

The background of the page is a photograph of a cozy living room. In the center, a fireplace with a white mantel has a warm fire burning inside. The mantel is decorated with several framed pictures and a string of red and white garlands. In the foreground, a table is set with a variety of holiday-themed gifts. On the left, a silver bowl is filled with oranges and a large, ornate white egg. In the center, a large platter is overflowing with an assortment of treats, including cookies, crackers with cheese and meats, and fresh vegetables like cherry tomatoes and bell peppers. On the right, a large, colorful gift bag featuring a cartoon Santa Claus is visible.

holiday GIFT GUIDE

NOVEMBER 2021

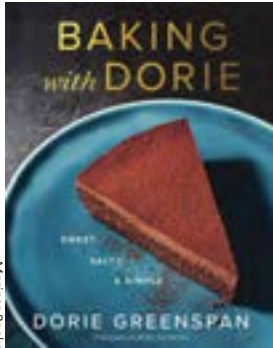
*Gift ideas for your pets,
your special someone,
the kids, and your friends*

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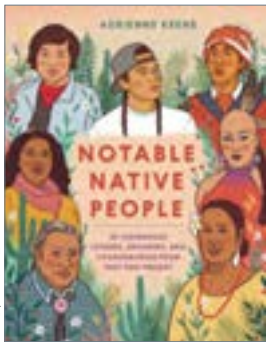
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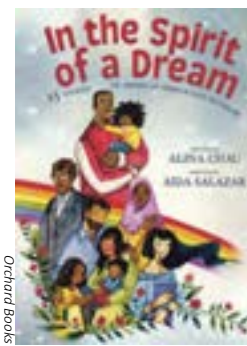
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Holiday Gift Guide

November 25, 2021

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Wishing for a Better 2022

Honestly, 2021 hasn't been all we had hoped for, after a rough 2020. But let's not get all Grinch-y here, as we launch into the Most Wonderful Time of the Year, a time of hope, joy and forgiveness. This holiday season, like the one that came before it, will be one of shopping challenges. Many commercially produced gifts will arrive late this year, because of shortages of this and that and delays here and there. Perhaps this will be a year when we shop local, do more with less and embrace the old New England traditions. Our writers have shared some inspiring ideas for holiday gifts in this special issue; but above all we wish you a 2022 that will remind us what a wonderful place our world can be.

— Cynthia Hochswender



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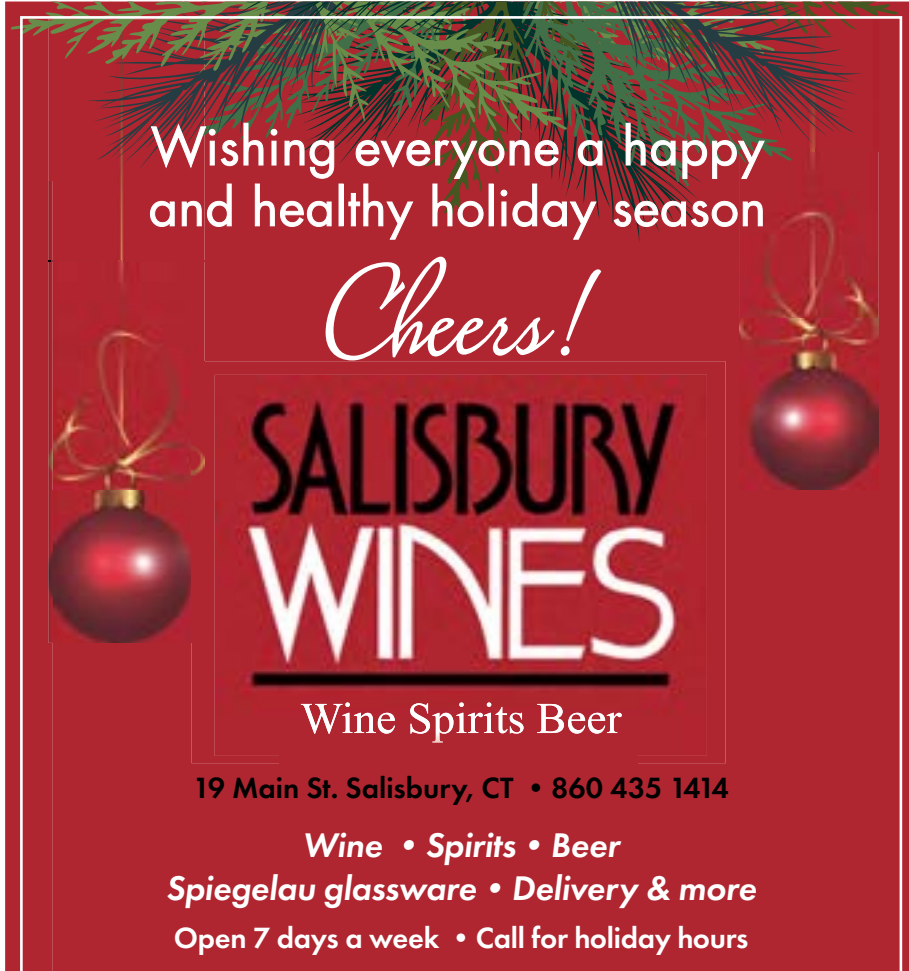
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PHOTO BY CYNTHIA HOCHSWENDER

Writer Kate Hochswender wonders why it's called "summer sausage" when it's a winter holiday staple food.

Why a 'Summer' Sausage Is the Key To Winter Holiday Happiness

By Kate Hochswender

For me, the Christmas spirit doesn't hit with the first snowfall or a greeting card from a beloved family member, but while wandering the holiday aisles of department stores admiring shelves stacked to overflowing with brightly colored baubles to hang on your tree, cinnamon and gingerbread scents, ceramic elves and Santas, candy canes of every color, all beckoning for you to buy them — even though you told yourself you would save your Christmas budget to spend on real, substantive gifts for friends and family,

not more tchotchkes and candy to hoard in the already overfilled "Christmas box" that spends most of the year in your basement.

Among the many things you find in every store's Christmas aisle, there is one recurring item that always catches my eye — unexpectedly alluring, almost hypnotic even in its banality among so many other blinking lights, sweet smells and promises of holiday cheer: The summer sausage-and-cheese gift box.

Hickory Farms is a common brand. Other retailers that have sausage boxes are

Smoky Valley, Hillshire Farms, Swiss Colony and Harry & David. The layouts are all comparable. They come with a wrapped summer sausage, some type of cheese, usually a box of crackers and sometimes even a jar of mustard. There are often smaller versions, and then progressively more “deluxe” options, with more samplings of meats, cheeses and condiments to try.

Perhaps it was the neat way the food items had been stacked within the box that appealed to me so, or the curiosity as to what a summer sausage was in compared to a sausage of any other season.

Or maybe it was an arousal of fond childhood memories that caused me to (correctly) interpret them as a Lunchable

for adults.

But I had always been drawn to and tempted to buy one of these sausage-and-cheese gift boxes.

I was initially ignorant as to what “summer” sausage had to do with Christmas (which traditionally takes place in winter). Were they on the Christmas shelf by mistake? Was this a tradition I just wasn’t privy to? But after asking around a bit (as my obsession with the sausage had become so overwhelming that I felt compelled to bring it up in conversation with people while discussing holiday plans), I learned anecdotally that these sausage-cheese packs are the sort of thing that people associate with office party gifts — like a ham or a fruit basket or a

wrapped fruit cake.

They’re a sort of consolation prize gift, intended for people you don’t know well enough to buy something more personal (or more expensive) for.

A quick Google search will inform you that the reason they are called “summer sausage” is because they are preserved meat, intended to be made from animals harvested in the autumn, then cured while hanging upside down in a barn and left for long months.

The idea was that since it is a preserved meat, you could

I gave in to my curiosity a few years back and bought myself a summer sausage-and-cheese gift box.

leave it on the shelf and it still wouldn’t have gone bad by the time summer rolled around — even in pre-refrigeration times. The history of how or when it became a Christmas gift regular is more iffy. I, however, can suggest my own thoughts on why it is a gift worth investing in.

I gave in to my curiosity a few years back and bought myself a summer sausage-and-cheese gift box. It was delicious and everything I had hoped it would

Continued on page 6



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... summer sausage

Continued from page 5

be. Sausage, cheese, cracker and mustard are a perfect appetizer that can add some much needed “salt” to the usual abundance of “sweet” of Christmas cookies or candy that are floating around at this time of year.

It is always safer to buy someone a gift that they can consume rather than one they have to keep in their house indefinitely.

Also, the ideal gift is one that can be played with for at least 5 minutes after being opened; the ritual of unwrapping the sausage, slicing the cheese, it’s all part of the fun of the snack.

Another ideal use for the summer sausage is in a charcuterie board. If you are as

addicted to social media as I am, you know these lavishly displayed snack boards have been “trending” this past year, with people trying to one up each others’ food porn game for Instagram or TikTok clout. Sausage and cheese provide the perfect foundation for a Christmas charcuterie that will make your dinner guests or your loyal internet followers happy.

You can find summer sausage-and-cheese gift boxes of various sizes at most “big box” stores. You can create a charcuterie board by arranging their contents with groupings of grapes, rosemary leaves and holiday candies in different color schemes.

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PHOTO BY CYNTHIA HOCHSWENDER

Most people dread receiving holiday fruitcake because it's, frankly, disappointing. The fruitcake in this photo is a delicious delight, and easy to make.

A Fruitcake Your Friends Will Actually Thank You For

By Cynthia Hochswender

As my daughter hilariously points out in her article on page 4, cheese-and-sausage boxed sets are often a corporate gift, or a somewhat impersonal edible gift for someone you don't know well. Commercially prepared fruitcakes are a similar gift, she points out.

There is a more elegant and more personal variation on the boxed set: an artfully designed charcuterie board.

And there is a more

delicious and more personal variation on the store-bought fruitcake: homemade fruitcake.

Now, some people are not great bakers; it's possible that for such folks a store-bought fruitcake is a perfectly wonderful gift.

But if you like to bake and you don't mind chopping up a lot of dried fruit and nuts, well, have I got a fruitcake recipe for you.

Continued on page 8



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...fruitcake

Continued from page 7

This cake is legitimately delicious. Anyone you give it to as a holiday gift will (I believe!) be delighted.

If you can find them, you should of course feel free to use several mini loaf pans but I can't offer you any guidance on how many mini loaves you can make with this recipe.

This recipe came to me from a website that no longer seems to exist. It was originally a California Golden Raisin marketing effort. There are several recipes online for what is often called Golden Fruitcake, but none matches this version I found in 2010.

The recipe calls for candied orange peel but I prefer to use

Trader Joe's Dried Fruit Soft & Juicy Mandarins. The recipe also calls for chopped walnuts, but I found their strong flavor overwhelmed the cake, so I use slivered almonds instead.

When I was a kid, my grandmother made a more traditional, old-school fruitcake that I actually really liked. It was also very nutty, but the nuts were ground up and made the cake dark and dense.

Her cake was also very old-school in that it used those mysterious assortments of "dried fruits" that I suspect were not actually fruit but something created in a food lab. And yet, they were kind of delicious. You can still find them at large grocery stores, such as Fresh Town in Amenia, N.Y. Feel free to use them in this recipe instead of actual dried fruit.

GOLDEN FRUITCAKE

Adapted from www.best.holiday-fruitcake-recipe.ever.com

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cups butter
2 cups sugar
6 eggs (separated)
pinch of salt
3/4 cup milk
1/4 cup brandy or whiskey
1 teaspoon vanilla
3 1/2 cups all purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 cups golden raisins
1 cup of chopped dried apricots
1/2 cup of chopped dried mandarin oranges
1 cup of slivered almonds

INSTRUCTIONS

Butter and flour two loaf pans.
Preheat the oven to 275 degrees.

For the photo on the previous page, I made half of the recipe above, and split it between two loaf pans, so it's not very lofty. If you use the full recipe, your cake will look like an actual loaf. Better yet, bake this cake in a bundt pan or an old-fashioned pudding pan with a scalloped bottom.

I prefer to beat the egg whites first, because it's important to have a grease-free bowl and mixers to get good loft on the whites. If you can decide to do the same, keep in mind that you have to work quickly to make the butter/sugar mix, or the whites will begin to separate.

So: Beat your egg whites and salt at medium speed for about 15 minutes, until they're stiff but not dry. Use the whisk attachment on your mixer if you have one. Halfway through, scrape down the sides.

Transfer the stiff whites to a large bowl.

Wipe out the mixer bowl and use the regular paddle attachment to beat the butter until it's light and creamy. Add the sugar a little at a time, beating until the mixture is smooth.

Combine the milk, spirits and vanilla. Whisk together the flour and salt. Add them to the butter mixture, alternating with first some flour, then some milk, then some flour, etc.

Fold in the fruits and nuts and then fold the whole thing gently but thoroughly into the whites. The thing with beaten whites is that you don't want to stir; you want to use a large spoon to scoop under the mixture and fold over until the whites are completely incorporated into the heavier batter.

Then scoop the mixture into your buttered-floured baking vessels. Bake for about two hours, until the top is just turning golden and you can insert a stick into the center and have it come out pretty dry.

Give it five minutes to set in the loaf pan after you take it out of the oven, and then gently turn it onto a wire cooling rack.

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Holiday Giving Is Going To The Dogs — In The Best Possible Way!

By Alexander Wilburn

In Clement Clark Moore's classic 19th-century holiday poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," we're told that "the stockings were hung by the chimney with care." But what stockings could be hung with more care than the ones meant for the household's most cared for inhabitants: our dogs.

It's no secret that in New England, dogs hold a high place in our hearts. From Labrador to Labradoodle, these four-legged companions can be seen everywhere, out on the town, stroll-

ing by the shops on Main Street in Millerton, N.Y., lounging on the Green outside The White Hart in Salisbury, Conn.

Growing up, my family's own chocolate Labrador retriever, named after famed abstract impressionist painter and Sharon, Conn., resident Jasper Johns, was given his own Christmas stocking every Dec. 25 morning. This tradition has continued with my brother's Welsh corgi and my sister's French bulldog.



ILLUSTRATION BY ALEXANDER WILBURN

No splurge is too excessive, really, for the most beloved member of the family.

Continued on page 11

Early Holiday

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... pooch gifts

Continued from page 9

We were hardly the first or only family to grant the dog his own monogrammed, needle-point stocking stuffed with toys. In fact, it's possible that for many households, the dog is the family member with the most treats hanging over the fireplace. Sometimes it's just time to admit we know who Mom's real favorite is ...

So what should you fetch to get your pup's tail wagging? At Petpourri in Lakeville, Conn., owner Stephanie Pellegrino pointed out Polkadog cod skins as the treat she can't keep on the shelves.

These ultra-popular canine snacks, which wouldn't be out of place in a high-end progres-

sive kitchen, are made by dehydrating the crispy skin of wild-caught fish in Alaska. Unlike pig ears (another popular animal-based treat that dogs salivate over) these crunchy fish sticks are gone in a flash.

Santa S'mores by Bocce's Bakery are another one of Pellegrino's picks for turning a typical stocking into a seasonal "doggy bag" of treats.

These holiday-themed bite-sized goodies combine peanut butter, carob and vanilla.

She also promises that shoppers can't go wrong with bedding products from Tall Tails — super soft, super comfortable, super washable and all in a range of minimalist, natural

hues to keep your dog's habitat from clashing with your kitchen.

For a special addition to your pooch's pile of gifts, travel down to The Barkery Boo'tique in New Milford, Conn., where the shop works with artisan bakers to provide all-natural gourmet cookies and cakes that look as good, or even better, than the homemade desserts you'd make for humans.

Though they carry birthday-themed miniature cakes all year (again, for your pup, not you, no matter how good they look), The Barkery stocks holiday snacks starting in November.

Entering the shop you'll also catch the scent of their bags

of baker-made biscuits, which come in a full range of flavors from cranberry to peanut butter to the ever-popular bacon.

Don't forget: A gift for your best paw friend can be a gift for you too — how about clean fur for Christmas? Ultimate Dog Spa & Boutique in North Canaan has gift certificates for grooming needs, including de-shedding, moisturizing and teeth-brushing.

Whether you're making an appointment for your own family pup or purchasing a present for a friend's canine, the spa can customize their gift certificates, tailoring them with the services best suited to the individual dog's breed and needs.



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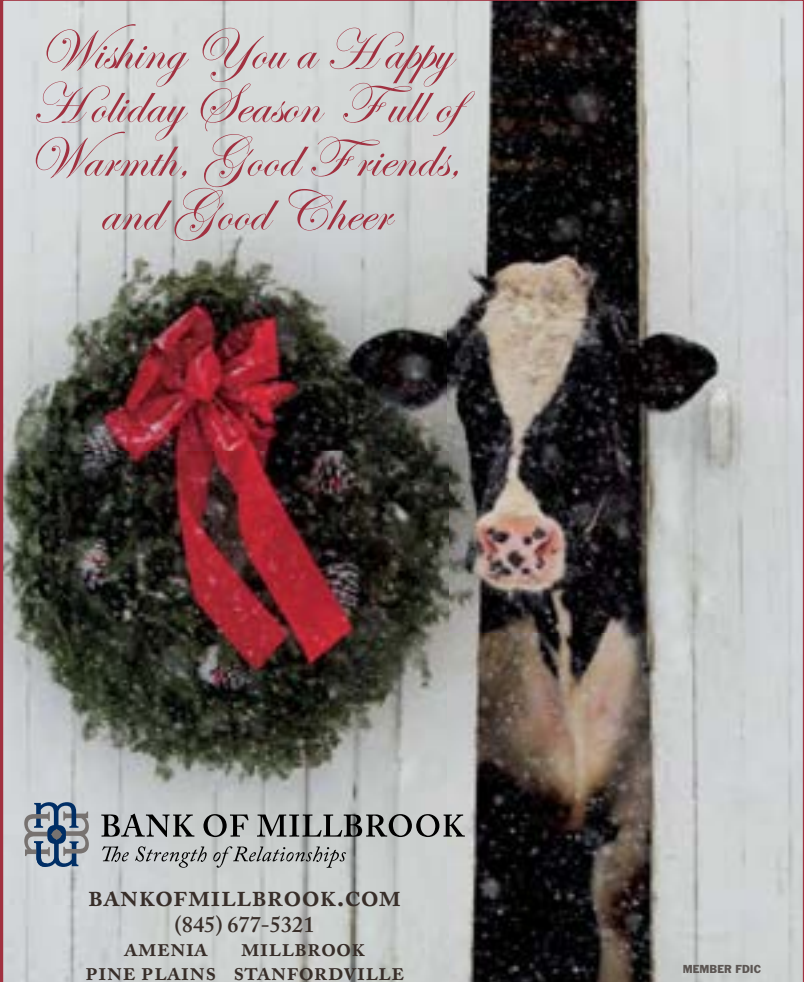


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The Eternally Elusive Question: What Do Children Want?

By Cynthia Hochswender



This is going to be a complicated year for holiday wish lists because of supply shortages. In particular, apparently, it is going to be difficult to get hold of gaming consoles, according to a financial industry podcast I like, called Barron's Streetwise with Jack Hough; you can find it online or on your phone.

In two October episodes on holiday gifts, Hough warns that if your child really wants a gaming console, you might need to shop

for used units because new ones are scarce.

But in a year of scarcity, now more than ever is the time to shop at local stores. You give businesses in your town a boost; and you don't have to worry about a gift that won't show up until mid February: It's either available on the day you go to the store, or it isn't.

But the holidays are traditionally a time when children put together wish lists, and it might be hard to explain to them that

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Santa can't get everyone their presents because of problems with unloading cargo containers in Los Angeles.

Wish lists are great for parents and relatives, but there are situations where you are, for example, buying gifts for the Adopt-a-Family program in Millerton, N.Y., or Toys for Tots or other groups that help families in need.

In those situations, many donors won't know what gifts to get.

We asked a few parents with youngsters what their holiday gift plans are, and will share a few of their ideas here. We will add the children's ages but not names or towns.

To avoid being genderist, I am going to simply give age ranges and not refer to boys or girls; and

I will use "they" as the pronoun so we can be fully inclusive.

Starting young and working our way up the age ladder, we first have a 4 year old, whose parents are shopping for **Squishmallows**. "Without a doubt, these insanely popular plush toys are our child's favorite," the father reports. "Squishmallows come in hundreds of styles and sizes, from animals and food to fantasy creatures and holiday characters."

Jack Hough in his podcast said that Paw Patrol products are big this winter, and our father-of-a-4-year-old agrees.

"New Paw Patrol and My Little Pony movies — now viewable on Paramount+ and Netflix, re-

continued on page 14



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... gifts for kids

Continued from page 13

spectively — have launched new characters and endless toys for these franchises. Our child loves Liberty, the newest member of the Paw Patrol team.”

“Our child plays with **slime of all textures and colors**; you can buy premade containers or make your own at home. She enjoys Play-Doh, and we work together on LEGO sets as a family.”

Family time is excellent, and it’s something that most children crave, even if they pretend to want to be far, far away from parents and siblings.

Board games are an excellent all-family gift. The 4 year old “really wants Hungry Hungry Hippos but there are plenty of fun games to choose from for young players, like Hi Ho Cherry-O and

Pop the Pig.”

We have a list from a 9-year-old with an unexpectedly old-fashioned request for a **record player**. They specified the Crosley Discovery, which is the entry level product, at \$49.99; and “the vinyl” for “Sour” by Olivia Rodrigo.

Sweet-scented body care products are eternally popular. On this particular wish list is cookie dough-scented hand cream. Anything from Bath and Body Works or Lush, including scented hand sanitizers and flavored lip balms, will work.

Jewelry is always a good idea. Most gift shops and all big box stores have less expensive options.

Another teen’s gift list in-

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cluded an earring organizer; this in theory extends to include any other kind of **jewelry box**.

Wraps, shawls and snug-gly blankets that can be worn as clothing are also eternally popular.

One gift list specifies a micro-fiber shawl called The COMFY! (\$45). Also stores such as TJ Maxx have many inexpensive blankets, wraps and throws to choose from.

A 14 year old and an 11 year old requested a **mermaid tail blanket**. There are many stores and online shops selling this product now; as with all things internet, it's always best to buy from a company you know. Originally, these tail blankets seemed to be mainly offered by unreliable offshore companies.

A gift list from a different 11 year old starts out with a request

for a gift card for the new **electronic game sensation, Roblox**.

Proving that gender stereotypes no longer apply, this same child wanted toys related to a **cheerleading toy** called LOL. Like the old Barbie dolls, the LOL line includes everything from inexpensive little accessories to a dreamy mini-mansion.

The father of our 4 year old concurs that the LOL products are very coveted, at all age ranges. Barbie remains popular as do the American Girl dolls.

Also on the list for his younger child: "Disney Doorables, which are cute miniature versions of Disney characters."

Back to our 11 year old: On the list is a craft item from Joann called Crystal Squeeze Nee Doh (streams of glitter fly around when you squeeze it), very affordable at \$3.99. Many children, even

if they don't realize it, will enjoy **craft projects**. You can find all different kinds at Michael's and Joann. If it's a child who enjoys spending time with you, add a gift certificate for a block of time to do a craft together. Sketch-books and colored pens or pencils seem eternally popular.

And never underestimate the joy that packs of stickers and sticker book will give any child — even older children, who like to decorate their Chromebooks for school.

One mom recommends the sophisticated offerings at online site **Redbubble**, "where they can get stickers from their favorite manga illustrators — and ones that support their **social causes**."

Many children want a pet to hug and love and not feed or care for. This is why **plushy cuddle**

toys exist and continue to be one of the most popular holiday gifts, even for older children.

Life is stressful for children. In addition to cuddle toys, they continue to love **fidget toys**; the newest iterations are bubble fidgets, which you can pop like packing material. They come in bright colors and many shapes. These are good for all ages.

The father of our 4 year old said his child "also likes stretching the elastic Nee Doh Noodlies."

Another 11 year old has requested the "Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook, apparently inspired by the Netflix show "Stranger Things."

Along with RPGs come accessories, such as the specialized multi-sided die. This child requested a gift card to the craft website Etsy, to buy artisan dice.

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Each of the grandkids started to build unusually shaped vehicles, buildings, space ships and much more.

Bringing Back the Purity and Magic of LEGOs

By Jeanette Weber

Electronic toys are once again the rage this holiday season. However I much prefer giving my grandchildren something that doesn't require batteries or frequent recharging.

Over the years I have gifted LEGO sets, because they help develop fine motor skills, dexterity, perseverance, and a sense of accomplishment. And our grandkids have loved them!

Preschoolers enjoyed building cars and houses with brightly colored pieces and then engaging in storytelling and fantasy play. As they grew older, they asked for sets from their favorite books and movies — Harry Potter's Hogwarts, space ships from Star Wars, and the ice castle from "Frozen."

While having fun working on the sets, they were developing spatial skills as they interpreted the drawings. They were using their creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Plus they were learning about construction and engineering, especially with the more complex sets.

As a grandparent, I've enjoyed sitting beside a grandchild and helping sort pieces, providing encouragement during challenging

steps, and helping solve a construction error. Then we always celebrated when the project was finished.

However: I discovered that after a few days the newly built item was often placed on a shelf to gather dust like a trophy.

One day when several grandchildren were visiting, I pulled out three old LEGO sets that had belonged to their parents in the 1970s and '80s. There were no big instruction books to follow. No specific designs to create. Instead there were boxes full of many different shapes, along with some windows, doors and big and little wheels. (Classic sets are still available in some stores and online). Each of the grandkids started to build unusually shaped vehicles, buildings, space ships and much more.

They had hours of fun being creative and using their imaginations — not following any instructions and designs in a book. One turned to me and said: "Look, Mimi, we're all being LEGO designers!"

Jeanette Weber lives in Salisbury, Conn., and is grandmother of six.



PHOTO BY JEANETTE WEBER

Writer Jeanette Weber's youngest granddaughter, Skylar, is delighted with her Harry Potter-themed LEGO set.

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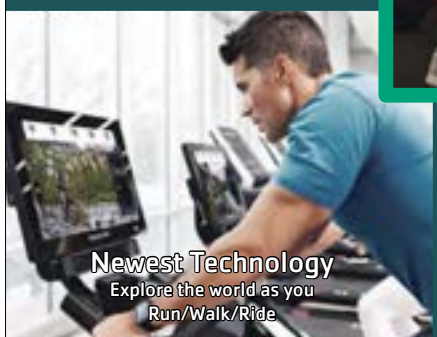


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Unwrapping an Original Gift Idea on The World Wide Web

By Kaitlin Lyle

When nothing stands out on the shelves of your local retailer and you're scrambling for a one-of-a-kind present, why not turn to the world wide web to unwrap an original gift idea?

Even very young people shop on these websites. Many young people are also interested in social justice and the gig economy, and the payment methods of these sites honor those impulses.

ETSY

I've never been disappointed by the range of potential gifts crafted by independent creators across the globe, found online at www.etsy.com.

It's enough that you're buying unique gifts directly from the artisans who create them; but Etsy also makes it easy to personalize gifts for special occasions and people. Etsy makes it easy for customers to connect with the makers; the makers respond in a timely and thoughtful manner.

One year I was able to create a personalized tea blend for my friend Emma. Advertised as "the perfect literary gift for tea lovers, book lovers and bibliophiles," the Etsy page invited customers to fill out a survey about themselves or the person for whom they were buying the

tea. The maker would then use the survey answers to craft a 20-cup loose leaf tea blend based on the individual's personality.

For an anniversary gift for my boyfriend, Thomas, I found and personalized a keychain. One half has my keys, the other half has Thomas' keys.

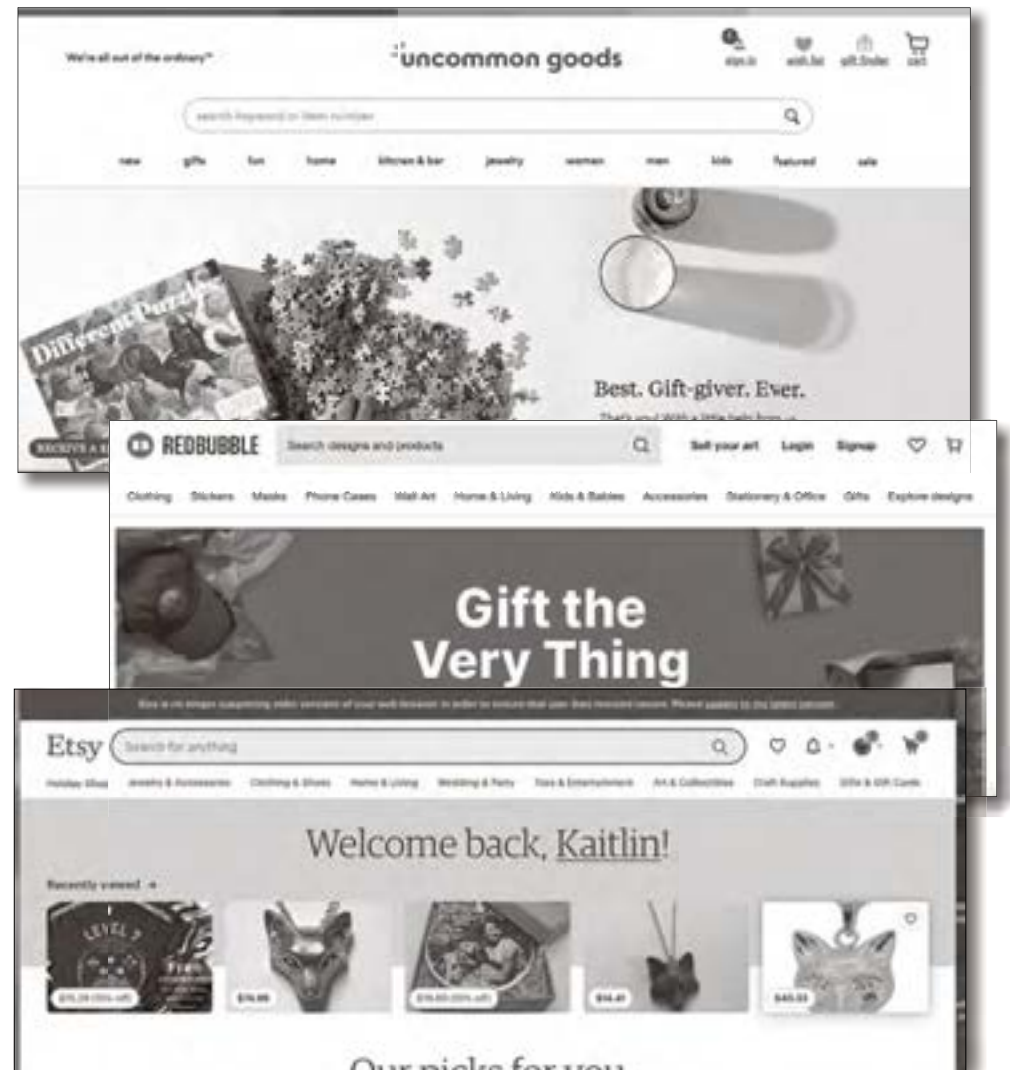
REDBUBBLE

Like Etsy, Redbubble promotes and sells original artwork and merchandise designed and created by independent artists around the world. According to the website, at www.redbubble.com, Redbubble sells "products featuring the thing you love made by an artist who loves it too."

At Redbubble you can find a multitude of one-of-a-kind designs featured on a multitude of merchandise and products: clothing, stickers, masks, phone cases, home and office supplies, accessories, stationery and more.

This is the place to go for "super-specific" gifts; somewhere someone is making a T-shirt that takes about a cause or an actor an animal that you love

Redbubble has been particularly helpful with shopping for the most challenging gift recipients in my



Searching for a meaningful anniversary gift online, Millerton News reporter Kaitlin Lyle found and personalized this key chain on the website www.etsy.com. The half of the keychain photographed here currently hangs alongside Lyle's car keys while the other half is with Lyle's boyfriend, Thomas Keane of Trumbull, Conn.

Continued on page 20



PHOTOS BY KAITLIN LYLE

Paying homage to legendary gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson, this T-shirt was purchased by Millerton News reporter Kaitlin Lyle from the website www.redbubble.com as a Christmas present for her brother, Hunter. Originally white, the T-shirt was later tie-dyed a variety of colors under Hunter's skillful hand.

... originals online

Continued from page 19

life. I got lucky a few years ago on Redbubble while searching for a Christmas gift for my brother, Hunter, who has been a longtime admirer of journalist Hunter S. Thompson. Typing "Hunter S. Thompson" into Redbubble, I found a white T-shirt featuring a silhouette of Thompson's face and the name "Hunter" printed below it.

UNCOMMON GOODS

"We're all out of the ordinary," claims Uncommon Goods on its website at www.uncommon-goods.com.

Browsing the website's catalogue of gifts, home goods, kitchen and bar equipment, jewelry and more, the products listed are far indeed from common.

Where other retail websites insist you be specific when search-

ing for a gift, Uncommon Goods lends a helping hand by allowing you to search by recipient, price, interest, category and occasion.

Customers still struggling with choosing the perfect gift can also try the website's gift finder to narrow down the search and receive gift suggestions.

Similar to Etsy and Redbubble, Uncommon Goods celebrates independent designers by showcasing the designers' work online.

The website donates money to causes that share its values; customers can choose a Better to Give partner at checkout and Uncommon Goods will give \$1 to that cause. The website offers "forever returns" and "Afterpay" for customers looking to buy now and pay later.

THE GIFT OF COLOR

Anyone who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s remembers tie-dye clothing. The dye of choice in those days was Rit, available at most supermarkets in a wide variety of colors. The technique was fairly simple and involved tying fabric into knots and then dunking the article of clothing into a pot of dye. Today, instead of buying multiple bottles of Rit, you can now buy kits with several colors. Lyle buys kits off the shelf at chain stores such as CVS and has had good results with them all. If you're unhappy with the result, Rit now sells Color Remover, which can return your garment to its original color. It can also restore the original color to a garment you've stained by mistake.

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For Stocking Stuffers, Why Not Buy Holiday Socks?

By Leila Hawken

They are widely available. Most merchants have them or are expecting them to be delivered soon. You can easily find them locally or online. However, most people do not admit to owning any or even to ever having owned any in the past. At last, a gift idea for someone who seems to have everything, except they don't seem to have: Holiday Socks.

Dollar Stores in their various iterations are sure to stock them. Chain drug stores will have a rack. Upscale trendy lifestyle merchants also hope to meet the need. Quality varies and so do prices.

I've been at gatherings where someone wearing whimsical theme-based socks invariably is expecting that people will comment on them. My accommodating comment is, "Oh, wow, look at those." That usually sparks other guests to nod in agreement and move on to the refreshment table.

Fashionista infants and toddlers often don them and enjoy the attention they bring. As infants eschew shoes, usually, these cute holiday booties and anklets do make practical fashion sense.

Larger sizes are expected to be a source of great delight to adults when given and received as a gift. What boss would not chortle with joy upon receiving a pair of Santa socks from his or her (or their) staff? Maybe that long-awaited raise will

follow. Or a grumpy relative might soften upon unwrapping a surprise pair of whimsical socks.

A few stores may not carry them, though. Tractor Supply has no plans to sell them, but an accommodating clerk did lead me to the display of practical work socks, offering winter warmth for those outdoor chores. One style had sort of a snowflake design.

While we were on the subject of holiday socks that they don't carry, I asked the clerk whether he owned any holiday socks at home, and he said, oddly, that he did. Actually, he said that he has more than one pair. He explained that they date back to when he worked at a local bank where they promoted the holiday spirit. In fact, he said, he actually owns a whole holiday suit from those years. I was encouraged.

Buoyed by my success at Tractor Supply, I went on to poll the cross-section who attended the koi fish party at the home of a notable author in Amenia, N.Y.

Among the attendees were candidates for political office actively meeting and greeting in advance of the Nov. 2 election. A full half of those professed to own one or more pairs of holiday socks. My research had found fertile ground.

Non-office-seekers at the event who admitted having pairs numbered about 10%. One guest who owned some



PHOTO BY CYNTHIA HOCHSWENDER

Once you've filled your closet with sweaters decorated with Santa and reindeers, the next frontier is socks.

said that in Sweden (where knitting is a popular past-time), hand-knit holiday socks may offer a double or triple thickness on the soles, sometimes featuring those popular non-slip floor grippers.

Online shoppers will have no trouble finding an array of styles and price ranges. Just a few (and there are many more sources) are Talbot's, offering a good selection at around \$14, in tastefully appealing designs. Macy's joins the fun with name brands available for around \$20. They even offer Kwanzaa socks for \$12. For tropical cruises, Macy's has summer-weight holiday socks for the same price. Or, how about a champagne bottle design for

New Year's Eve?

Even Miles-Kimball joins the online fun, offering holiday socks for your special pooch. In that case, rather than coming in pairs, they come in two sets of four: one set in red and the other in green with those non-slip grip soles.

Success in finding handknit socks locally can be had at craft fairs, particularly the holiday-themed events that are scheduled throughout the season. If your local fire department or other nonprofit organization offers a holiday craft fair, be sure to attend. It is likely to help with your holiday sock search and it will certainly give an important and helpful boost to your friends and neighbors.

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Tips on Buying Artwork — as a Gift or for Yourself

By Sari Goodfriend

In 2020, when so many folks did the right thing and stayed home, hidden creative urges bubbled to the surface and many people’s inner artist finally blossomed.

This, combined with the overwhelming need for charities to raise the funds they had lost due to the world’s sudden economic woes, caused a proliferation of online fundraisers to buy art for a cause. While this saved many organizations, artists didn’t necessarily profit because most, if not all of the income from the sales was donated to the nonprofit.

This year for the holidays, how about going straight to the source? So many artists have what amounts to a warehouse of output from their years of creativity.

Never hesitate to ask an artist what they might have squirreled away, when buying holiday gifts.

If you’re on a tight budget, believe me, artists understand. Just specify your desired price range.

If you’ve admired a specific artist from the Tristate Region but don’t know them personally, try this directory that was

put together by the Northwest Connecticut Arts Council: www.artsnwct.org/shops.

WORKING WITH A DEALER

If you’re looking to purchase something by an artist who may no longer be living, an art dealer can be helpful.

Many people are intimidated when buying art and it doesn’t need to be that way. I know this firsthand: My parents have been Old Master print dealers for 52 years and have helped countless people purchase their first “real” piece. (Shameless plug: Much of their in-

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When you approach a dealer, know their specialty. Sounds basic, but don't go to a print dealer and ask about paintings, for example.

Once you've found the right gallery or dealer, the fun begins. Maybe you're in the market for landscapes? If so, do you prefer oil paintings, watercolors, etchings, woodcuts, photographs?

If you're not sure, just think when you look at a piece: Do I like it? Do you think the person you're buying it for will like it? Will it fit with their style? Will it hold meaning for them or perhaps a shared meaning between you?

All of these are considerations both when collecting and when buying art as a gift.

Price of course is also a factor — but try to avoid buying art “as an investment.” Remember, art is meant to evoke emotion. If you enjoy looking at an image or you think your friend or family member will enjoy it, honestly, that's the best possible return on your investment.

WHERE TO GO IN OUR AREA

A good place to start that many people don't think of is your town's public library. Most of the libraries in this area have rotating exhibits on their walls by local artists and the work is almost always for sale. Here, both the artist and the library benefit.



PHOTO BY SARI GOODFRIEND

Author Sari Goodfriend learned tricks of the trade for buying art from her father, James Goodfriend, in the photo above, a professional art dealer.

Many towns in the region also have at least one gallery; there's no reason why you can't cross town or state borders to get to Salisbury, Kent, Sharon, Falls Village, Cornwall and Torrington, Conn., Millerton and Hudson, N.Y., and Great Barrington, Mass.

The nonprofit Five Points Gallery in Torrington says it is “dedicated to the belief that contemporary art is a vital component of human understanding.” If you look at it that way: When you give art to someone, you're giving a gift that connects you and a person you care about. What could be better than that?

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The Useful and the Sublime for Home Design

By Patrick L. Sullivan

This reporter readily admits his idea of home furnishings is “Dorm Room ca. 1982.”

Nonetheless, when the unusual and interesting is presented, even the most hidebound and reactionary (meaning this reporter) can’t help but take notice — especially when thinking about what to get Mom for Christmas.

Carolyn Piccirelli at Honeychurch Home in Salisbury, Conn., has some nifty stuff that won’t break the bank. A largish ceramic jar, suitable for flowers or utensils, designed by Piccirelli and made in Tuscany, comes in blue, green and ivory and is \$59.

Also designed by Piccirelli and made in Tuscany are smaller bud vases, in seven colors, at \$19.

And to shed a little discreet light there are mercury glass candles in six colors, with a fir tree scent, at \$29.

At Passports in Salisbury, Christopher Baetz pointed the visitor first at festive felted ornaments from Nepal, depicting not just dogs and cats, but unicorns and sloths. These cost



PHOTOS BY PATRICK L. SULLIVAN

between \$12 and \$15.

To replace the tangle of wires and power strips deployed to charge the various devices, there are wireless charging pads made of crystals in five colors. Baetz said a similar model, made of marble and perfectly round, are expected shortly. He explained how they work, and I still don’t get it, but am willing to try at \$55.

And on the more exotic side of things, Passports has a large collection of Cambodian betel boxes, truly unusual items that are not particularly easy to get.



(A buyer must take a course and be certified by the Cambodian government.) These range in price from \$55 to \$250.

Find out more at www.honeychurchhome.com and www.passportsct.com.

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Thanks to our Community's generosity and the dedication of our team, we were able to remain fully functional through the COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue our work, with your kind and greatly appreciated respect and support.

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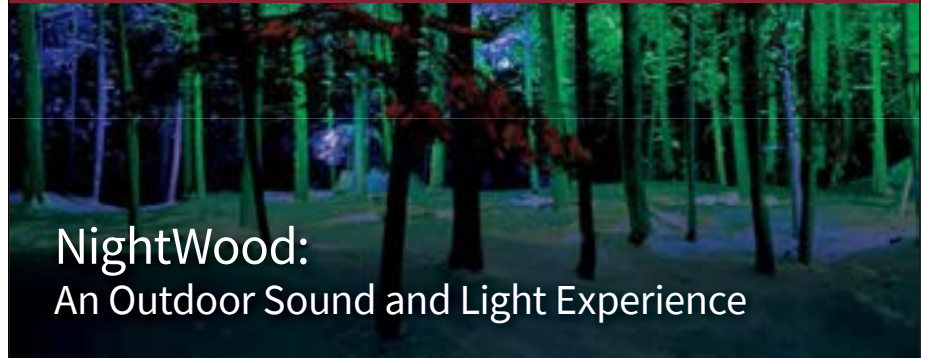


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