

STAR

2013 NUTCRACKER MARKET

Shopping extravaganza offers gifts for all

By Lindsey Love

The holiday hustle and bustle has already started. And if you care to avoid mad-dashing to the mall on Christmas Eve, then you only have 44 days before Santa's world tour begins.

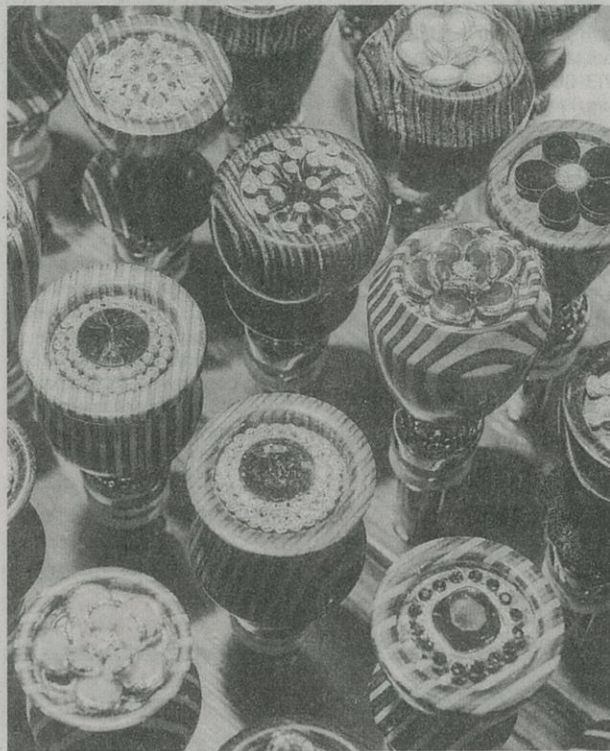
Procrastinators take note: The 2013 Nutcracker Market has made gift-giving an idiot-proof experience. Saturday and Sunday, Reliant Center can be your one-stop present shop. With more than 280 vendors, navigating the aisles and aisles of merchandise can seem daunting. Here are the must-haves and where to find them:

»For the impossible-to-please dapper Dan, San-Francisco's Chic by Design (No. 647) sells collectible pieces including original Pan Am cuff links, Argentinian horn wine carafes, Laguiole portable steak knives and inlaid-wood backgammon sets. Your beau will not be asking for a return receipt

after opening a goody from this specialty booth.

»For the international jet-setter, La Bella Italia (No. 1432) offers neoprene suitcase covers by Dandy Nomad in of-the-moment prints and patterns. These suitcase bras come in three sizes and, says retailer Ester Truchhi, the Nutcracker bazaar is their introduction into the United States. The must-have design for protecting a Rimowa roller during a jaunt to St. Barths is the gray houndstooth with the Eiffel Tower decal. Tres chic!

»For the single-digit set, Laugh Out Loud Expressions (No. 1509) has everything from Rockin' Robbie Christmas trees to Moos Like Jagger cows that will surely replace Barney the dinosaur lullabies. While Nutcracker Teddy spins the tale of "The Nutcracker," the gingerbread man dances along to "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." Start your laughing collection for only \$29.90.



Gary Fountain

Hand-made wine-bottle stoppers from the D-Patt booth at the Nutcracker Market would make good stocking stuffers.

»For the first ladies on your list, stop by Alicia Lee's Gingersnaps/The Center/Willow River

Farms (No. 1556) and sample Barbara Bush's Christmas gift of choice. Fifteen years ago, the for-

mer first lady encouraged Lee to ditch the fruitcake and bake gingersnaps. This do-gooder donates 100 percent of her sales to the Center, which serves people with developmental disabilities.

»For the wine drinker, D-Patt Wine Bottle Stoppers (No. 310) has scores of brightly colored, hand-turned gems that will help keep that half bottle of Malbec as delicious as it was when it was uncorked.

»For your eclectic friends, Viva Rouge (No. 1542) has creatively transformed knickknacks into usable magnets. Remember the ballerina figurine from your birthday cake when you were 8 years old? If only you had saved the topknotted porcelain trinket and transformed her into fridge art. No two magnets are alike. Prices start at \$5.

»For Candy Land fans, Thomas E. Kilgore & Associates (No. 636) decks your halls with pastel-hued ornaments

reminiscent of Frosty the Snowman. These non-breakable, homemade pieces would definitely be Snoopy's festive flare of choice for his abode, nor would he wind up in the doghouse for spending too much. These large-size, small-priced decorations start at \$7.95.

»For the "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" believers, Peran & Scannell Jewelers (No. 1437) offer baubles worth naming. A former prima ballerina for the Houston Ballet, Dawn Scannell traded in her tutus for carats. Scannell, along with her partner, Shelley Peran, handcraft award-winning designs with sticker-price shock, as the prices appear to be missing a digit.

»For the bargain shopper, Salt Water Taffy by Waxberry (No. 514) provides a sweet treat at an even sweeter price. Bonus: Salt water taffy does not contain gluten or nuts.

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