

## details

### Dressing Up The Dining Room

**D**INNER PARTY DECOR is getting a little dressier.

Makers, retailers and rental companies say they are selling more colorful, elaborate tablecloths that incorporate everything from peacock feathers to confetti. Magnolias Linens in New York specializes in designs like iridescent organza with textured embroidery and coffee silk with mirror applique. Revenues have at least doubled annually since the company opened in 2003, co-founder Asema Asghar says; revenues were \$700,000 in 2005. Al Gracious Style, a Los Angeles-based mail-order retailer, sales of decorative cloths have grown 35% a year for the past two years, according to founder Carolina Con.

Customers think white is "boring," says Matt Schlosberg, director of business development for White Plains Linens, in Peekskill, N.Y. "They want the linens to fit the theme of the event." His company's specialty brand, Linens à la Carte, which features textures and prints, has grown 15% to 20% a year for the past three years, he says.

Solid colors still comprise about 90% of the table linen market, and basic white accounts for 50% to 60% of that, according to Rick Jarrard, general manager of the commercial table linens business for Milliken & Co., one of the largest manufacturers of linens in the U.S. But sales of prints and wovens are growing about 15% a year, says Mr. Jarrard, and he expects that to increase. American consumers spent \$671 million on tablecloths and napkins in 2005, according

to Simmons Market Research Bureau's most recent national consumer survey.

Retailers and party planners say the trend is an offshoot of consumers' continued interest in home design and decor. Partygivers are also taking their cues from events and restaurant design. "People go out and the restaurants are dressing up their tables," says Ms. Con. "They want to come home and recreate that."

The more colorful designs can also be more costly. Al Magnolias Linens, a 120-inch round silk with hand-painted detailing and peacock feathers starts at about \$400 (to rent the same item costs about half). At Lynness in Greenwich, Conn., prints in turquoise, lime green and fuchsia are the big sellers, says owner Lynne Jenkins, with prices for

napkins ranging from \$10 to \$86 each, and standard-size tablecloths ranging from \$150 to \$600.

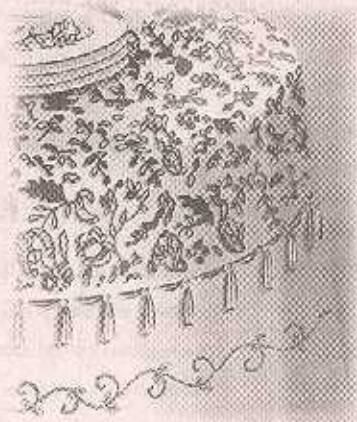
When Elisa Hirschberg was planning her Thanksgiving dinner last fall, she decided against the white linens she usually uses. Instead, she bought a sheer fabric with hand-

painted leaves from Magnolias for \$90. "I'm not formal at all," says the New York mother of three. "This was just a little more fun."

The cloths can be harder to maintain, however. "They're much more difficult to launder," says David Struminger, president of Virginia Linen Service, based in Petersburg, Va. "It's just like clothing: if you get into sequins and beads, they have to be laundered separately."

Sheri Donovan, a mother of two in Greenwich, Conn., says she's resisting the urge to get anything too fancy. "I have bought so many expensive table linens," Ms. Donovan says. "And then our friends spill red wine on them."

—Peggy Eidersheim Kall



Greg Sandler