



Season's greetings: Creative card designs and displays, plus holiday photo tips

By Lauren Johnson

Nov 30 2015

Several years ago, Cindy Grosso, owner and founder of Charleston School of Protocol and Etiquette, polled the public's perception of email Christmas cards with a survey on her website. Overwhelmingly, people wished for traditional mailed cards — 78 percent of those surveyed preferred the

time-honored practice season's tidings by post, while not a single respondent favored the digital greeting (the balance remained indifferent).

Nationally, feelings toward e-cards are similarly frosty. According to an Associated Press-GfK poll, only 2 percent of people queried said they'd like an electronic holiday greeting.

In today's age of instant Internet sharing, a snail-mail card offers a refreshing slowdown at the hectic holiday season. Planning to dispatch a family card to loved ones this winter? Whether you opt for a custom design, a five-by-seven snapshot, or a conventional bifold, here's what you should know before sending up your holiday salutations.

Holiday cards offer a bit of glimmer to winter days, and this season's greetings are certainly sending up the sparkle.

"As with other accessories, gold is huge in holiday cards this year," said Sarah Reed, owner and designer of local stationery studio Dodeline Design. When it comes to card colors, rich metallic accents such as copper, silver and gold take basic neutrals to a shiny new level.

Corresponding with these shimmering accents, polished designs are also trending in 2015. And quite often, their simple focus is on one family photo.



While websites like Shutterfly, Tiny Prints and Minted offer plenty of custom collage templates, photographer Jennifer Smith of Carolina Photosmith finds their single-image designs have the biggest impact.

“We’re used to seeing many small images on Facebook and Instagram, so I prefer receiving one big photo,” she said. “And if you’re going to the trouble of mailing a photo card, it’s nice if the picture hasn’t been seen before.”

In other words, save social media posts of your selection until after your cards have been sent.

Having trouble narrowing your picture picks to just one? Include smaller close-ups of individuals on the card’s reverse side. If you do settle on a collage, be sure all of the shots come from the same time of day or turn mismatched pictures black-and-white to create cohesion.

“Combining photos taken at multiple times is hard because their coloring is very different,” Reed explained.

For extra pop, this winter’s envelopes boast bold jewel tones that stand out among the standard bills, catalogs and junk. Another popular way to make your mark in the mail? Personalized stamps. Consider using a funny family outtake from your holiday photo session as a way to lift spirits this season.

Capturing a magical moment

Though the thought of organizing your crew in front of a camera may send you reeling, capturing an inspired holiday photo can, in fact, offer some fun togetherness. Whether you opt to hire a professional, recruit a shutterbug friend or snap the photos yourself, there are several workarounds for the dreaded frosty faces and forced cheer. Below are five tips for achieving a stunning family picture.

1. Dress for success

The days of the white-on-khaki family uniform have passed. Instead, Smith recommends dressing in clothing that makes you comfortable.

“Start by putting daughter or mother in a cute print, and then pull other family member’s outfits based on its colors,” she said.



Stick to a scheme of three to five hues to provide a bit of variety but still gain a cohesive look. (Be careful to select smaller patterns over bold graphics, which can dominate a photograph.) Use layered textures from scarves, cardigans and jewelry to tie an outfit together.

2. Background check

Give some thought to the backdrop of your photos. Words placed over scenes with lots of light and dark pockets can be hard to read, Reed said, so seek out simpler scenes like one of the Lowcountry's grassy fields, brick buildings or shoreline expanses. You may also allow the background color to guide your wardrobe palette by picking colors that will stand out against the background.

3. Right on time

"Magic hour. That's what we call the last 60 to 90 minutes of the day when the sunlight is gentle," Smith said. "There aren't harsh shadows, no one has to squint, and you get a golden glow that flatters everyone."

If you do have to shoot in the middle of the day, natural light is still best, but choose a fully shaded spot. Positioning subjects directly under the sun puts faces in the shadows and results in narrowed eyes. And dappled light, while lovely in nature photos, can cause people to appear ghostly or splotchy.

Lastly, make certain everyone is rested and fed before the shoot, rather than demanding cooperation and cheer half an hour before nap time.

4. Perfectly composed

Most of the time, family pictures are taken before committing to a card style.

"Get a variety of poses and shots so you have plenty to work with," Reed noted. Shoot horizontals, verticals and squares; close-ups and wide angles; sitting, standing and reclining poses. When grouping family members, avoid the formal lineup, instead overlapping people and closing the gaps between bodies to create a more affectionate aesthetic.

While photographs to be hung on the wall are usually guided by the "rule of thirds," which dictates the focus of a picture rest at the intersecting line of a tic-tac-toe board, for holiday cards, consider shifting the main subjects to the left, right, top or bottom of the frame in order to allow for text overlays.



5. Play it up

Capture your kids enjoying themselves, and you can ensure your card will bring joy to those who receive it. Find ways to have fun with your photo shoot — whether through playtime, props or just letting go of the prescribed poses — and you may end up with some candid gems. Allowing subjects to look away from the camera and enjoy some natural movement lends emotion and energy to your shots while giving audiences an honest view of your family's dynamic personality.

Creative displays

Wondering how to festively deck your halls with the collection of cards you gather this December? Our favorite display ideas are simple and sweet. Instead of piling them in a basket, fill a small tray with miniature ornaments and prop those pictures up for visitors to see. Or punch holes into a corner of each and slide them onto a binder ring — this is a wonderful way to group cards by year if you'd like to save them for perusal down the road.

Feeling crafty? Use washi tape or twine to create a Christmas tree or star shape on a blank wall, then use pins or clips to decorate your design with cards as they arrive. For a more sophisticated take on the proverbial tree, place a few bare branches into a tall vase, then adorn them with cards strung on ribbon or twine. Alternatively, you could clip cards onto a banister trimmed with greens.

When the holiday season comes to a close, don't just toss those treasured cards, find creative ways to upcycle them. With a pair of scissors and some clever cuts, you can transform snippets of graphics and words into gift tags or blank gift bag embellishments for the following year, ornaments in a variety of shapes (Pinterest is loaded with folding techniques for three-dimensional results), small gift boxes, magnets, garlands or scrapbook accents. Utilize blank spaces on the inside front cover or rear as postcards, stationery, household note cards or recipes cards. LCP

Take note

With the advent of social media, the popularity of the customary holiday letter tucked into seasonal cards is dwindling. But the addition of a well-edited personal note is an excellent way to feel connected to the people you love the most. We turned to local etiquette expert Cindy Grosso for the top five dos and don'ts when it comes to annual correspondence.

1. Do send your letter to the right people. This type of personal correspondence should be reserved for folks you know well, such as far-away relatives, longtime friends and close neighbors rather than business associates and casual acquaintances.



“Etiquette dictates that holiday cards and letters are only sent to those people to whom you are not sending a present, so that the card becomes the gift.”

2. Don't document everything. Try to keep your letter to a single page that hits the highlights of your year.

“We live in a sound-bite society, where we're twittering at 140 characters. People just want the headlines.”

3. Do stay upbeat. “Nobody wants to be saddened at the holidays, so share the good things that might warm your recipients' hearts.” Try to put a positive spin on the details being included.

4. Don't share news that's not yours. Letters typically include details about immediate family members' interests and hobbies, vacations and achievements. “Just be sure your subjects are okay with the information included.” Perhaps have them OK the content, while simultaneously proofreading for grammar and punctuation.

5. Do make it visually exciting. “This is a social letter, so it can veer from the typical business letter format and be a bit whimsical.” The more fun you make it to read, be that with fun fonts, lots of pictures or short text snippets, the better chance you have of getting recipients to read it.

