



Holiday Gift Guide



From wine experiences to pottery to fun toys, shop local this season

INSIDE

Give experiences: Wine Country offers fun tastings, unique presents **S4**

Must-have toys: Classic toys with a tech-savvy twist are popular **S6**

Enjoy travel: As travel picks up, these gifts will make adventures easier **S8**



FAUNAMADE



LISA FLEMING CERAMICS

Clockwise from left: Real Food Dressings are gluten-free, soy-free, nut-free, dairy-free and garlic-free; the Faunamade Basket Bed is perfect for cats and dogs weighing 15-20 pounds; Lisa Fleming Ceramics created this Black and White Spiral Vessel, which is glazed in crystalline white matte and accented by manganese.

Support local businesses to discover unique gifts, avoid shipping delays

By Carey Sweet

It sure seems like the holidays came quickly this year with so many of us feeling extra-busy as we navigate the global changes that just keep on coming. Something as simple as shopping for gifts can seem daunting in this time of supply chain disruption — shelves often are more bare than in previous years.

Thankfully, the Bay Area is its own supply source, home to many important large companies plus plenty of boutique businesses making unique products. Holidays are a particularly good time to salute our smaller, independent producers, who work especially hard to succeed. In the ever-growing world of Amazon, it feels especially nice to give back and purchase directly from these Bay Area artists and entrepreneurs.

Thanks to burgeoning online retailing, it's just as easy to support independent companies these days, too. Browse, click and before you know it, your gift is on its way, conveniently shipped directly to the recipient.

Plan your holiday presents around these great finds from all across the San Francisco Bay area:

San Francisco

Lisa Fleming Ceramics

Artist Lisa Fleming specializes in one-of-a-kind porcelain forms, notable for their sleek elegance. Created on a pottery wheel in her San Francisco studio, trimmed, refined, bisque-fired to 1,900 degrees, sanded, glazed, then fired again to 2,300 degrees, each piece is unique, dashed with color or in sophisticated monotone. Her Black and White Spiral Vessel (\$170) is petite (4 inches wide and 5 inches tall) but so dramatic, glazed in crystalline white matte and accented by a rim of manganese that has melted and dripped while firing. Against this layering of satin and matte, the glaze shimmers with small speckles and hints of blue and green. Buy at www.lisaflemingceramics.com.

Cut Loose

This casual but classy clothing is sewn and dyed to order in San Francisco, then snatched up by top boutiques across the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. But you can get the goods straight from the source and even customize styles and colors from seasonal palettes — what a great, personal gift. Shop at the Cut Loose Factory Store for after-season styles at great prices and browse samples of current-season styles. Then check out the seasonal fabric swatches, choose your favorites and the nearby factory will dye your garments and ship them directly within 2-3 weeks. The look is lovely, as clothes skim the body for a fluid silhouette, made for layering in cottons, linens, jersey and other soft materials. Buy at 1218 Valencia St., San Francisco, 415-282-0695, www.cutloose.com/sf-factory-outlet.



MONOPOLY NAPA VALLEY

Above: Monopoly Napa Valley features wineries and destinations like Silverado Resort and Oxbow Public Market. Below: Shuei-Do Manju Shop creates traditional Japanese manju, which is sweet rice mochi.

Alameda County

Oakland

Wooden Table Baking Co.

Owner and head baker Andreas Ozzuna grew up baking alfajores with her grandmother in Buenos Aires, and she brings the authentic recipes to her café in Uptown Oakland, crafting the shortbread cookies stuffed with dulce de leche from scratch daily. Treat friends and family to a sampler box of 16 cookies (\$29), in a mouthwatering mix of the traditional Argentine flavors of dulce de leche rolled in grated coconut, chocolate and meringue, plus an Americana Snickerdoodle for fun. Buy at the café, 2300 Broadway, Oakland, 510-879-6105 or online at www.woodentablebaking.com.

Emeryville

Faunamade

Former Remodelista interior design website editor Meredith Swinehart believes that pets appreciate good-looking stuff, too, so she created the Basket Bed for cats and small dogs (\$129). Made of a Fair Trade Certified jute basket, a U.S.-made custom alternative-down cushion and designer fabric covers cut and sewn in Oakland, the bed is soft, supportive and cozy. Plus, its machine-washable cushion covers come in a variety of classic and limited-edition fabrics that can be swapped in



SHUEI-DO MANJU SHOP

and out to update the look of the bed while complementing a home's décor (or even a pet's color). The Gray Flannel cover is 100% cotton, neutral-stylish for virtually any home palette, and at 18 inches in diameter, it is the perfect size for cats and dogs up to 15-20 pounds (it makes pets feel "secure and tucked in," Swinehart said. Buy at www.faunamade.com.

Santa Clara County

Los Altos Hills

Blue Plate

Artist Maija Lähdesmäki loves working in her studio with ceramics, food and photography. All come together in her Instagram-

worthy creations like plates, bowls, teacups, tapas saucers, sorbet ramekins, sake cups and much more (want a specialty ramen bowl? She makes that, too). This is functional, everyday art to make a table and favorite recipes even more beautiful. She never creates replicas, she said, because the kiln and glazes work a little bit differently every time, adding a sense of uniqueness to each piece. Buy at Purplemaroon, 4089 24th St., San Francisco, or online at www.onblueplate.com.

San Jose

Shuei-Do Manju Shop

Shuei-Do Manju Shop is Santa Clara's only traditional Japanese confectionery, specializing in

manju (sweet rice mochi) filled with azuki (red) or lima (white) bean. The pillowy confections are baked fresh daily and everything is made by hand, the old fashioned way. The sweet treats come in a multitude of flavors with colorful sampler collections glittering like jewelry. Select favorites like Raspberry-Coconut, Butter Mochi-Peanut Butter-Chichi Dango (fruit), Habutai-Yomogi-Green Tea and Monaka (water cookie with whole azuki bean). Buy at 217 Jackson St., San Jose — walk-ins are welcome or to pre-order, email shueidomanju@gmail.com or call 408-294-4148. Shipping is not available, but you can easily ship boxes yourself. For more information, go to www.facebook.com/shueidomanju.

Contra Costa County

Concord

Earth Tu Face

Do you know vetiver? It's a fragrant grass containing compounds that counteract the aging of the skin, plus blooms with a rich, grounding scent that reduces anxiety and depression. You can get it in the convenience of a carry-around Skin Stick in a 100% compostable tube (\$38 for .7oz), enhanced with geranium that's said to be beneficial for anxiety, depression, infection and pain management. Rub it on your face, lips and body. The ingredients come from an organic California garden, then are crafted by hand in the Earth Tu Face apothecary in Concord. Do the potions work? Founder Sarah Buscho's products are reportedly beloved by stars such as Alicia Silverstone, model Karlie Kloss and former Victoria's Secret Angel Lindsay Ellingson. Buy at www.earthtuface.com.

Marin County

Corte Madera

Farmhouse Lab

Daniela Kratz' Real Food Dressings are known for what they don't have: they're gluten-free, soy-free, nut-free, dairy-free and garlic-free (plus absolutely no emulsifiers, preservatives, artificial flavors or refined sugars). The certified organic, 100% vegan condiments are blends of premium oils with artisanal ingredients to enhance salads, grain bowls, seafood, meats and virtu-

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

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Cover photos: Clockwise from top: Jordan Vineyard & Winery hosts a Holiday Tour & Tasting with a 90-minute experience that includes a walking tour through the barrel room (Credit: Jordan Vineyard & Winery); Merry Meritage, the holiday village of Meritage Resort & Spa, features an ice rink that is open through Jan. 8 (Credit: Meritage Resort & Spa); Jordan Vineyard & Winery offers a Signature Trio Collection gift box featuring the 2018 Jordan Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, 2020 Jordan Russian River Valley Chardonnay and 2021 Jordan Estate Extra Virgin Olive Oil (Credit: Jordan Vineyard & Winery); Merry Meritage will feature a tree lighting at 4 p.m. Nov. 25 (Credit: Meritage Resort & Spa); the Rubik's Cube is a popular holiday gift for children and teens (Credit: Spin Master).



MAIJA LÄHDESMÄKI

Above left: Blue Plate artist Maija Lähdemäki creates plates, bowls, teacups and tapas saucers in Los Altos Hills. Above right: Sovi Wine Co. makes non-alcoholic wines, including a 2021 Chenin Blanc and a Reserve Red Blend. Below: Earth Tu Face is a Skin Stick of vetiver and geranium that comes in a 100% compostable tube.

ally anything you find delicious. For example, the Sunny Avocado Real Food Dressing features an apricot spread from family-owned Crofter's Organic and an unfiltered, raw, organic apple cider vinegar made in California by a historic apple cannery that has been turning out apple-sauce, juice, and vinegar for over 80 years. The other ingredients are, simply enough, avocado oil, olive oil, Vitamin C, citric acid and Celtic sea salt. Go for the Four Pack sampler gift, featuring all the company's flavors including the Sunny Avocado, plus Berry Olive, Green Pumpkin and Red Sunflower (\$62.99). Buy at www.farmhouselab.com.

San Mateo County

Half Moon Bay Spread the Love

Made with all organic ingredients, these delectable jams and jellies are handcrafted in small batches by third-generation farmer Marilyn Johnson. Many are distinct flavors, such as the bright, spicy cranberry habanero, pear ginger, delicate honeysuckle lemon and pumpkin pear, but you can also stock up on classics like blackberry or olallieberry (the

fruits are grown in Pescadero). Ingredients are all-natural — nothing but perfect fruit, organic cane sugar and pectin, plus vinegar and/or spices in certain recipes. Try the Gift Set of three jars of jam/jelly and flour sack dish towel that comes in a super cool, branded wooden box (\$45). Buy at www.spreadthelovejelly.com.

Solano County

Vallejo Oxgut Hose Co.

A designer tote made from genuine retired fire hose salvaged from fire departments — how cool is that? Each piece at the Mare Island business is handcrafted and one-of-a-kind (the name Oxgut honors the very first fire hose of Ancient Greece). Besides looking terrific, up-cycling keep the durable material out of landfills and helps give back to the community as a portion of sales proceeds support the Alisa Ann Ruch Burn Foundation, a California-based nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing burns and fires and providing services to those who have been affected by a burn injury. Grab the Weekender Tote



REENA & CHRIS / R.S. & CO.

(\$249), a stylish, hose-beige model with a real fire station stamp on it, black fire-hose grips on the handles, copper rivets and a roomy 15 inches wide at the top, 19 inches across the bottom and 10 inches tall. Buy at www.oxgut.com.

Napa County

Napa Monopoly Napa Valley

How fitting for this posh part of Wine Country — the classic Hasbro board game lets you "accumulate fortunes, but watch out for taxes, jail and bankruptcy." But really, it's all in good fun for this brand new version (\$44.99), as you move your top



SOVI WINE CO.

hat or race car token around to classy sites like Frank Family Vineyards or Beringer Vineyards, plus newer, hip spots like JaM Cellars, and destinations like Silverado Resort and Oxbow Public Market. Invest in hotels and houses and draw cards to enjoy a vineyard picnic or take part in a grape harvest. Buy at www.visitnapavalley.com/monopoly.

Sovi Wine Co.

Not everyone drinks wine. Some people love the taste, but not the alcohol. So it's husband-wife team Julia and Alex Littauer to the rescue. This new bottling brings non-alcoholic 2021 Chenin Blanc (\$34), and a multi-vintage Reserve Red Blend of Petite Sirah and Cabernet Sauvignon (\$38). After the wines were complete, the alcohol was removed, protecting the flavors without the need for any additives or sugars. Buy at www.drinksovi.com.

Paula Kornell Sparkling Wine

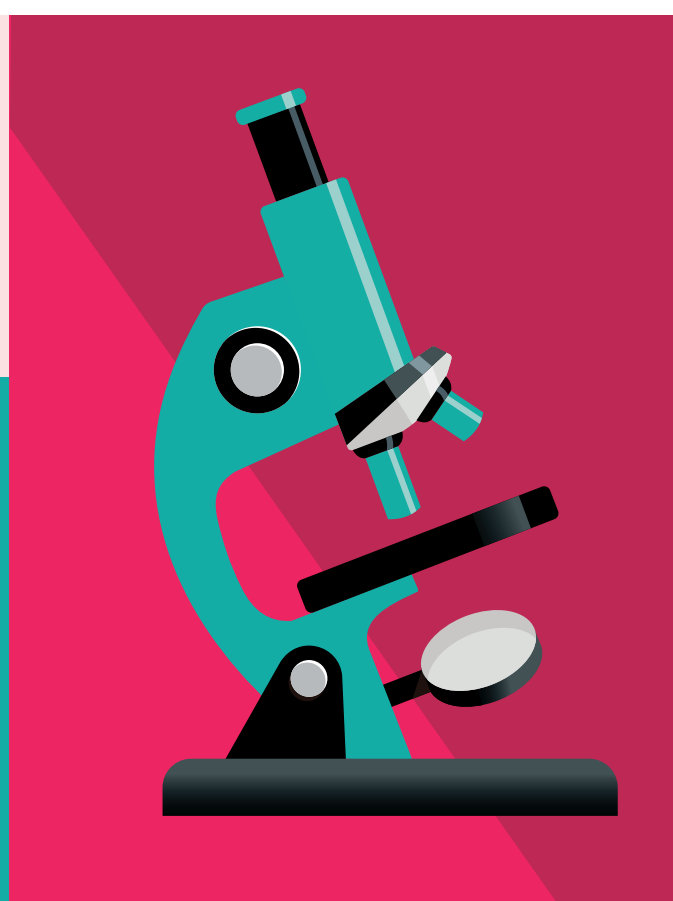
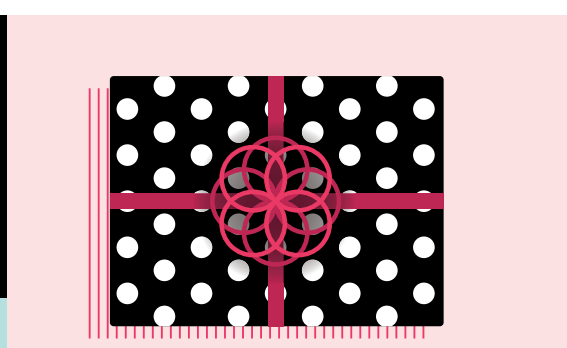
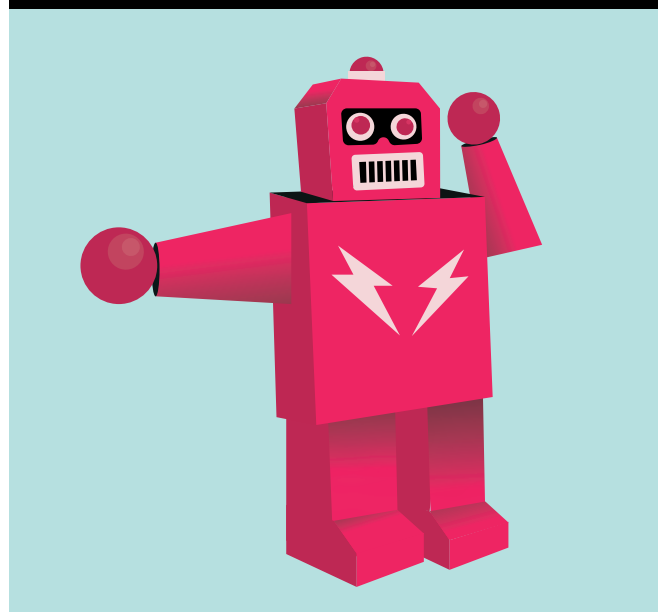
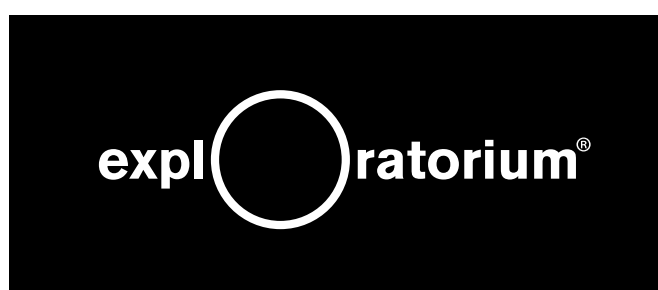
Kornell's brand debuted in 2017, in homage to her father, Hanns Kornell, who was among the first to employ Méthode Champenoise techniques in California. Now, she has just released her 2019 Napa Valley Blanc de Noirs (\$50), crafted with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay

grapes from the historic Mitsuko's Vineyard in Carneros. For a holiday gathering, she suggests serving the sparkling with Polanco Caviar of Uruguay, followed by juicy fried chicken catered by Five Dot Ranch and Chef Dave Cruz's Milestone Provisions at Oxbow Public Market. Buy at www.paulakornell.com.

Sonoma County

Healdsburg Copperfield's Books

Remember bookstores? Before the time of Kindle, e-books and podcasts? With thousands of new and classic titles in stock, this independently-owned bookstore has something for every reader of every age. Today, there are nine locations in Sonoma, Napa and Marin counties for this gem that was launched in 1981 in Sebastopol by Barney Brown and Paul Jaffe. And yes, you can browse and purchase online, too — or here's an idea, send a gift card so your recipients can get exactly what they want. Buy at 104 Matheson St., Healdsburg, 707-433-9270, or many other locations: www.copperfields-books.com.

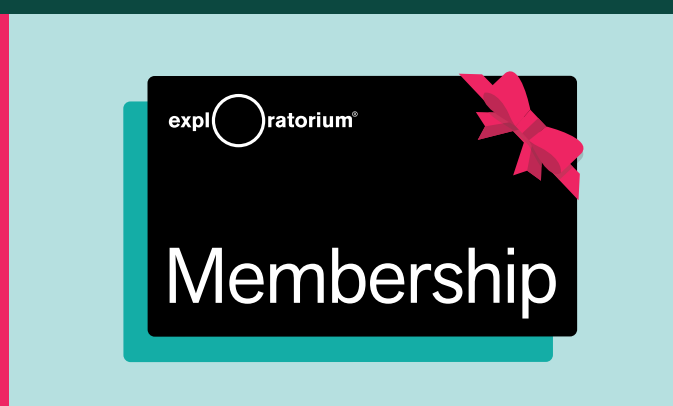


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SILVERADO RESORT & SPA

Napa's Silverado Resort & Spa will host a festive tree-lighting ceremony with free cookies and cocoa, live music and a visit from Santa Claus at 6 p.m. Nov. 25.

Wine Country offers holiday events, fun gifts, one-of-a-kind experiences

By Jeanne Cooper

The grapes may be off the vines, but winter holidays bring a new harvest to Northern California's Wine Country. Those looking for unique gifts and experiences will find plenty to glean in Napa and Sonoma valleys, where wineries and resorts are decked in seasonal apparel.

Here are some highlights:

Just for the holidays

Now's the time to snap up seats to two tastings available for a limited period in December. Jordan's Holiday Tour & Tasting (\$85 per person) is available only Dec. 1-16, 1 p.m. Thursday through Monday at the 1,200-acre winery in Healds-

burg. The 90-minute experience begins with a taste of Jordan bubbly and an hors d'oeuvre with caviar and a walking tour through the barrel room and past oak tanks. A seated tasting of Russian River Chardonnay and Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon takes place in the dining room with a lit fireplace, accompanied by more hors

d'oeuvres, artisan cheeses, homemade cookies and Tcho hot cocoa.

Jordan also sells sustainably packaged gift sets (\$34-\$225) with vintages selected by winemaker Maggie Kruse, estate-grown olive oil, spice rubs and wooden boxes made in Napa as options; see www.jordanwinery.com/shop for selections.

At PlumpJack Estate in Oakville, sip a retrospective of Reserve Cabernet Sauvignons from the last 10 years during the Reserve Library Tasting Experience (\$225 per person), held Dec. 8-13. A curated cheese plate and hand-crafted chocolates accompany the tastings of the winery's most sought-after wines. Or book one of the winery's regularly available tastings, both with vineyard views, as a gift for a later date: The 90-minute, seated PlumpJack Experi-

ence (\$100 per person), a guided tasting of a flight of flagship wines and a library wine, takes place on an oak-shaded hilltop, while the hourlong Current Release Tasting (\$60 per person) pours the latest vintages on the back patio.

Family fun

Merry Meritage, the holiday village of Meritage Resort & Spa, combines artisan markets, an ice rink (\$25 per person, open through Jan. 8) and daily snowfall at 6 p.m. beginning Nov. 25, when the resort's annual tree-lighting ceremony starts at 4 p.m. Held on the Lawn at Vista Collina, the ceremony includes a visit by Santa and live music by carolers and a band fronted by Chicago lead vocalist Jason Scheff; grownups can partake of optional wine and craft beer tastings. The tree-lighting

ceremony is free but tickets are required for the event; see www.exploretock.com/meritageresort.

Families may also want to book the resort's Tinsel Tea, offered at 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Dec. 10, 17 and 24 in the Vintner's Room. The price (\$50 for ages 4 to 13, \$75 for ages 14 and older) includes tea, juice, sparkling wine for adults, kid-friendly sandwiches, mini cookies and assorted sweet treats, plus a ticket for 90 minutes of ice skating and use of skates. Reservations are available on www.exploretock.com/meritageresort.

Italian fun and flair

Eleanor Coppola, wife of filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola, created the textile design used on the label of her namesake red wine, a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. A special gift set (\$160) features a numbered bottle of her wine with a lightweight wool scarf sporting a variation of that design; it's available at the Geyserville winery and through its website.

Also at the winery, a wine

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DONUM ESTATE

The Donum Estate recently revealed its Vertical Panorama Pavilion, which was designed by Berlin-based design firm Studio Other Spaces. It is nestled on a small hill with an beautiful panoramic view of the San Pablo Bay and the Estate vineyards.



MARC FIORITO / GAMMA NINE PHOTOGRAPHY



BOB MCCLLENAHAN



MERITAGE RESORT & SPA



Clockwise from top left: Jordan Vineyard & Winery sells custom spice blends, created to pair perfectly with Jordan wines, including the Lazy J Rub and the Chardonnay Lover's Rub; a Napa Valley vineyard is decorated in holiday lights; the Culinary Institute of America at Copia features a variety of gifts, including a French-made Laguiole knife in a wooden box or a large walnut cutting board crafted by a Napa woodworker; visitors enjoy the Merry Meritage, the holiday village of Meritage Resort & Spa.

Details

Jordan Vineyard & Winery: ADDRESS TK, Healdsburg, 707-431-5250, www.jordanwinery.com

PlumpJack Estate Winery: 620 Oakville Rd., Oakville, 707-690-1213, www.plumpjackwinery.com

Meritage Resort & Spa: 875 Bordeaux Way, Napa, 866-370-6272, www.meritageresort.com

Francis Ford Coppola Winery: 300 Via Archimedes, Geyserville, 707-857-1471, www.francisfordcoppolawinery.com

Silverado Resort & Spa: 1600 Atlas Peak Road, Napa, 844-421-6474, www.silveradoresort.com

Marketplace at the CIA at Copia: 500 First St., Napa, 707-967-2500. www.ciaatcopia.com/marketplace

Donum Estate: 24500 Ramal Road, Sonoma, 707-732-2200, www.thedonumestate.com

Vaughn Duffy: 8910 Sonoma Highway, Kenwood, 707-282-9156, www.vaughnduffywines.com

Hamilton Family Winery: 8860 Sonoma Highway, Kenwood, 707-408-3090.

Prohibition Spirits: 452 First St., Sonoma, 707-933-7507, www.prohibition-spirits.com

Pomme Cider Shop & Tap Room: 531 Broadway, Sonoma, 707-343-7155, www.pommecidershop.com

and bocce package (\$400 for up to eight guests) includes a customized fight of reserve wines, a private bocce court and instruction in the Italian sport. To make this experience a gift, e-mail guestservices@francisfordcoppolawinery.com.

Spa, sips and Santa

A 50-minute Chardonnay sugar scrub (\$250) incorporating shea butter and six natural oils makes a memorable hands-on experience at Napa's Silverado Resort & Spa. Wine lovers will also appreciate the resort's Best of the Valley Wine Tasting (\$79), led by a sommelier from noon to 2:30 p.m. Saturdays. Held on the Mansion Terrace, which overlooks the Silverado golf course and Atlas Peak, the tasting includes five glasses of wine and a charcuterie plate.

Among other holiday events, Silverado hosts a festive tree-lighting ceremony with free cookies and cocoa, live music and a visit from Santa Claus at 6 p.m. Nov. 25; bring an unwrapped toy for Toys for Tots. Breakfasts with Santa take place at the resort's Grill Dec. 3, 10, 17 and 24.

Culinary classes and gear

What pairs better with wine than food? The Marketplace at the Culinary Institute of America at Copia brims with beautiful gifts for home chefs and entertainers. For a cut above,

Not sure what to get? The CIA gift card, available online, can be used for experiences at the CIA at Copia and the Greystone campus in St. Helena, among others.

Artistry in Carneros

More than 50 large-scale sculptures and other works by international artists dot the 200-acre Donum Estate, which offers three reservation-only guided tours of the land and art that include private wine tastings and canapés prepared with ingredients grown on the estate. Book at least six to eight weeks in advance.

The 90-minute Discover Experience (\$125 per person) is available at 10 a.m., 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. daily, while the 2-hour Explore Experience (\$175 per person) holds the tasting in an open-air salon and is available Friday-Sunday. The new Transcend Experience (from \$500 per person), also available Friday-Sunday, starts with the estate tour and includes a meeting with the chef in the culinary garden before tastings of reserve and library wines paired with a seasonally driven, estate-sourced menu, served under the brilliantly hued glass canopy of the Vertical Panorama Pavilion.

Intimate tastings in Kenwood

Two well-regarded wineries started by couples in Sonoma Valley now provide relaxed settings for the gift of a wine tasting — perhaps for your significant oenophile.

Husband and wife Matt Duffy and Sara Vaughn began making wine in 2009. At the new tasting room for their Vaughn Duffy label, the

Seasonal Sampler (\$20 per person) involves tastes of four small-lot, North Coast bottlings, including Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel, while the Purely Pinot Tasting (\$30 per person) surveys four Sonoma County Pinot Noirs. Tastings are limited to groups of six or fewer people, with one fee waived with a two-bottle purchase.

At Hamilton Family Winery, owners Lindsay and Greg Hamilton pour their small-production, naturally

fermented wines in a garden shaded by olive trees. Tastings (\$45 per person, waived with \$100 purchase) include Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Rosé of Grenache and red blends, made with minimal intervention practices.

Holiday spirits

Grapes are not the only source of Wine Country libations, as two shops in Sonoma prove. Pick up a gift bottle of Limoncello di Sonoma (\$27), the unique

Figcello di Sonoma (\$27-\$47) made with black Mission Figs or another of some 50 small-batch products at Prohibition Spirits' tasting room on Sonoma Plaza. The family-owned craft distillery can also arrange after-hours events, offsite tastings and mixology classes.

Nearby, Pomme Cider Shop & Taproom sells more than 100 ciders from around the world, plus Champagne and natural wine; you can also try 18 ciders on tap.



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CRAYOLA



CANDYLAB

Clockwise from top left: A teen plays with a Rubik's Cube; Ricky Rain Frog is a soft stuffed animal; Lego has released many classic sets, including recently a Princess Peach set to add to the Super Mario collection; CandyLab wooden cars are durable and come in fun collections, like this Lone Cactus Motel combo; the Crayola Ultimate Light Board allows kids to use gel markers to write on the LED drawing tablet; for fans of Star Wars "The Mandalorian," the Wild Ridin' Grogu could be a perfect gift.

Old meets new in tech-inspired classic toys

By Peggy Spear

It seems as if technology is spinning faster than a dreidel these days. And parents, grandparents and well-meaning aunts and uncles will see that on the store shelves this holiday season. They shouldn't fear that youngsters can't handle it — for once the little ones will be showing the grown-ups how to assemble their holiday toys.

With all the blinking lights, special noises and coded train sets, however, there is a major theme: Many of these toys that are flying — some literally — off store shelves are just 2022 versions of toys that were popular 30, 40 and sometimes 50 years ago.

Both national and local retailers are predicting a holiday toy season that harkens to the past, but with a new century twist. Star Wars toys? Yes. Model trains? Yes. Legos and other building blocks? Of course. But with added digital delights.

"One of the more popular toys we're seeing are magnetic tile building block sets that can be set up for three-dimensional building," said Helen Dean, the owner/manager of Alameda's popular Toy Safari. "It really helps kids see things in a more mathematical way."

Timeless toys like Lionel and Brio train sets are now equipped with coding mechanisms so the young conductors can design their tracks, change how the trains go over bridges and through tunnels and maybe or maybe not arrive on time, she said. It seems those popular coding summer camps are paying off.

"It's basic computer coding," Dean said. "It's fascinating to watch these young kids, some as young as 3, code their own routes."

Not all is high-tech, however. She sees a leftover pandemic craze continuing, as kids — especially tweens — are still into fidgets, but the squishier kind.

"Those kinds of toys are great for stress relief," she said.

Beading remains a popular activity, mainly for girls.

"They still love those 'Best Friend' necklaces they can make together," Dean said, but again, with a more modern twist. "Kids



MOOSE TOYS

The Magic Mixies Magical Misting Cauldron allows kids to use a wand and spell book to mix up ingredients to create a furry pet.

will make jewelry and give it away ... I see a real sense of giving back this year, of thinking of others."

And board games — especially some old-school ones — are still popular, as the idea of family and friend game nights, which regained their popularity during the pandemic, seems to have stuck around.

And that old favorite, the Rubik's Cube, is still as beguiling as ever.

"Sometimes after someone has come in and tried our floor sample — and mostly finished it — I'll go over to complete it," Dean said. "I still feel so triumphant when I do finish it, just like I did many years ago."

She has heard of what she calls the "Retired Man Challenge," where kids will challenge their grandfathers — and grandmothers — on who can complete the cube faster.

"It's a great intergenerational toy," she said.

Tyler Smith, the manager of the new-and-consignment Toy Go Round on Albany's Solano Avenue, also said that the nostalgic factor is big.

"Pokémon cards are big again," he said, after seeing a spike in popularity in late 2020.

He also agrees with Dean that cooperative board games are

big. "Since we're a consignment store, kids will come in with their parents and asked if they played a certain game and be interested in that," he said.

Still, he doesn't see a "must have" toy that is flying off shelves, as in pre-pandemic years.

Another older, yet popular toy he is seeing resurface is Battle Beasts after kids see them on YouTube. The small action figure toys feature anthropomorphised animals with body armor and a weapon. And Lego's remain as popular as ever — even for adults to gift other adults.

And the Force is still with kids of all ages. He sees many Millennials and GenXers buying any Star Wars toy or Transformers bot they can get their hands on to give to friends.

And for their children, one of the more popular toys is an animatronic Grogu (a.k.a. The Child) from "The Mandalorian." Decked out in a fuzzy coat, it moves, giggles and makes its signature sounds, traveling in his "hover pram."

Smith said the puzzle craze that kept so many people engaged during the pandemic seems to have slowed down.

"People are puzzled out," he

Six hot toys to make the holidays happy

BlackFriday.com compiled a list from some of the major retail chains, including Macy's, Kohl's, Target, Walmart and the Meijer Toy Book 2022, to come up with its annual top toy list. Here are some of the highlights.

Magic Mixies Magical Misting Cauldron (\$64)

One of the hottest toys in 2021 is back with magical mixes to smoke from a cauldron.

Star Wars "The Mandalorian" Wild Ridin' Grogu (\$60)

"The Child," Grogu, from the "Star Wars" series "The Mandalorian" makes adorable sounds and looks even cuter riding around in his "hover pram."

Crayola Ultimate Light Board (\$29)

The old is new again — with a 2022 twist. This reusable LED drawing tablet uses gel markers to create glowing drawings.

National Geographic Break Open Geodes (\$30)

Yes, National Geographic is cool. Children can use this earth science kit to start their rock collection by allowing them to break open geodes to reveal natural crystals inside.

Kinetic Sand Swirl N' Surprise 2-pound Playset (\$20-\$25)

You don't have to be at the beach to have fun with sand. This set lets kids layer, squish, carve and slice non-toxic, hypoallergenic sand to create beautiful, custom and colorful art.

Squishmallows (\$20)

OK, so they became popular over TikTok, but these ultra-squishy characters are worth the hype with their unique personalities. They are available in a variety of sizes, shapes and characters and come with tags with their names on it. Sound familiar, Beanie Baby fans?

Visit www.blackfriday.com/news/top-toys-holidays for more information.

—Peggy Spear

said.

However, stuffed animals are always popular, and he sees customers walk out with bags full of them to give to kids — and adults.

Besides the spirit of giving being a little more elevated, sustainability and "green" toys are also popular. San Francisco's Tantrum on Clement Street is known for its unique international collections, as well as for toys that can stand up to an energetic toddler.

Amanda Weld, who with husband Richard are the owner and buyers for the store, says handmade baby food rattles, made in Denmark, are beautiful, useful for infants and come in fun designs like a fried egg or chocolate chip cookies.

For older girls, the French-made Minikane dolls are popular

and can do every kid's favorite thing: change accessories.

Middle school and younger kids love anything Nee Doh, a round squeeze toy that is colorful and again, eases stress. For teens who like to decorate — or just use stickers — Stay Home Club stickers are great for decorating water bottles and notebooks.

Tantrum's most popular item, however, is Jellycat Ricky Rain Frog, a tubby, squishy frog that all ages enjoy.

As for major trends, she says her customers are spending a bit more on higher-quality items, like CandyLab wooden cars or trucks.

With a combination of new technology and older flair, toys in 2022 are more fun than ever. But nothing beats a car or a doll for that special holiday treat.



SQUISHMALLOWS

Squishmallows are fun plush toys that each have their own unique name and storyline and come in a variety of sizes, from 3.5-inch clip-ons to an extra large 24-inch toys.



SONOS



KINDLE



THERABODY

Clockwise from left: Sonos Roam is compatible with wireless charging, boasts up to 10 hours of battery life and has a bass-heavy output perfect for outdoor settings; the Kindle Scribe is an e-reader with a new capacity for annotation or doodles with a magnetic pen; the Theragun Pro provides the same relaxing results as a soft-tissue massage.

Innovative gifts for the tech geek in your life

By Matt Villano

One of the benefits of living within mere miles of Silicon Valley: Everyone in the Bay Area has an appreciation of technology. This is good news during holiday season, as it means there's never a shortage of high-tech gadgets and gizmos to give to loved ones. Here's a rundown on eight of the gifts on our lists this year.

Sonos Roam (\$179)

The market is flooded with portable Bluetooth speakers but the new Roam, from Sonos, delivers exceptional sound and convenience for great value. It's compatible with wireless charging, boasts up to 10 hours of battery life and syncs with most mobile phones quickly and painlessly. The speaker's bass-heavy output makes it especially good for outdoor settings — if your loved one enjoys throwing pool parties or barbecuing, this is a great gift. The speaker is water and dust resistant; the manufacturer even claims the speaker can survive an accidental swim or two. Buy at www.sonos.com.

Kindle Scribe (\$340)

The latest iteration of Kindle from Amazon combines all the best features of the iconic e-reader with a new capacity for annotation or doodles from a magnetic pen. The screen of this new device is 10.2 inches across — slightly larger than Kindles of the past — and the Paperwhite display is easy on the eyes over time. The Scribe charges with a standard USB-C cord, and Amazon claims a single charge can last for up to months. It's worth noting that optional upgrades for the pen include a digital eraser and a shortcut button. Buy at www.amazon.com.

Hydrow Wave Rower (\$1,995 plus \$38 monthly subscription)

Think of the Hydrow like a Peloton, only for rowing. The newest product, the Wave, is slimmer and sleeker than the original rower, and it comes in colors such as red, yellow, blue and green. Whichever Hydrow you choose, the workout is exceptional: the company says a Hydrow workout engages 86 percent of the body's major muscle groups. If your budget allows, spring for the additional monthly subscription to access live and asynchronous classes and other fitness routines. Buy at www.hydrow.com.

Theragun Pro (\$499)

Who needs expensive mas-



HYDROW

Above: The Hydrow Wave Rower is a full-body workout and for \$38 a month, users can subscribe to access live and asynchronous classes and other fitness routines. Below: The Phillips S9000 Prestige beard trimmer relies on sensors to make trims even.



PHILLIPS

sage appointments when you've got the Theragun Pro? This device delivers the shock and awe of a massage by thumping your muscles at high speeds to provide the same relaxing results as a soft-tissue massage. (The company calls the tool a "percussive therapy device.") Runners in particular swear by the "gun," as it helps release lactic acid build-up after long training excursions. Perhaps your loved one will love it, too. Buy at www.therabody.com.

Equa Smart water bottle (\$69)

The vendor describes this

product as a Smart water bottle, and the description is apt, as it's a perfect gift for those loved ones who'd like to drink more but forget to do so. The bottle comes with a discrete LED rim that flashes at regular intervals as if to say, "Drink now, you camel!" Your loved one can connect their Equa bottle to a smartphone app that tracks water usage throughout the day. The bottle's stainless-steel exterior has pros and cons. On the plus side, it's durable; on the con side, it's heavy and makes a ruckus when you drop it on the airport floor. Buy at www.myequa.com.

Upright Go 2 (\$80)

This is the perfect gift for the slouchers in your life. The device, the latest product from Upright, is what the parent company calls a "wearable posture coach." Users don the tool like a necklace and built-in sensors determine whether posture needs correcting. When you wear it, the product vibrates and beeps every time you slump over in your chair, and it does so until you correct your posture enough for the device to stop (or you shut it off). The data then syncs up with an app that can help track performance over time and provide positive affirmations

when the data suggests you need a pick-me-up. Buy at www.uprightpose.com.

Ooni Koda (\$399)

Backyard get-togethers are practically right around the corner again, and the Koda pizza oven from Ooni is a great gift choice for a loved one who loves to entertain outside. The portable pizza oven hooks up directly to a gas source, which means it can go just about anywhere and get to cooking temperature in less than 20 minutes. At maximum temperature — about 950 degrees — even the most elaborate pizzas cook in 60 seconds or less. The oven comes with its own tripod stand and cover to protect it from the elements outside. Buy at www.ooni.com.

Phillips S9000 Prestige (\$85)

In an era where just about every gizmo and gadget is adaptive and "smart," this beard trimmer relies on sensors to make sure every trim is an even one. A built-in metal comb and strong cutter means hairs are snipped evenly every time, regardless of density or length. A special anti-friction coating guarantees the trimmer won't hurt your loved one's skin. The manufacturer promises the trimmer can handle everything from short stubble to a 6-millimeter dense beard in 0.2 millimeter installments. These specs are sure to make every hipster happy. Buy at www.usa.philips.com.



PEAK DESIGN

Above: The weatherproof Peak Design Travel Backpack 45L meets international carry-on size requirements and can double as a day pack. Below left: Cadence The Capsule are leakproof, magnetic containers to store products for travel. Below right: The Apple AirTag is a coin-sized tracking devices that can be added to your luggage.



CADENCE



APPLE

From gadgets to bags to clothes, enjoy gifts to make traveling easier

By Jill K. Robinson

Nobody said the return to travel would be smooth. Despite delays, cancellations, missing bags and rusty travel habits, many of us have gotten back to seeing the world — but there's nothing wrong with making the way just a little easier.

Whether your next adventure is down the road or many airplane connections away, this collection of gadgets, clothing, accessories, bags and wisdom gives you what you need to face the near future of travel. There may be a few lines, delays and rattled nerves between home and our destinations, but we can handle it.

Apple AirTag (\$29)

These coin-sized tracking devices can be attached to anything you might worry about losing (like your luggage, wallet or keys) and tracked on the Find My app on your iPhone, iPad or Mac. Despite the recent confusion from a Lufthansa announcement (and then retraction) about whether these trackers could be accepted, the Federal Aviation Administration has confirmed that "luggage tracking devices powered by lithium metal cells that have 0.3 grams or less of lithium can be used on checked baggage. Buy at www.apple.com.

Patagonia Women's Recycled Cashmere Cardigan (\$269)

Cashmere is a luxury that people often choose to forego, but when it's recycled cashmere, the indulgence is a little easier (and less expensive) to prioritize. European garment factory scraps are sorted and broken down, then spun into soft new yarn and knit with 5 percent virgin wool for strength. The result is a comfortable, versatile piece that you can wear on the plane, around town and out to dinner — saving room in your carry-on bag. Buy at www.patagonia.com.

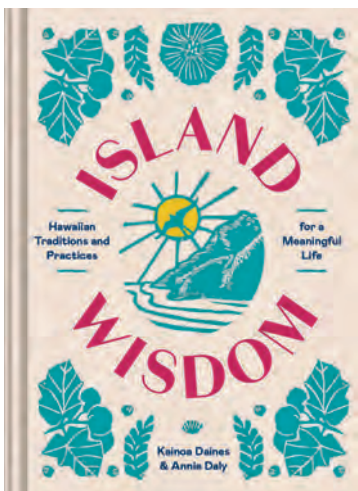
Twelve South AirFly Pro (\$55)

Perhaps you downloaded a bunch of streaming shows to your phone or tablet before the



AWAY

Above left: Away The Carry-On is a lightweight suitcase with an interior compression system. Above right: The Patagonia Women's Recycled Cashmere Cardigan is a comfortable, versatile piece. Below left: "Island Wisdom: Hawaiian Traditions and Practices for a Meaningful Life" by Annie Daly and Kainoa Daines is the perfect vacation read. Below right: The Twelve South AirFly Pro allows up to two people to connect their wireless headphones to any device.



CHRONICLE BOOKS

flight, but now you see some tempting entertainment on the plane that you can only access by headphone jack. If you'd rather ditch the airline headphones and use your own wireless headphones or earbuds, plug in with the AirFly Pro, which has enough battery life to last the entire flight. You can also connect two pair of headphones, so you can share that fun entertainment with a friend. Buy at www.twelvesouth.com.



TWELVE SOUTH

Peak Design Travel Backpack 45L (\$300)

This weatherproof backpack may as well be magic, because it meets international carry-on size requirements, collapsing to serve as a 35L daypack just as easily as it expands to be a 45L gear hauler. It's got top, side, front and gear access via weatherproof zippers, padded laptop and tablet sleeves, quick-access pockets and expandable side pockets for water bottles or a

tripod. Use it for a carry-on, a city bag and a trail pack all for the same trip. Buy at www.peakdesign.com.

Cadence The Capsule (\$14)

Instead of struggling with getting all your liquids in their original containers or occasionally a leaky travel container into the plastic bag small enough to make it through security — why not use a dedicated set of containers each time? Cadence

turns ocean plastic and reprocessed material into leakproof, magnetic containers that stick together and are customizable for travel or home use. The rounded interior makes it easier to scoop product with your fingers without leaving a lot behind. Buy at www.keepyourcadence.com.

OluKai Lae'ahi (\$100)

These stylish slip-on sneakers have a drop-in heel design that gives the shoes a slide functionality, which is useful when you need to put them on quickly after going through airport security. Made with canvas and breezy mesh, the sneakers breathe well, whether you're out pounding the pavement or scouting the trail. The anatomically contoured footbed, inspired by the feeling of bare feet in wet sand, is removable and washable and also makes the shoes comfortable to wear all day long. Buy at www.olukai.com.

Away The Carry-On (\$275)

Why check your bag and risk being separated from your clothing when you can pack smart and carry your bag with you? The anxiety of being separated from your luggage has made many people reconsider how (and what) they pack. This lightweight carry-on with 360-degree spinner wheels has an interior compression system with the space to pack from 3 to 5 days of clothing (and I've used one for trips up to 9 days, easily). The durable polycarbonate hard shell is plenty of protection is you decide to check it, anyway. Buy at www.awaytravel.com.

Island Wisdom by Annie Daly and Kainoa Daines (\$20)

With limited travel opportunities during the pandemic, many people took the time to see once-familiar destinations in a new light, and going forward, are paying more attention to sustainability and authentic local culture. Whether it's your first trip to the Hawaiian Islands or you've returned countless times, "Island Wisdom: Hawaiian Traditions and Practices for a Meaningful Life" gives a deeper understanding, appreciation, and respect for Hawai'i and its people through sharing traditional teachings and wisdom that have served the test of time. Buy at www.chroniclebooks.com.