

MARTHA
STEWART

Living

RUFFLES

EASTER LUNCHEON

FANCY EGGS

YELLOW MAGNOLIAS

MUSTARDS

MARBLE GLASS

Spring





Modern design, with its emphasis on clean lines and unadorned surfaces, once came close to banishing the ruffle from interior decoration,

but these flurries of fabric remain one of the easiest ways to introduce a little poetry to a room. Ruffles play with the air around them; they flaunt a fabric's personality by lavishly augmenting its texture and color. "Don't be fooled by their lighthearted appearance," says Kevin Sharkey, home editor of *MARTHA STEWART LIVING*. "Ruffles can change the whole character of a fabric. They can lighten up a heavy piece of upholstered furniture. They put punctuation into decorative statements." 🌻 In its simplest form, a ruffle is a strip of fabric—of any length or width—that has been gathered along one edge. Variations include the flounce, the frill, the pleat, and the ruche. Distinctions among these terms may be based on the length of a fold, a technique of construction, or nothing more than changing linguistic fashion. But no matter—under any name, these lavish displays of costly fabrics have signified wealth throughout history. Ruffles, which require excess lengths of cloth, first showed up on aristocratic dress in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Stiff, densely rippled "ruffs" circle necklines in portraits from that period. When complemented by wrist ruffles, they made up a "suit of ruffs." Soon, ruffles began to appear in houses as well, where they decorated the edges of curtains and bed hangings. Even after bed hangings receded, ruffles continued to adorn bedskirts and pillow trim. In the first half of the twentieth century, ruffles were often used for their airy, rustling effect on lightweight summer curtains, but they also became a cliché of cottagey cuteness. With a little imagination, however, ruffles can be updated and used in all sorts of surprising ways in any room of the house. 🌻 There is an inherent versatility to all cloth; it is what allows a thin voile to become a whisper when light skims through it, and a heavy silk to become voluptuous when it folds around itself. Ruffles can help any fabric live up to its full potential. Although it's important to understand the weight and hand of any fabric before you work with it, there are few hard-and-fast rules about ruffles. "You can make a ruffle out of just about any textile," says upholsterer Carl Dellatore, who created the ruffles shown here. "Depending on the effect you're trying to achieve, however, certain fabrics will work better than others." In general, a material can be gathered in on itself anywhere from one-and-a-half to three times to create the desired fullness. For example, a very fine fabric such as voile can be gathered to create a ruffle three times

OPPOSITE: Evoking the workmanship of a couture gown, the clamshell-ruffle appliqué on this tablecloth was shaped from one continuous two-hundred-yard-long strip of damask and then attached in concentric circles.

ABOVE: Like piped icing, a premade satin-ribbon trim (available at notions stores) personalizes a satin pillow.

fuller than the flat piece with which you start. A thick fabric such as grosgrain, on the other hand, can be gathered only one-and-a-half times, before its stiffness makes the edge stick straight up and look clumsy. See the glossary on page 212 for descriptions and assembly techniques. But feel free to experiment with new forms and combinations. Once you've created them, ruffles do require some special care. (See "Good Things" on page 86 for tips on maintenance.) 🌻 Although rooms seem to derive their main character from the essentials, it is really the details that people remember. Ruffles, one such detail, can be the flights of fancy that elevate the prose of the essentials to something lyrical and personal.