

LIFE ARGUS



Geoff Stonebanks, from Seaford, has thousands of Christmas decorations which he puts up every year. Image: The Argus



Meet Geoff, the 'most festive man in Britain'

BRITAIN'S "most festive man" has added even more Christmas decorations to his 10,000-strong collection this year.

Geoff Stonebanks' passion for most of the year is his award-winning Driftwood Garden, which has attracted more than 23,000 visitors and raised over £170,000 for charity.

But when November hits, Geoff's focus turns to beautifully decorating his house in Marine Drive, Bishopstone, Seaford, ready for Christmas.

It takes the 71-year-old a week to get around 10,000 individual decorations, some dating back to the 1930s, out of 40 crates and hung up in time for December 1.

"Each year, I drag the crates out of the loft towards the end of November and get everything set up by December 1 for switch-on," he said.

His painstaking efforts have earned *The Argus's* weekly gardening columnist the title of "Britain's most festive man".

Geoff has been honing his collection for over 60 years with his love starting when he was a child growing up in the Dolphin pub his parents Barbara and Ron owned in the Cotswolds.

His vast collection includes homemade gifts from family members, international finds and many purchases from Woolworths bought to decorate his parents' public house.

When his parents retired in 1987, Geoff inherited all the decorations his parents had for the pub. Geoff also has over 25 assorted artificial Christmas trees of varying heights adorned with dozens of baubles which hold many memories and have a lot of sentimental value.

These include a small tree that was purchased in Woolworths in the early 1960s with some of the decorations from the same time. The small Pierrot figure on top was made as a gift tag for a Christmas present Geoff received from his paternal grandmother, Elsie Stonebanks, back in 1963 and was made from a ping pong ball, some felt and pipe cleaners. It has been treasured now for 60 years and looks as good as new.

Also in the collection is a small yellow church along with two glass figures that were gifts from his maternal grandmother, Dorothy Brooker, back in the 60s.

Geoff's collection also includes decorations from when he would visit Washington DC every Christmas in the 1990s and bring an official White House presidential ornament back.

He now has every decoration from 1992 to date, which are displayed on a grey wire tree every year.

Other new additions to this year's collection include a felt mouse and a tinsel flamingo.

"I always try and collect a few new pieces each year, this year it's a fab felted mouse, the 2024 official White House tree decoration and a chic tinsel flamingo gifted by a friend June," said Geoff.

"The felted mouse jumped out at me from a shop's Facebook page and I could not resist. The

White House decoration is the latest to add to my annual collection, dating back to 1992."

When asked about his favourite decorations, Geoff said: "Many favourites in the collection to be honest do vary from year to year, but to pick four out at this moment in time I'd say vintage pieces from my childhood, two Woolworths mercury baubles and two figures given to me by my grandmother in the 1960s," he said.

The Christmas bonanza has attracted a lot of attention from the media across the world with German broadcasters making a film about the collection, to regular appearances on television, including on *This Morning* and *The Jeremy Vine Show*.

Geoff said he is "utterly overwhelmed" by the interest shown in his collection.

