



HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

So the holiday clock is ticking and you have no clue what to get that special someone. Fear not. We've scoured metro Detroit for the best presents of the season — and created a can't-miss wish list.

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GIFTS THAT WILL MAKE YOUR KIDS SMARTER

As you're scrambling to find the hot toys of the season, take a breath and consider these ideas. They're gifts that don't dance or sing, but could put your kid at the head of the class.

ROBO ROVER Pity the animal-loving child in an allergic household, cursed to a young life spent without the companionship of Fido or Cleo, glumly watching a single goldfish circle in the bowl. Innovation comes to the rescue with **Robopets**, a mechanical 9-inch-long pal that walks, jumps, sits, lies down, begs, rolls over, sniffs, crawls, runs, shakes hands and scratches — everything but stain the carpet, it seems. It learns from reinforcement, displays puppy-like moods and can even be set in "guard" mode, when it'll bark at anything invading its space. You don't need to walk it, and all it eats are batteries. Wallace, meet the improved Gromit, \$89.95 at The Sharper Image, the Somerset Collection, Troy (248-643-4747) and Twelve Oaks Mall, Novi (248-347-0080).



CLASSIC CASH REGISTER Are we born capitalists? Or is it just fun to push buttons? Who cares, when a kid can push the buttons on this cool, retro toy **cash register** from Battat, which includes such up-to-the-minute details as a scanning wand and a solar-powered calculator. The function keys on this classic cash register can be used for math games when your child is ready, but even if your child can't add yet they'll have fun playing store with this lime-green beauty. \$19.99 at Target in Brighton (810-229-0038), Dearborn (313-336-5000), Novi (248-374-1282), Madison Heights (248-585-9000), Southfield (248-423-4202) and Troy (248-614-9792).



ALIEN ADVENTURE Monopoly famously took its inspiration from the streets of Atlantic City, N.J., but **Cogno, the Alien Adventure Game**, is a bit more ambitious. As the box urges: "Outsmart other players in a race across the universe." But it's not just science fiction; the game's action is based on real science. Pick an identity as an alien (you can be an herbivore or carnivore, with different sets of skills), roll the dice and start your journey. Watch out for the black hole and, of course, the atmosphere you're not adapted to. \$29.95 at the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum (734-995-5439). You can also pick up a family membership to the museum for \$75.



DYNAMIC DESIGNS The age range on **Colora** is 4-to-adult, and that sounds about right. Anyone who can appreciate shapes, colors and patterns can have fun arranging these tactile, wooden tiles of highly polished bamboo on a black magnetic board. Children can use the magnetized tiles to make tangram puzzles or just cool geometric patterns which parents can display on the coffee table, because, despite being brain-building, it's also lovely to look at. \$19.99 at the Doll Hospital & Toy Soldier Shop in Berkley (248-543-3115), Village Toy Company in Grosse Pointe (313-882-1300) and White Rabbit Toys in Ann Arbor (734-665-1555).



FLASHY PHONICS If it's never too early to start reading to children, it probably holds that it's never too early for **alphabet flashcards**, either. Children today learn their ABCs along with their letter sounds, which lays the groundwork for phonics-based reading later. (The back of the cards details long and short vowel sounds for children already started down the reading road.) But we can't deny that part of what we like about this set is how beautiful it is — the clear, simple typography and artwork may inspire a young wannabe reader to be an up-and-coming artist. \$11.95 at Adventures in Toys in Birmingham (248-646-5550).

GIFTS THAT WILL MAKE YOUR KIDS SMARTER



CAR CREATION Even little Motor City residents get cars in their blood early. Maybe it comes from sitting curbside, in a stroller, at the Woodward Dream Cruise, or it could just be something in the water. Whatever the reason, we think if Junior's going to build a car, he could hardly do better than **Automoblox**, a snap-together system suitable for any budding automotive designer. Richly detailed, the parts come together with satisfying clacks and appeal equally to boys and girls. Shown here, the A9 Compact, with low-profile tires and, yes, its own VIN. \$34 at The Henry Ford in Dearborn (313-982-6145).



HOT POCKET This is the one all the cool kids want — the **PlayStation Portable**, the hand-held video game player but, oh, so much more. It's an entertainment system you can put in your jacket pocket, offering games, music, video, photos and even wireless Internet. If your thumbs get tired, you can kick back and watch *Ghostbusters* on the sharp LCD screen, already thoughtfully sized for movies' wider viewing aspect. In other words, this is a portable that kids will put under their pillow at night — if only to keep it away from Mom and Dad. About \$250 at Sony Style in the Somerset Collection (248-816-7078) and major electronics retailers.



FIELD FUN Relax. You don't have to commit to hours of Ken Burns' meandering marathon, nor a multi-volume history. In the age of bite-size learning, you can nibble your way through the Civil War with a **Fandex Family Field Guide**, which breaks down the cultural history of the great conflict into an easy-to-use set of die-cut cards, liberally illustrated. Bound at the bottom by a single brad, the set can be fanned for easy reference forward and back. Toss it in the car for your next family trip through the South or to Gettysburg, pass it around and make it fun. \$9.95 at Borders bookstores throughout the metro area.



GLOW GLOBE Don't be fooled by this seemingly plain-vanilla desktop globe. Sure, it'll show you where the Gobi Desert is and which countries the equator passes through. But it has a trick: At night, when the lights go out, the **Illuminated Universal Globe** lights up, showing the world's night skies and constellations. Drowsing in bed, your child can find the same light in the darkness as their ancient ancestors. And yes, you can turn the whole thing off. \$79.95 at Discovery Channel Stores at Briarwood in Ann Arbor (734-769-8403), Twelve Oaks in Novi (248-347-0851) and the Somerset Collection in Troy (248-643-0037).

GIFTS THAT WILL STUN YOUR WIFE

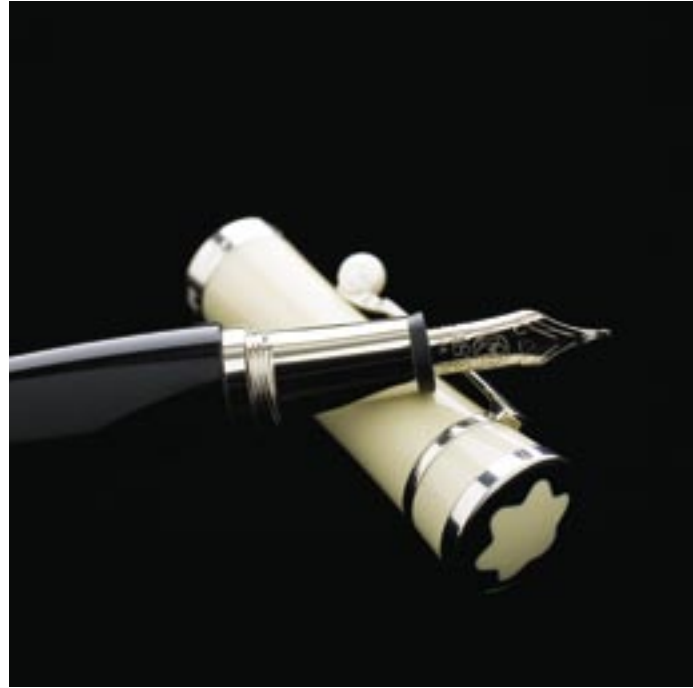
She may have dropped a hint or even given you a list. You'd be wise to do what she says ... but you'd also be a genius if you follow our advice.

FUR HER There's something so primal about fur, especially in the season when nature seems bent on our destruction. This could be our inner cave man talking, but wearing fur in winter is one way of saying, "Bring it on; we're ready." Of course, this mink purse isn't precisely a garment and keeps nothing warm but her money and a compact. Do we care? No, we don't, because she'll agree this limited-edition little **Coach mink hobo** is too cute for words (and her lipstick wants to be warm, too). In white or brown. \$998. Place your order at Coach. Briarwood, Ann Arbor (734-663-0777), Fairlane, Dearborn (313-441-1774), Twelve Oaks, Novi (248-348-7439), Lakeside, Sterling Heights (586-532-1838) and Somerset Collection, Troy (248-649-4877).





GOLDEN GIRL Elsa Peretti's fluid, sensual designs for Tiffany & Co. always look contemporary, but never seem to go out of fashion as styles change, which is one reason these bracelets are so appealing. From the **Wave collection**, five delicate strands of 18-karat white or yellow gold undulate around the feminine wrist like the hydrologic phenomenon they're named for. And if you're stumped for a follow-up, you're covered there, too — with matching earrings, ring and necklace. PS: You get countless extra points for any gift in a Tiffany blue box. The bracelet is \$1,200 at Tiffany & Co. in the Somerset Collection (248-637-2800).



WRITE STUFF At a time when it seems the most important skill one can bring to any written communication is the ability to type with thumbs and read the hieroglyphics of text messaging (R U going? W8 4 me!), this pen seems — well, “retro” doesn't approach it. But oh, how lovely retro can be when it's this, Montblanc's **Greta Garbo pen** for women, created in honor of the film legend. Crafted in black-and-cream resin, the cap's clip is topped with an Akoya pearl. When she nestles one of these beauties in her fingers, there'll be no LOL — more like SOL, swooning out loud. \$675 at Montblanc in the Somerset Collection (248-637-9885).



ICE, ICE BABY At the risk of sounding like a television commercial, this must be stated: For pure holiday “wow” factor, for gasp-and-scream present-opening, nothing does it like jewelry. And this sparkly little bijou is all about making the holidays memorable, for giver and recipient. This **18-inch lariat-style necklace**, in 18-karat white gold, suggests bubbles rising up from the holiday champagne, or just the glee of the lucky woman who wears it. Pavé-style diamonds alternate with those set inside polished circles, with a total weight of 1.86 carats. \$6,160 at Pat Scott Jewelers in Grosse Pointe Woods (877-439-4088).



LOVELY ACCENT Once upon a time, there was a girl who was very, very good — and stylish, and charming, and smart. She was the life of every party and always turned heads with her sharp fashion sense. But when it came to dressing for a night on the town, she was always vexed by two questions: “How can I enliven a black cocktail dress for the holidays? How can I add a touch of class to a cocktail suit?” Fortunately, Santa heard her cry and tucked this **Lanvin mink collar**, with silk velvet bow, into her stocking. Did we mention she was very, very good? \$1,260 at Tender in Birmingham (248-258-0212).

GIFTS THAT WILL STUN YOUR WIFE



SOFT STYLE Here's the cold truth the holidays hold at bay — after the new year, there are many, many more weeks of winter. In metro Detroit, this requires proper gloves, hats and coats. But the best way to show you care about the danger to her skin that lurks in January and February is, quite simply, cashmere — soft as a kiss and a lot longer-lasting. This **Magaschoni sage mock turtleneck**, with hunter-green trim at hem, cuffs and collar, will warm her quite nicely. It looks equally great in front of roaring fires in ski lodges and over hot, spicy lattes at the mall. \$249 at Saks Fifth Avenue in the Somerset Collection (248-643-9000).



TECH TREAT Do your shoes match your bag? Does your tie match your shirt? Does your laptop match your life? Until now, only users of a certain fruit-themed computer got to ask that question; everybody else got the Henry Ford option. No more. **Sony's Vaio FJ series laptops** debut for the holiday season in five colors, which ought to give your wife or daughter something to take the sting out of using a Windows-based PC. The Vaio ships with Intel Centrino Mobile Technology (on select models), Windows XP, DVD+R and a whopping 100GB hard drive. Starting at \$1,499 at Sony Style in the Somerset Collection (248-816-7078).



EYE MAC Everybody loves opening the giant, gaily wrapped box under the tree, but let's hear it for the stocking, too — the perfect place to hide faux croc **compacts from MAC**, the trendy cosmetics line for the fashion-forward. She'll see you in a whole new light if you spring for the compact on top (\$34), which includes eye shadows called "Tease 'n' Teal" and "Pearl of the Earth." (Note: Ask for the "Delights" collection.) Also pictured: Indulgence eye shadow, lip products and blush, \$42; and the Stash box of various shadows, blushes and brushes, \$37. Available at MAC stores in Fairlane and Somerset, and at Marshall Field's and Nordstrom.



LOVE NOTES One look at these **custom Corrina notes** made by Crane's and we long for those magical days of snail mail. Surely these cards — thick, creamy, classy — can help revive it. Arriving amid the junk mail, they demand attention. And then they reward it, with the hidden message: "I care enough to sit down and write." Get 50 cards engraved with her name or monogram starting at \$150 (with envelopes and liners) at Notations in Rochester (248-651-8700). Crane's products also available at Barbara's Paper Bag in Birmingham (248-642-3860), Lee's Specialty in Bloomfield Hills (248-646-6700) and Write Impressions in Royal Oak (248-541-8921).

GIFTS THAT WILL **SURPRISE YOUR HUSBAND**

You've already loaded him up with socks, shirts and sweaters. This year, don't go there. We've checked around. Trust us. He doesn't have everything.

BRIT HIT Over the last few years, Burberry has gone from an old-reliable maker of English raincoats to one of the hottest luxury brands in clothing; when you see hip-hop stars wearing the company's venerable plaid, you know a corner's been turned. This **Burberry tie**, however, is proof they haven't forgotten their roots — an Italian-made silk in a dignified check, this one in moss, with a wide selection of colors available. Equally at home on an NBA star as a corporate lawyer, and always in good taste. \$115 at Burberry in the Somerset Collection (248-643-8555).





DISC MAN If you're old enough to be shopping for bifocals, this turntable probably looks familiar. The **Numark PT01** looks a lot like what we used to call a record player. But this being the digital era, this device is for DJs who want to take the party on the road — and turn vinyl music into digital tunes. Battery-powered, with pitch control and a built-in speaker and carry handle, it plays albums at the beach, or you can use line-level outputs to burn them to a CD. And the price is low enough that, like the singer Beck, you can afford two. \$100 at Guitar Center in Canton (734-844-0600), Roseville (586-296-6161) and Southfield (248-354-8075).



GET HITCHED In the age of special effects so sophisticated you think you really do see dead people, why do the films of **Alfred Hitchcock** endure? Because Hitch dealt in the scarier world of the human psyche, which resists CGI. And, of course, there were those great, icy blondes — Kim Novak, Tippi Hedren, Grace Kelly. "The Masterpiece Collection" assembles 14 of the master's greatest films on DVD, with the usual extras. Whether your husband is laid up with a broken leg or a week of vacation between Christmas and New Year's, this should keep him happy a good long while. \$119.99 at Barnes & Noble.



BOY TOY Digital technology has made moviemaking easier than ever, so it only stands to reason the performance bar needs to rise. It's no longer enough to have a little slow-mo and credits in your productions, when anyone with a five-year-old computer can do the same thing. No, what we're thinking you need is this palm-size **Samsung camera** with one special option — a remote lens you can clip to your helmet or cap for hands-free point-of-view footage. You thought Scorsese was cool? Wait'll they get a load of your BungeeCam, SkiCam or HarleyCam. \$599.99 at Best Buy and Circuit City.



GOOD LOOK Men's grooming companies will go to any length to assure guys their products aren't girly. **Sharps**, for instance, calls its pomade Guck-in-a-Puck, its deodorant is "Pit Guard" and its foaming face scrub is "True Grit." And to underscore that good grooming is macho, Sharps offers a gift set in a canvas tool bag. Included are shave gel, shampoo, pomade, hydrating gel, deodorant and body wash. And you've gotta love a men's grooming company whose CEO is named Oliver Sweatman. \$28-\$79 at Poppy Beauty Bar in Royal Oak (248-545-7466), Lori Karbal in Birmingham (248-258-1959) and Peasant in Birmingham (248-203-6470).

GIFTS THAT WILL SURPRISE YOUR HUSBAND



PUFF DADDY Greater love hath no woman than one who will let her husband smoke a cigar in the house, but greater still might be the one who gives him a **Davidoff Aniversario No. 3 Tubo**. At 6.5 inches by 50 millimeters, it delivers roughly an hourlong experience of creamy, mild, smooth-smoking pleasure. Even its package is special: a tube lined with cedar, which enhances the flavor of its Dominican-blend tobacco, in a Connecticut Shade wrapper. \$20 at Smoky's Fine Cigars in Bloomfield Hills (248-593-9100), Livonia (734-513-2622) and Royal Oak (248-546-3093); and Churchill's in Birmingham (248-647-4555).



CHILL OUT We don't know about you, but when we get thirsty, we want to taste what we're drinking, not the package it came in. Which is why we like these **SIGG sports bottles**. In seamless aluminum, they're lined with an enamel coating guaranteed to be taste-neutral, odorless and impervious to being tainted by whatever you put in it. Which means you can carry anything from orange juice to cabernet sauvignon and not be reminded of it on your next trip. They come in three sizes, including a .3-liter for the littlest backpackers. \$15-\$26 at Moosejaw in Birmingham (248-203-7777), Grosse Pointe (313-881-9999) and Rochester (248-375-5800).



GREAT CALL For a piece of technology we use every day, we've never understood why phones aren't more attractive. We press them to our bodies — shouldn't they give us a little kiss? Fortunately, Bang & Olufsen believes everything should be beautiful. Right now we're swooning over the **B&O BeoCom 2**, a sleek, cordless curve of aluminum that nestles in the hand so naturally it seems made to be there, which, of course, it was. You can pair up to eight handsets (in five colors) with the base unit. \$1,050 for base, charger and handset; additional handsets \$850 at Bang & Olufsen in the Somerset Collection (248-816-9690).



MATING GAME Chess is one of the oldest games in the world, and yet someone's always trying to steal its dignity. Sets that look like a Spartans-Wolverines matchup, a Simpsons cast party — it's enough to make you take up backgammon. This **chess set**, however, has some gravitas to match all that history. A replica of a set used in a 1959 match featuring many of the greatest players in the world, it has an elegant simplicity. Made of boxwood, the felted pieces have a pleasing heft. Bobby Fischer played on a set just like this; maybe some magic will rub off. Set \$235, board \$110 at All the King's Men in Warren (586-558-4790).

GIFTS THAT WILL MAKE YOU A HOLIDAY HERO

Be honest. You have no idea what to get your in-laws, that co-worker, the friend, or your aunt or uncle. It's okay. We do.

LOOK BOOK Renowned local photographer Balthazar Korab has chronicled the art and architecture of Cranbrook Educational Community for more than 50 years. In **Genius Loci: Cranbrook**, he compiles 135 of his favorite black-and-white images in one handsome volume. Here is the Triton Pool, the Orpheus Fountain and other landmarks, captured in Korab's careful, architectural eye. "Genius loci" refers to the prevailing spirit of a place, and seldom has it been captured so beautifully. \$85 at The Store at Cranbrook Art Museum in Bloomfield Hills (248-645-3325).





PETAL POWER In winter, we need proof that spring is near. And Blossoms delivers it with a subscription to **monthly flower deliveries**, a reminder that somewhere in the world, something beautiful and fragrant is blooming. The florist offers the service in three-month, six-month and one-year terms, but they'll be as welcome in July as they are in January. \$150-\$600 (depending on subscription) at Blossoms in Birmingham (248-644-4411). Subscription services also offered by Jacobsen's in Waterford (248-681-5300), Leppek in Brighton (810-227-2566), Sparr's in Northville (800-375-7822) and Viviano's (800-848-4266).



SIP TRICK Let children contemplate the mystery of insulation (How does a thermal bottle *know* whether to keep the contents cold or warm?) while we take on the more satisfying question of how these **double-wall glasses** from Bodum Assam manage to look so good. The line of glassware is made of two layers of hand-blown high-quality glass. The dead air between the layers keeps your cappuccino or hot buttered rum the proper temperature while your hand stays cool on the outside. \$15-\$40 a pair, depending on size. Order through Design Within Reach in Birmingham (248-593-9640).



WARMING TREND With winter heating bills threatening to break records this season, you have the perfect excuse to buy this **cashmere throw**. It will look elegant on the back of your loved one's sofa or favorite easy chair ... Okay, let's be honest, it will look even better in *your* living room or on your bed, especially when you're enveloped in it. If there was ever a silver lining in the dark clouds of January and February, this is it — in butter-soft cashmere, as light as winter's skies are heavy. It's so warm and luxurious, you'll want to nudge the thermostat even lower. \$639 at A Touch of Lace in Bloomfield Hills (248-645-5223).



CRAFTY If knitting is the new yoga, is origami the new knitting? That's for others to decide, while we improve our skills with this amusing **origami** page-a-day desk calendar. The ancient art of Japanese paper-folding is a lot like yoga and knitting in at least one way — it can be simple or difficult and, like everything, gets easier the more you practice. At a page a day, that gives you 365 chances to start your day with a little piece of paper sculpture on your desk and end the year ready to construct your very own flock of paper cranes. \$19.95 at Village Toy Shoppe in Milford (248-684-8697), Borders and Barnes & Noble.

GIFTS THAT WILL MAKE YOU A HOLIDAY HERO



PICTURE THIS Maybe “World’s Greatest Grandma” on a picture frame does it for you (and her), but we’re betting you’re looking for something a little more personal this holiday season, something that doesn’t say, “I got this at a chain store 15 minutes before closing on Christmas Eve.” For personalization with style, we suggest these **Marye-Kelley Decoupage frames**. The Fuchsia Frog in Birmingham (248-203-6550) is the exclusive dealer in the metro area, offering 10 frames with messages (\$36-\$41). For a little more, you can custom-order frames with your choice of 74 papers and words your grandmother will love.



SEASONAL SCENTS Nothing suggests the holidays like candlelight, and nothing relieves the accumulated stress like a little aromatherapy. These new luscious lights from **Archipelago** combine both, and because they’re more than 50 percent soy wax, they burn cleaner and longer than other varieties. The scents are truly unusual and candle-loving recipients will appreciate the quality; the scent will do the giver good, too. \$22-\$30 at How Inviting in Grosse Pointe Farms (313-881-7400). Archipelago candles also sold at The Green Bee in Royal Oak (248-582-0616) and the Village Peddler in Milford (248-684-0666).



JAVA JUNKIES Regulars at metro Detroit’s coffeehouses have long suspected there’s an extra ingredient in those creamy lattes and foamy cappuccinos — something addictive. How else to explain how we all developed \$6-a-day Arabica habits? Okay, maybe it had something to do with our standards being raised, our palates educated, our tastes more demanding, but what it boils down to is: Must. Have. Coffee. And not just any coffee, which is why we’re grateful for home **espresso machines** like this one, from Nespresso, in high-gloss chrome. \$399 at Williams-Sonoma stores and US Appliance in Lake Orion (248-364-0700).



I-STYLE iPod users can be a little scary in their devotion to their ever-shrinking toys. The little armbands! The carriers! The add-on speaker systems! On the other hand, they’re carrying around their entire record collection, so maybe they’re entitled to be fussy. You may not have your first Walkman around in a little knit sock, but only because they weren’t available then. These brightly colored **iPod socks** come in colors to match your outfit, protect the player’s screen from scratches and stretch to fit everything from the tiny Nano to the larger models. \$29 at the Apple Store in the Somerset Collection (248-822-0081).