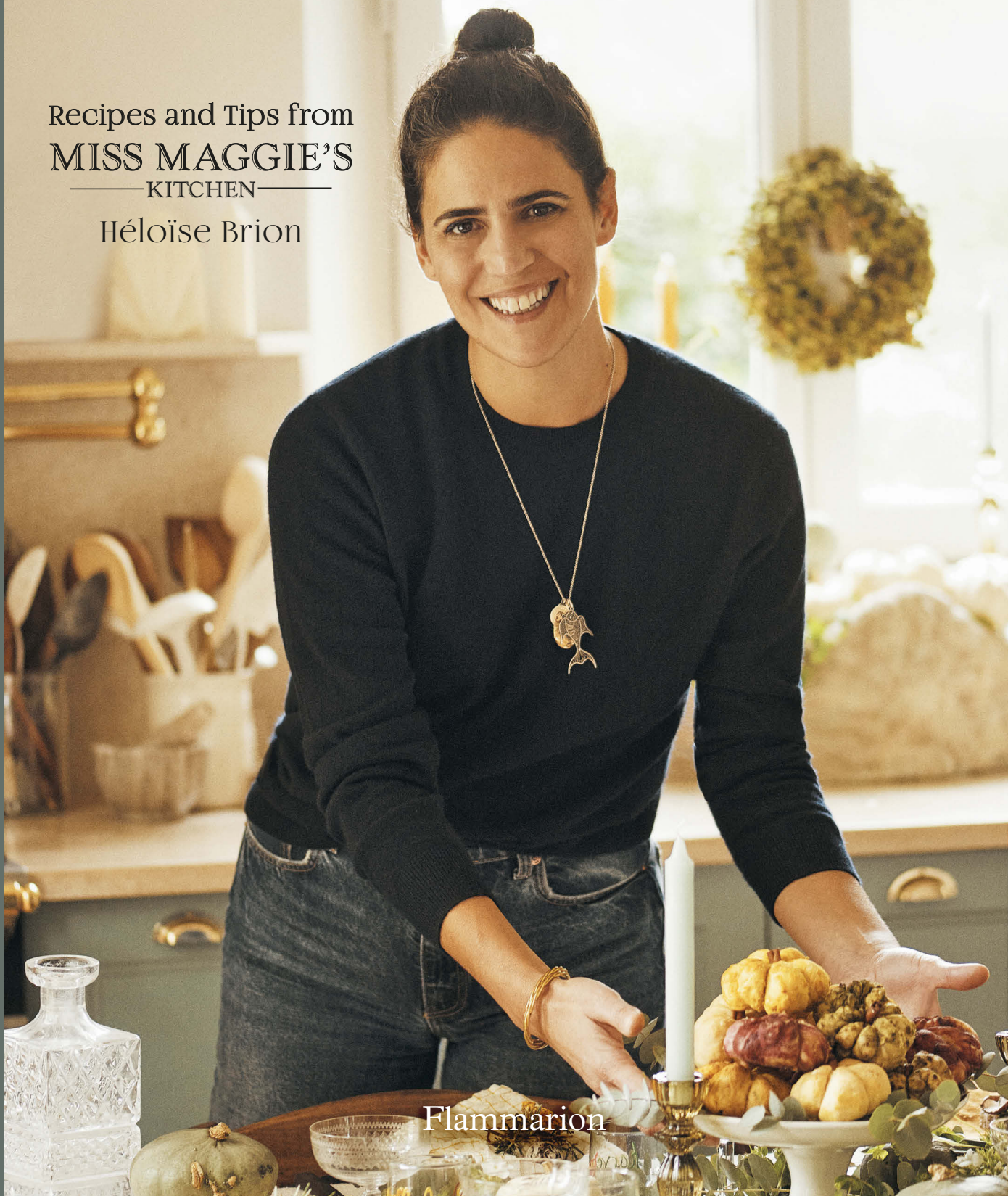


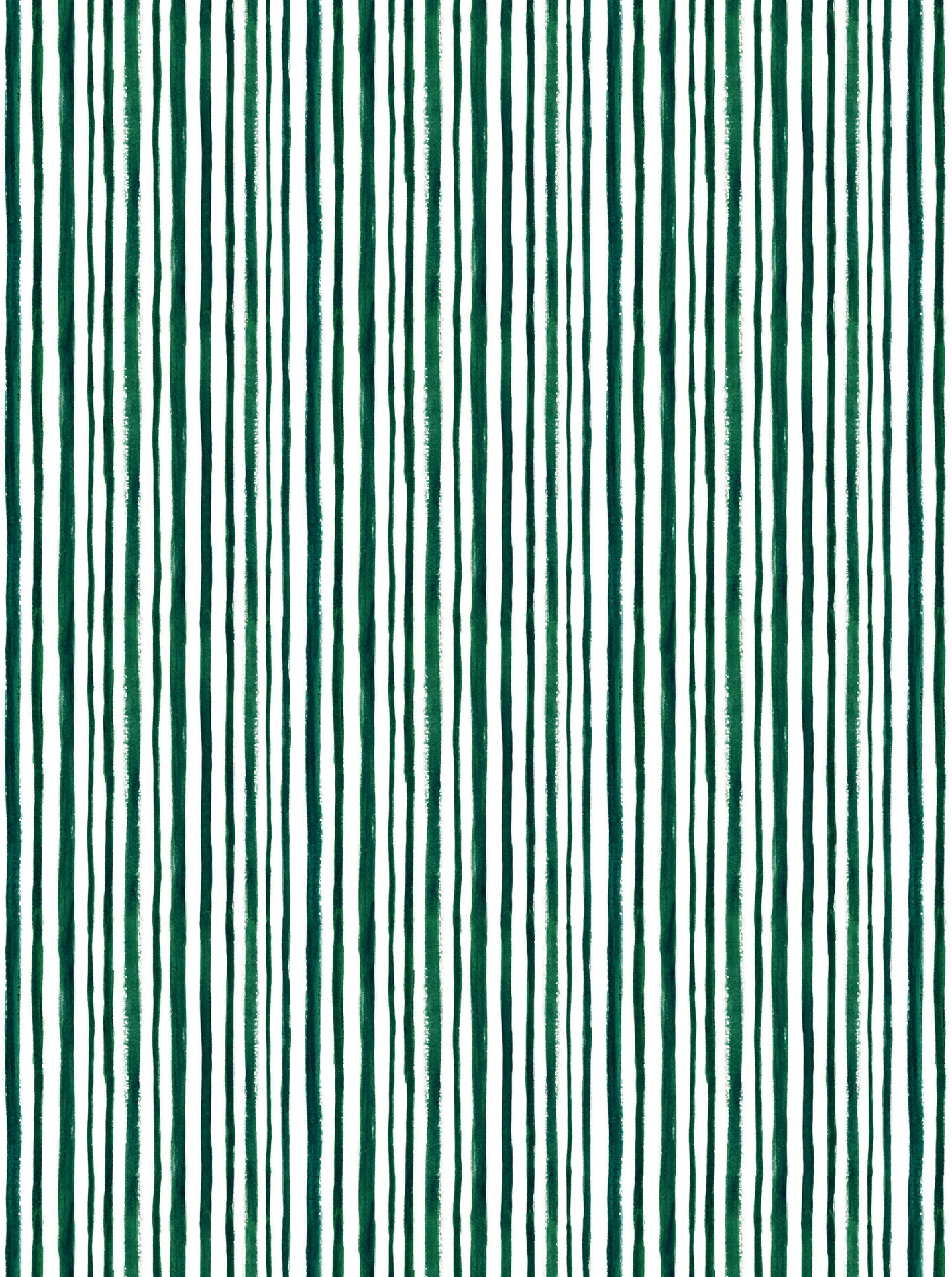
# MY ART OF ENTERTAINING

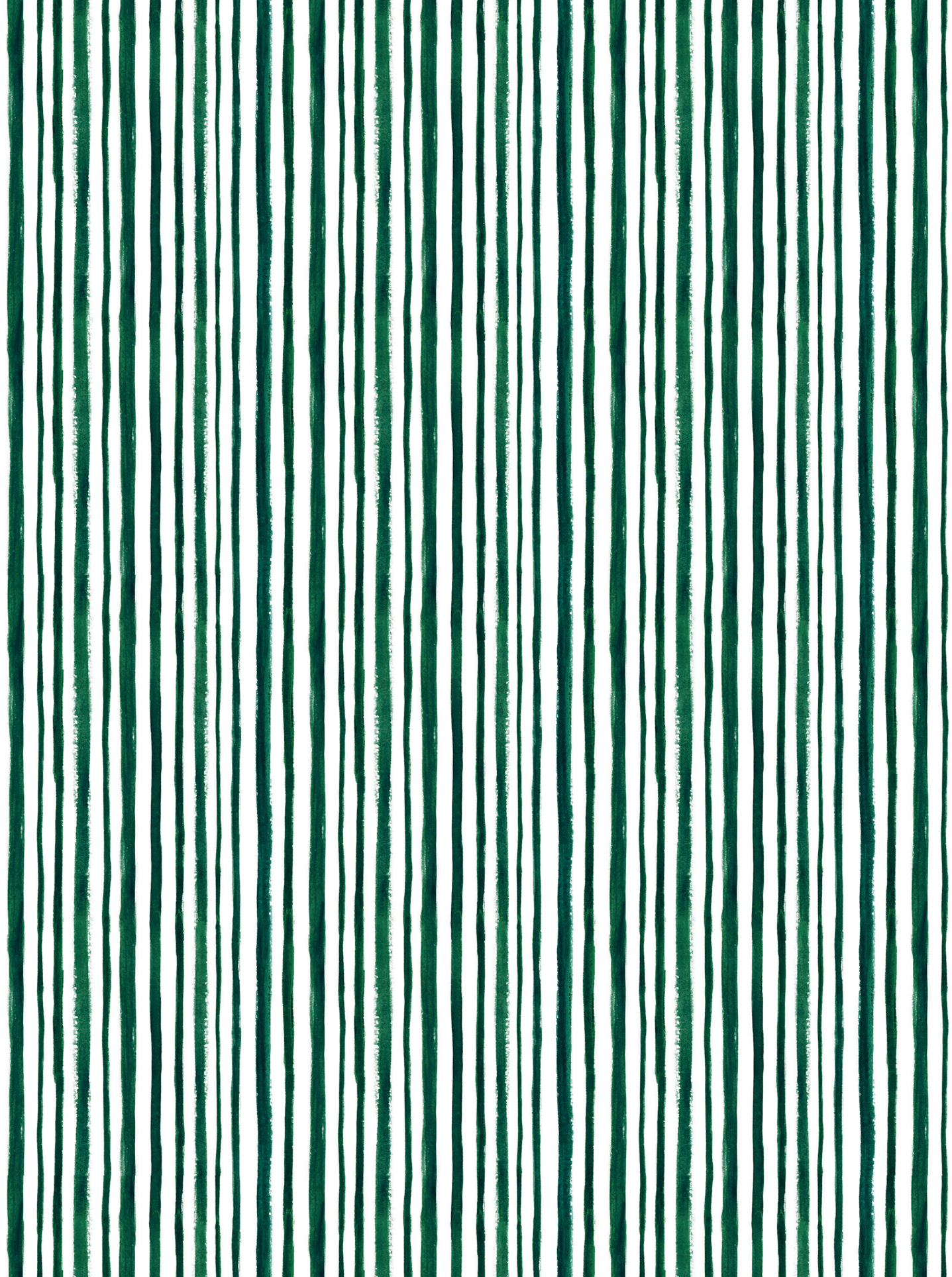
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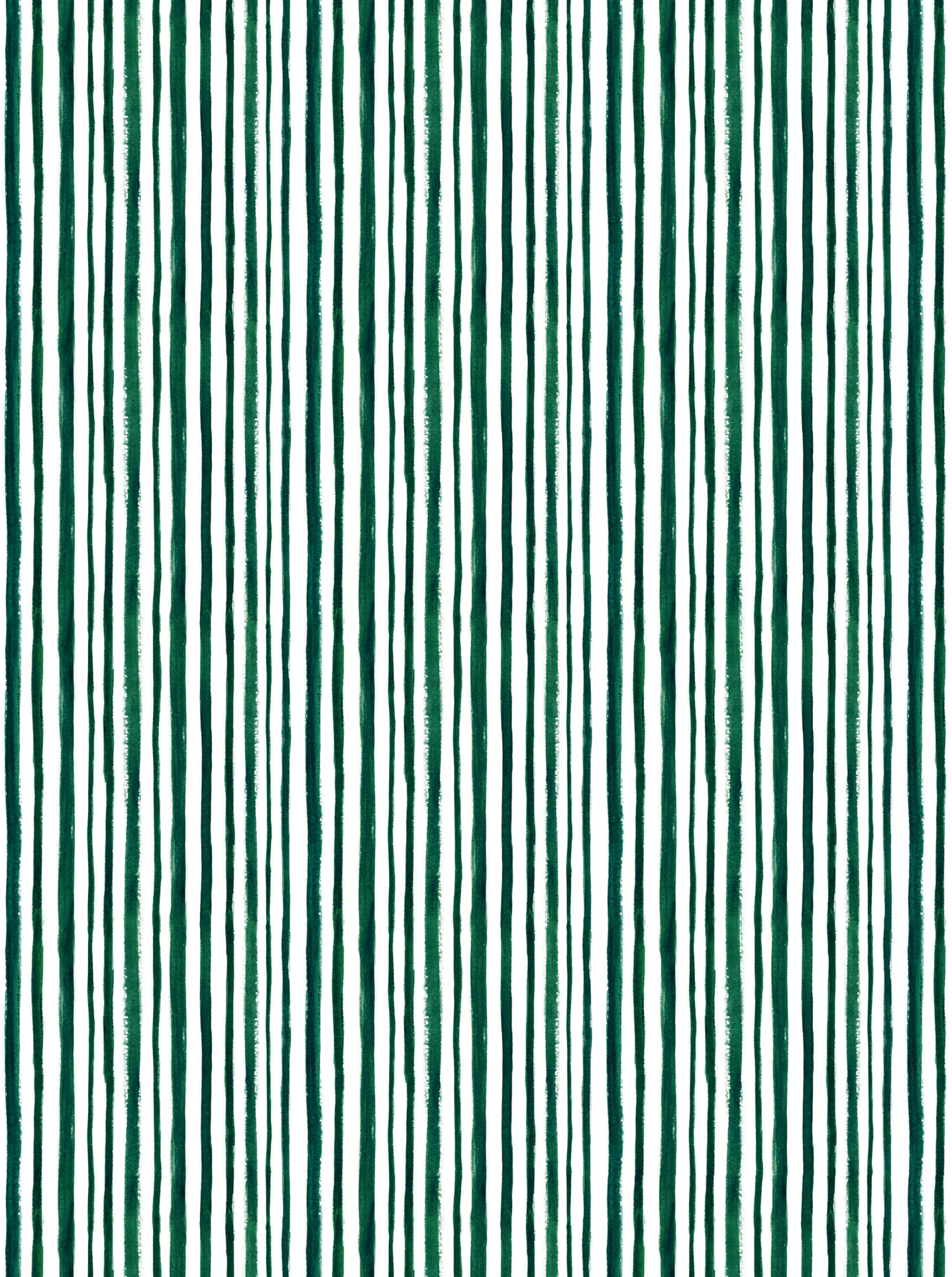
Héloïse Brion



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MY ART OF  
ENTERTAINING

To my father, who loved life and people,  
and from whom I inherited my love  
of big lively gatherings around a table  
and sharing delicious meals.

#### **FRENCH EDITION**

Editorial Director: Ronite Tubiana  
Editor: Clélia Ozier-Lafontaine  
Design: Claude-Olivier Four and Christophe Roué

#### **ENGLISH EDITION**

Editorial Director: Kate Mascaro  
Editor: Helen Adedotun  
Cover Design: Audrey Sednaoui  
Translation from the French: Ansley Evans  
Copyediting: Wendy Sweetser  
Typesetting: Claude-Olivier Four  
Proofreading: Carey Jones  
Production: Louisa Hanifi-Morard and Marylou Deserson  
Color Separation: IGS-CP, L'Isle d'Espagnac, France  
Printed in Bosnia and Herzegovina by GPS Group

Simultaneously published in French as  
*Mon art de recevoir: Recettes et conseils par Héloïse Brion*  
© Flammarion, S.A., Paris, 2022

English-language edition  
© Flammarion, S.A., Paris, 2022

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Flammarion, S.A.  
87, quai Panhard et Levassor  
75647 Paris Cedex 13

[editions.flammarion.com](http://editions.flammarion.com)

22 23 24 3 2 1

ISBN: 978-2-0802-8864-6

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
Christophe Roué

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# PREFACE

## *À Table!*

As a child, I always loved hearing those words: “Dinner time!” I relished the prospect of a delicious meal, of course, but I also sensed that, at the dinner table, I was about to embark on a journey of discovery. Because, although I truly believe that what is on our plate is of utmost importance, the table setting—no matter how simple it is—is just as essential. Together, they constitute a moment captured in time, an unforgettable experience, and an invitation to share.

At my home, the table decor is always unique. It varies with the seasons, my mood or fancy, my inspirations at the time, the menu, and the occasion. I allow myself the freedom to mix styles and I give my creativity free rein rather than adhering to old, outdated conventions. After all, the most important thing is to convey joy and warmth. I am convinced that these moments around the table remain etched in our memories; my sons are proof of that. They love dining by candlelight, adding flowers and their little treasures to the table setting, or writing up seating plans, even when it's only the four of us.

In this book, you will discover flavorsome recipes to savor in each season (which can be adapted according to your tastes or the ingredients you have on hand), as well as tips and ideas for creating attractive seasonal table settings, planning suggestions for parties—both at home or for summer vacation when family and friends gather together—and a countdown to the Christmas celebrations.

So, have fun, trust your creativeness, and enjoy and share the delight. That's what life is all about!

—Héloïse

# SEVEN TIPS FOR CREATING BEAUTIFUL TABLESCAPES

## **TIP #1**

### **SET THE SCENE**

A simple way to create a cohesive style for your table setting is to keep certain base elements neutral (the tablecloth, glasses, a wooden or stone table, etc.) and to add color using flowers, napkins, ribbons, candles, and so on. NB: lighting is key, especially at dinner, and candlelight casts a particularly flattering glow. Place candles all around, but avoid scented candles on the table during meals.

## **TIP #2**

### **DECORATE YOUR TABLE WITH FLOWERS**

I often begin with flowers as inspiration for my table settings: a few pretty blooms mixed with simple elements, for example, create a light, fresh springtime tablescape. And think beyond ordinary vases: repurpose other containers like jars or buckets, fill little wooden crates with jars of flowers, or use foraged finds from your garden or woodland strolls such as flowering branches or vines of ivy. Place them down the center of your table, as this adds texture and color—and will look simply stunning. You can

then have fun adding flowers (with their stems removed) and candles here and there. If it's not peak flower season, or just to change things up a bit, make use of seasonal produce such as squash, artichokes, apples, cabbages, or turnips, in your table settings.

## **TIP #3**

### **PLAY WITH DIFFERENT MATERIALS**

Using a mix of contrasting materials gives tables a nice twist. For example, combine wood and silver pieces with a vintage embroidered sheet to create a rustic chic look; this laid-back yet elegant vibe is perfect for romantic dinners or springtime parties.

## **TIP #4**

### **CONSIDER THE HEIGHT OF THINGS**

Make sure the top of your centerpiece is low enough so that guests don't have trouble seeing one another across the table. If you have very tall candle holders, varying the height of your candles can produce a striking effect—just be careful not to place them right at eye level.

**TIP #5**

**MIX STYLES**

I love combining different styles: vintage tableware (often mismatched) paired with finds from my travels or artisanal pieces, or else a classic table setting with a bohemian piece or two. This makes for a unique and visually interesting tablescape, and it adds rhythm. Don't be afraid to try various pieces, removing them, putting them back again, and changing their position if it isn't working—that's part of the fun of creating an original table setting. Follow your instincts and have faith in your creative flair!

**TIP #6**

**BREAK SOME RULES**

According to certain rules of etiquette in France, champagne glasses don't belong on the dining table, but I find champagne dinners rather joyful. In a classic table setting, glasses are placed above the plates and ordered from tallest to shortest, from left to right: the tallest glass, usually for water, goes on the left, then comes a smaller glass for red wine, and so on. However, I prefer to place a bigger glass for wine to the left and a smaller one for water to the right of it. I find this more aesthetically pleasing. When it comes to napkins, though, I always make a point of using cloth napkins, even for picnics!



**TIP #7**

**IT'S ALL ABOUT THE DETAILS**

For a final, personalized touch, I usually add a little detail or gift to each place setting. This could be a rosemary sprig in flower from the garden, an inspirational quote on pretty paper, a small jar of a homemade spice blend, a lovely ribbon tied around the napkin—the possibilities are endless!





# TIPS FOR HOSTING A PARTY

- Ask each of your guests to bring a dish, such as a salad, quiche, dessert, or cheese.
- Make sure you have plenty of trays, as this makes it so much easier to set up a buffet or a table in the garden.
- Create a bar area so your guests can serve themselves. Make a variety of drinks in pitchers or drink dispensers, such as water infused with cut fruits or fresh herbs; homemade lemonade; watermelon and mint juice; or cocktails.
- Set up speakers and prepare a playlist: plan on two hours of music during dinner (jazz, classical), followed by increasingly danceable tunes!
- Place candles, string lights, and lanterns everywhere: on tables and buffets, on steps, hanging from trees, etc.
- Weather permitting, get out some outdoor games for guests to play (*pétanque*; croquet; Mölkky, the Finnish throwing game; cornhole, the beanbag toss game; etc.).
- Be sure to have lemongrass on hand to fend off mosquitos, or else bouquets of fresh herbs that repel them, such as mint, sage, basil, lavender, and lemon balm.
- And if possible, have a fire pit in the garden, a guitar or two, and plenty of blankets to end the evening singing under the stars.
- My most important piece of advice, no matter the season, is to be sure to schedule a moment just for you before your guests arrive. It's essential to take a little time to relax: take a bath, apply a facial mask, have a drink with your partner. Now everything is ready, it's time to enjoy your family and friends!



