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Let it Glow: Follow the lights for the most festive displays

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All over the Bay Area neighborhoods are stringing up, plugging in, and blowing fuses in almost heroic attempts to bring about holiday cheer. Tiny neon reindeer prance across rooftops, animatronic elves shake their booties to "Jingle Bell Rock" and glowing stars anoint chimneys with an astral glow.

Even if Christmas isn't your bag, the spectacle of gleaming festivity is often enough to thaw the most frostbitten of spirits. But with such an overwhelming number of places to see in the Bay Area, light-seekers may wonder where to begin, so we've compiled a list of a few notable spots to help our readers reach the optimum holiday cheer factor.

### **Tri-Valley Area**

**3671 Chelsea Court in Pleasanton** boasts an overwhelming quantity of animatronic animals, Santas, and toys covering the front yard and winding into a Byzantine maze of jolliness in the backyard.

Open from 6-9 p.m. until Jan. 1, the backyard alone is worth the trip. Teddy bears ride carousels, Homer Simpson is decked out in lights and Santa Claus plays golf on his own customized course. There is a playground and enough twinkling lights to make a power grid shiver.

To get there take Las Positas Boulevard to Fairlands Drive and turn left onto Chelsea Court. Other notable spots are 1552 Trimmingham Drive in Pleasanton; Deacon Dave's display at 352 Hillcrest Avenue in Livermore; Riesling Circle in Livermore; Blanco Court in San Ramon; 366 Love Lane at Moncrest Place in Danville; 821 Sultana Drive in Tracy and Minnow Avenue at Lincoln Road in Stockton.

For even more information on lights in the Tri-Valley area log on to <http://www.lightsofthevalley.com/> and peruse your hometown or add your lights display to the list.

### **Fremont**

Fremont residents looking for a new place to visit will delight in touring the lighted grounds and decorated rooms at **Country Inn Retirement Community**. Managers Fran and Joel Martinez and their granddaughter Jennifer Matthies spent five days decorating the facility with the help of volunteers and staff. With a life-sized Nativity scene, poinsettias, a dancing Santa Claus and a tree in every room, residents are treated to a wealth of holiday memories. "It really means a lot to our residents," says Joel Martinez, "it takes them back to their childhood and reminds them of holidays past."

Fran Martinez got the idea to decorate the facility four years ago, and the annual ritual has become a community building experience that encourages residents to participate in tree decorating and gift exchanges. Martinez notes that many residents hire professional photographers to take family photos next to the lavishly decorated fireplace or in the lighted atrium.

The public is welcome to visit and bring cameras. The Country Inn Retirement Community is just off Paseo Padre Parkway at 2860 Country Drive in Fremont. Other

festive locations in Fremont include Cripps Place (a.k.a. "Crippsmas Place"); 41355 Beatrice St.; 38643 Glencoe Dr. and the Masonic Home at 34400 Mission Blvd. in Union City.

#### **Hayward and surrounding areas**

The darkened stretch of Soto Road in Hayward is illuminated by the twinkling beacon of **305 Berry Avenue**. Drivers slow down to gaze at giant candy canes, families of cheerful snowpeople, nutcrackers and lighted reindeer, along with an enormous inflatable snowman at the back of the house.

It's best to take a tour down Berry Avenue and take a look at neighboring houses 324 and 314 which also decorate abundantly with twinkling lights, lighted woodland creatures and nativity scenes.

Additional locations to ogle include the corner of Almond and Seven Hills Road in Castro Valley and Stanton Avenue just past Sydney and before Laredo also in Castro Valley.

#### **San Mateo**

The adjacent streets of **Glen Avenue and Santa Lucia Avenue** in San Bruno feature glowing nativity scenes, lighted rooflines, Santa Claus figures, tiny reindeer and a variety of other holiday decorations as residents of both streets decorate their homes to provide blocks of comforting goodwill.

The neighborhood of Eucalyptus Avenue and Cordilleras Avenue in San Carlos hosts a bevy of holiday onlookers with an impressive community display of lights and lighted statues. Other neighborhoods to view include Dewey Avenue in Redwood City; Lilac Lane and Parkway Estates in South San Francisco and the corner of Santa Cruz Avenue at El Camino Real in Menlo Park.

#### **Oakland and Alameda**

A twinkling galaxy of lights this year, Oakland offers a strong gravitational pull for light-gazers. **Picardy Drive off 55th Avenue** is a community effort of gaiety with strands of bulbs strung from house to house. The effect of this decorating fellowship creates a magical holiday village that crowds the street with onlookers in slow-moving vehicles. Another notable destination is Millsbrae Avenue just off MacArthur Boulevard, where several homeowners have covered every square inch of their shrubs, structures and lawns with multi-colored lights and herds of glowing reindeer.

Finally, don't forget to pay a visit to Alameda's Thompson Avenue, also known as Christmas Tree Lane, where Santa has been known to wait on the median to greet onlookers, and positively every house is aglow with the palpable warmth of good cheer. Thompson Avenue is located just off of High Street in Alameda.