



*Milaeger's*

## Christmas Ornaments: The Value of Vertical

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**If you assembled** a random group of Christmas ornaments, probably almost all of them would be either round or roundish in shape. Even many of the older figural ornaments, though not round, often have a roundish mass to them (especially if you squint!) These are the easiest shapes to manufacture, whether they are machine made or hand blown. Most of our trees are filled with them. From a design point of view, there is something to be said for repetition of form---how a form or an idea can be stressed through repetition. This can be very effective, if done thoughtfully. Another way to stimulate the senses is through contrast or variation. In the case of a Christmas tree that is decorated with rounded ornaments, this can be accomplished by adding something that has a vertical form or shape. Years ago, lead tinsel filled



that need, but it was discontinued and was replaced by inferior tinsel, which never caught on (thankfully.) Since then, our trees have been lacking a significant vertical accent. Solid glass icicles have always been available, but they were never as popular as tinsel. They are still sold, and are inexpensive. Of course, you can buy old ones. But when I see solid glass ornaments offered as "vintage," I am always wary, because I don't have the expertise to distinguish new from old. If, with age, they acquire a certain patina, I am unable to discern it. Since the new solid glass icicles look the same (to my eyes) as the old, they look perfect on a "vintage" tree. But for me, I like to use blown glass icicles. While the solid glass icicles have more reflective quality, the blown glass

ornaments have a bonus---they come in just about every color, and some have multiple colors. Whatever you choose, I am sure you will be happy--- a large display of any icicles adds drama and elegance to any tree.

The icicles are the last thing I put on my tree. After all the traditional ornaments are on the tree, I find I can easily add several hundred icicles in between the ornaments---they are so thin. (Of course, none of the ornaments are allowed to rub up against one another.) In fact, I think I could find room for a couple hundred more, if I really wanted to. Make sure they hang straight---they look far less natural if they are crooked.



As I mentioned earlier, there is a valid argument about the value of repetition of form---it can be very effective. This photo shows some of the larger icicles from my personal collection, hanging under kitchen cabinets. The cabinets are lit underneath, so the icicles "glow" nicely. Plus, the wall behind the icicles is mirrored, so the display effectively doubles in size. The largest icicle in this photo is 24" long.

Although I have many guidelines in my head about tree decorating: placing complementary colors next to each other, keeping shapes evenly distributed, putting advancing colors behind receding colors, and a number of others---in the end I have a more casual attitude. I only make rules that I am comfortable breaking; I refuse to be bullied by rules of my own making, and you should too---your Christmas will be merrier.

Please feel free to [email](#) me with any questions or comments.



