman, and Carly Brecher. **Bottom row from left:** Susan says that the Miniature Smoked Salmon Frittatas look like "little hats with dill feathers." ■ Eve Pennington admires her friend's hairdo. ■ Other delights include fine champagne for the mothers to enjoy. ■ Petite Coconut Cupcakes are the feast's finishing touch.

Acquiring social graces can be arduous for children whose imaginations

are increasingly tethered to a television set. But interior designer Susan Zises Green would like to interrupt that broadcast trend with an important message: Connecting with others in classic settings—like a tea party—builds confidence besides being fun.

The Manhattan-based interior designer is grandmother to Isabelle, a 4-year-old who embraces every new discovery with delight—and her “Nonni” steers her in the right direction. Today it’s with a nice cup of tea—a lively ginger one to tickle the senses—and a bounty of other inventive morsels, all of them bite-sized. Surrounded by Susan’s beautiful things, Isabelle and three of her friends play dress-up in real time—not just with their imaginary friends and dolls.

“The world is so chaotic now,” Susan muses. “Why not slow down and savor it?” Her antidote to life’s fast pace has inspired similar friendly gatherings over the years—some of them fundraisers. This one is particularly meaningful. It’s the first annual tea party for Isabelle, her 4-year-old friends, and their mothers, including Susan’s own daughter, Lynn Zises, mother of Isabelle. (The number of guests each year will increase with Isabelle’s age; five 5-year-olds next year, and so on.) The idea came from Susan’s friend in Virginia, who had enjoyed a similar party. “I thought, what wonderful Southern hospitality. Then I thought, why can’t it be wonderful Northern hospitality, too?”

Another inspiration for the party was purely aesthetic. “I love beauty all around me, and I try to share that with everyone I know,” says Susan, whose historic, three-story Upper East Side

townhouse (which is three doors down from New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s) makes a nice place to do just that. There, a palette of timeless colors and sumptuous comfort showcase her traditional taste. She says her ultimate goal is for her home to feel fine but not fussy—“a warm and inviting place where people coming in instantly feel welcomed.”

As the little girls file in, Susan finds them “delightful and delighted,” acting especially exuberant in their dressy attire, “which people rarely wear these days,” she laments. “When I was a little girl, coming into New York City was a big deal.” Encouraging the girls to wear outfits that make them feel special is as important as learning how to gently hold fine luncheon plates, dainty teacups, and miniature crystal glasses, gathered from a little-girl-sized serving table. The adult-beverage sideboard is just beyond.

“I know that whenever I dress up I feel like I can take on the world,” Susan says. “I want these little girls to ultimately feel the same way. To be self-assured. To feel beautiful.”

The girls’ fine afternoon dresses are matched by equally festive tea party fare. Susan’s favorite caterer, chef Alison Mesrop, is beloved for “sunny food” featuring seasonal ingredients in playful and refreshing combinations.

“I love the fact that at first the girls looked at everything in awe. And then, of course, they ate everything with abandon,” says Susan, whose etiquette lessons are painless. “All the while, though, they were trying to be little ladies. You know, children





Above left: Carly Brecher whispers a secret to her friend, Eve Pennington.

Above right from top: Cream Scones with Devonshire Cream and Lemon Curd.

- "The little girls were especially lovely in their smocked dresses," says Susan of the guests of honor, looking like pretty maids all in a row on the living room sofa (from left): Haley, Isabelle, Eve, and Carly.

Bottom row from left: Enjoying the party are (from left) Lynn Zises (Susan's daughter and Isabelle's mother), Malyn Sheridan, and Christin Brecher. Lynn says, "Our lives are so busy! It's important for mothers and daughters to spend time together, especially in a beautiful setting."

- Tempting Petite Chocolate Cupcakes.
- Asian Pears with Horseradish Cream are presented by a server—very uptown!
- The food is as decorative as it is delicious. Tomato & Avocado Swirl Soup highlights the beauty of Susan's grand serving pieces.



Fresh Ginger Tea
 Ginger Ale with Pomegranate Juice
 Champagne & Bloody Marys
 Miniature Smoked Salmon Frittatas
 Asian Pears with Horseradish Cream
 Classic Tea Sandwiches
 Macaroni & Cheese Squares
 Tomato & Avocado Swirl Soup
 Lobster Bisque
 Petite Coconut and Petite
 Chocolate Cupcakes
 Cream Scones with Devonshire Cream
 and Lemon Curd

MENU

really will rise to the occasion if you allow them to." That rising included a little sofa jumping, which was just fine by Susan. Her only request was that they remove their shoes first. Then the coast was clear—and soft and springy. "I don't have child-proof rooms and never have," Susan says. "I always raised my children with antiques. There was nothing so precious that it wasn't replaceable."

Even her extensive collection of 19th-century majolica, with its fanciful molded surfaces and colorful glazes, is unmarred by the small hands that have touched it over the years. The little girls love the whimsical pottery that Susan started collecting when it was plentiful—and, she explains, all she could afford. She now displays it in little vignettes throughout her home. "I've had tremendous enjoyment from collecting it and other special pieces and patterns over the years," she says.

The designer, whose work is often seen in the prestigious Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club Showhouse, admits that she's disheartened by the lack of "china sensibility" in young adults. "Whenever I buy a wedding gift, I always look forward to >

Above left from top: An antique pine table offers champagne and Bloody Marys après tea for the adults. ■ A barefoot Eve and Haley share a giggle. Above center: Behind a svelte coral sofa hangs a quilt that had been in an Ohio family for 100 years before being sold. "Each square is embroidered with layers of details," notes Susan. "You can tell it was done with a great deal of love and time."

Above right: Isabelle and Carly jump for joy sans shoes.

Below: "The girls quickly removed their Mary Janes when I said it was OK to jump on the sofa," Susan says with a smile. "That's how I am about things. Nothing's too precious here—except for the people."





Left: Haley takes off her shoes under an antique table in Susan's living room, which is divided into various conversational groupings. Above: An elegant silver tea service gives the party an air of ceremony. Below: Susan and the mothers toast to a fun and instructive day.

seeing what pattern the couple has selected." She is especially pleased when, instead of practical and unadorned, the selected pattern is pretty and lends itself to entertaining. Susan, who loves to mix vintage and contemporary china patterns, explains that "I'm not into everything matching and being precisely the same." That's one of the reasons for her tea party—to give the little girls the experience of using beautiful things. "I want them to know that it's fun to look at pretty things and enjoy beautiful food—to enjoy life in general."

For the moment, the tea party has done the trick—at least for one of the little guests. "She asked her mother almost immediately when she could come back and do this again," Susan says with pride. "That's the highest compliment."

Her intent, she says, is not to rush the girls toward maturity, "but to simply enjoy watching them grow up. Eventually they'll be young ladies, and memories of these gatherings will have a warm spot in their hearts. And maybe," she says wistfully, "they'll even have tea parties with their own children and friends." >

For more information, see sources on page 248. See recipes on page 138.

