

# SUSSEX'S *Mr Christmas*

Geoff Stonebanks, from Seaford, puts Buddy the Elf to shame when it comes to dazzling displays of Christmas decorations – a skill that has earned him a reputation as a festive super fan. Here he shares his plans for 2021

WORDS: Faye Bartle

In late November, while many of us are still munching our way through Halloween chocolate, Geoff Stonebanks begins the annual ritual of bringing his 35-odd crates packed with Christmas decorations down from the loft and transforming his home into a festive wonderland. Arranging the collection, which comprises around 8,000 decorations, no less than 24 trees and has taken 60 years to build, takes over a week to complete but the time invested is well worth it for Geoff. The 68-year-old Seaford resident has appeared on national TV talking about his obsession including Channel 5's *Incredible Christmas Trees* and *How to Decorate Them* and being interviewed by Phillip and Holly for ITV's *This Morning* in 2020. This year, he is planning a quiet time at home with his



A prized decoration made by Geoff's grandmother in the 1960s

94-year-old mother, his partner Mark and their sprightly terrier Chester, but going all-out with the décor is something he says he'll never tire of.

'I've been interested in Christmas decorations since my early childhood, when my parents had a country pub in Oxfordshire that I used to help decorate,' he says.

He's been collecting

decorations since he was eight years old and now has a veritable goldmine of treasured keepsakes.

'My eclectic mix includes some delicate pieces from 1930s Prague, glass baubles from the 1950s and 60s and a wealth of decorations from Woolworths from 1960 through the decades until its demise,' he says. 'In the late 1990s, I spent six successive Christmas breaks with friends in Washington DC so I started collecting the official White House decorations issued by the White House Historical Association. They are beautifully crafted pieces in memory of past presidents, each packed in decorative boxes and with a detailed history of the president immortalised. The 2020 decoration remembered JFK.'

Geoff regularly opens his award-winning garden,



Photo: Geoff Stonebanks



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Photo: David McHugh / Brighton Post

Geoff Stonebanks with his amazing collection of Christmas trees in his bungalow in Seaford



Photo: David McHugh

Geoff admits he's a bit of a perfectionist

**TOP LEFT:** Geoff has collection of official White House Christmas decorations

**TOP RIGHT:** The big tree in the lounge is the most labour-intensive part of the decorations

**ABOVE LEFT:** A close up look at a stand-out tree

**ABOVE RIGHT:** The 1960s handmade decoration in pride of place

Driftwood Garden, to the public so is used to ensuring his surroundings are dressed to impress and puts his heart and soul into each and every detail.

'I always feel, when getting my garden ready to open every year, that I am dressing a film set for visitors to view and the same principle applies to my Christmas decorations,' he says.

'I'm a bit of a perfectionist.'

The most laborious part of the process is dressing the large faux tree in the living room, which features 15 metres of tinsel, 1,700 fairy lights, over 800 baubles and 10 metres of silver beading. 'It

*'By New Year's Day, even I've had enough'*

takes ages to set up with all the branches having to be just right,' he says.

This year, all his Christmas food shopping (including online delivery slots) were booked in October and his real Christmas tree was delivered at the beginning of December so he can relax and enjoy the festive season.

'Conditions allowing, we'll probably have a couple of friends join us for lunch on Christmas Day and Boxing Day,' he says.

While he's renowned for his hobby, he's not one to let it roll into the New Year.

'It's no mean feat to get this collection down out of the loft and set up every year – even more so to pack it all up again after Christmas and put it back in the loft,' he admits. 'But by New Year's Day, even I've had enough.' ♦ You can find out more about Geoff at [geoffschristmas.co.uk](http://geoffschristmas.co.uk) Driftwood Garden reopens on June 1, 2022.