

Geoff Stonebanks, from Seaford, has thousands of decorations, including from his parents' old pub, below middle



Meet our Mr Christmas

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WHEN December hits, most people get out the old box of decorations and spend an afternoon sprucing up their living room.

But for Argus weekly gardening columnist and Christmas lover Geoff Stonebanks - also known as "Britain's most festive man" the process involves around 10,000 individual decorations which take a week to hang up.

The 70-year-old's passion for most of the year is his award winning Driftwood Garden which has attracted more than 23,000 visitors and raised more than £170,000 for charity.

When the garden quietsens in the winter, Geoff's focus turns to beautifully decorating his house in Marine Drive, Bishopstone, Seaford.

The process starts at the end of November and takes Geoff a week to complete, including one artificial tree which takes him five hours to finish.

"If you add each piece of tinsel and individual bauble there probably is 10,000 pieces", Geoff said.



"Each decoration and collection brings back memories. I remember buying some of them in the 1960s.

"I have been Christmas decorating every year since I was about ten. It came about because my parents Barbara and Ron owned a pub in the Cotswolds.

"They always opened on Christmas Day. From about the age of ten she would just let me get on with it.

"It became a passion through growing up in the pub I think. As children we were brought up in a pub that was open all year. It was our parents' prime concern. We

were very much left to our own devices because our parents were totally occupied working.

"Even on Christmas Day we couldn't open our presents until we had filled all the shelves up on the bar so they could be ready for opening.

"Christmas decorations gave me something to do because we always had to amuse ourselves so it stemmed from that.

"When they retired in 1987, I inherited all the decorations they had in the pub.

"I have pieces that go back to Prague in the 1930s. My grandparents also bought me decorations

around Christmas time."

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

He used to decorate the front porch and hallway but has focused on fewer rooms with his collection.

Geoff has more than 2,500 baubles and 32 artificial trees.

"This year I have decided not to go the whole hog. I decided to do these three rooms. Other years I have done the porch and hallway.

"Each room has a different focus, the living room is silvers, greys and blacks, the dining room is mostly reds and greens. This year, my surplus decorations have created the collage of trees in that spare room.

"We used to have my mother living here, she's in a care home nearby. We went to decorate her room recently."

Geoff said he hopes the decorations put a smile on people's faces.

He has entered Airtasker's British Collector Awards where people have the chance to win £1,000.

The awards, which close on January 26 next year, are looking for people's 1990s collections of memorabilia.

