

How To Buy The Perfect Piece Of Jewelry

It's that time of year when thoughts turn to gift giving.

There isn't a woman out there who isn't thrilled with the thought of Santa's helper stuffing her stocking with glittering jewelry. But how do you know what to buy?

Look at the jewelry she's already wearing and follow these pointers to help choose the perfect jewelry present this holiday season.

- What kinds of metal does she prefer? Is she wearing silver,

yellow or white gold or platinum? Does she mix white and yellow metals? Try a piece in two-tone metals.

- What gemstones does she like? You can never go wrong with diamonds, but some women prefer colored gemstones.

If you know your recipient's favorite color, you can always buy a piece of jewelry that showcases a stone in that color.

- What's her personal style? If her style is contemporary and modern, then chances are she will prefer sleek designs with clean lines and geometric shapes.

If she has a more romantic style, she may prefer something with filigree or an antique look.

Maybe she's a trendsetter and

she likes the unexpected.

Perhaps a pearl or diamond dangling from a leather cord is just her style.

Note the size of her jewelry. Is it a big statement piece or is it small and dainty? This too, should help narrow your choices.

- What are her interests? Does she love anything with animals, hearts, flowers or the sea? A beautiful charm bracelet in silver or gold would be an ideal choice.

- Go window shopping with your unsuspecting recipient. Pay attention to the items she admires. Go back and purchase them.

- If there is a jewelry store that she frequents, ask a sales associate who knows her taste for some sug-

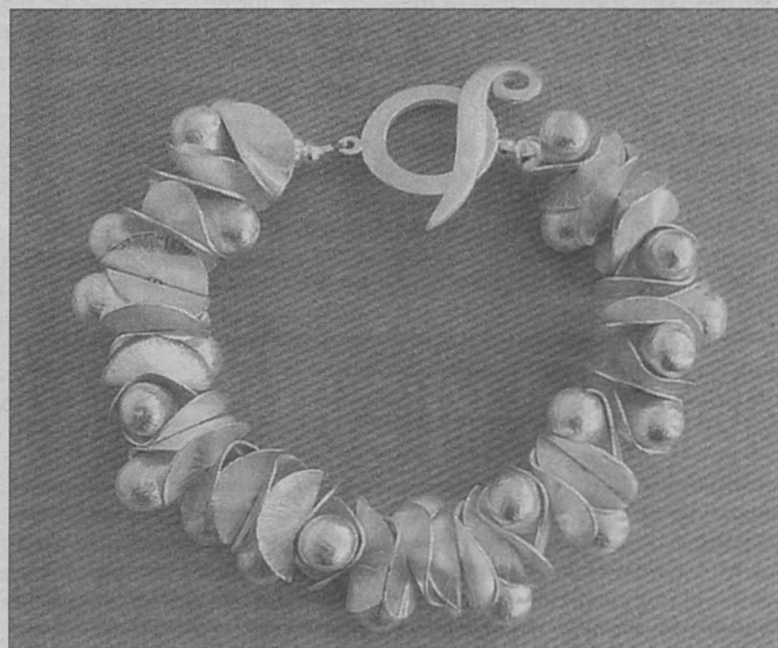
gestions or if he or she knows of an item that she's admired recently.

Whether you're after earrings, a necklace, bracelet, watch or brooch, be sure to visit a jewelry merchant that has a good reputation and has been in business for a while.

If you need to make a return or exchange a piece, or have the item repaired, you can be sure the store will be around.

There are several classic pieces that are ideal for every jewelry wardrobe, including diamond solitaire earrings, a diamond solitaire necklace or a diamond bracelet.

For those who love color, suggestions include gemstone bead necklaces or bracelets that come in a rainbow of luscious shades.



Creative Places To Hide Gifts

Come the holidays, your kids will become detectives -- gift detectives that is.

They'll search the house high and low for their holiday gifts, leaving no cabinet unopened and no closet untouched by their sticky fingers.

Here are a few hiding-spot ideas that hopefully will stop your resident snoopers in their tracks.

Just be sure not to get so clever and sneaky that you forget where you've hidden the gifts! Jot down the locations in your organizer or

clue in your spouse as a backup.

- * Place gifts in paper bags -- like those from the supermarket -- and hide them in the back of your closet or under your bed.

- * Hide gifts in the attic or basement. Cover them with blankets so they are out of sight.

- * Stash gifts in suitcases. Kids are so accustomed to seeing the luggage, they won't think to look there.

- * Place gifts on a high shelf in the back of your storage closet, out of eyesight.

- * Store gift under the kitchen sink or on the top shelf in the laundry room.

- * Place small gifts inside old purses, bags or briefcases. Hang them in a closet or spare bedroom that isn't used very often.

- * Stash presents in the china cabinets. Kids aren't allowed in there anyway so they'll never find their gifts.

- * If all else fails, store your gifts at work or stash them at a neighbor's home. Just be sure you get them home in time!

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The excitement of the holiday season begins the moment the Thanksgiving parade sails on by. With the appearance of old Saint Nick on the tail end of that caravan, kids and adults alike start preparing for the arrival of Christmas.

To help mark the days and commence the countdown, Christmas calendars are popular this time of year. Here's how you can put your own creative spin on the concept, plus incorporate the idea of hanging stockings into the design.

This fun craft is based on an idea presented by Family Fun magazine and utilizes stray socks, mittens or pieces of scrap holiday fabric you may have on hand.

Christmas Countdown Calendar - What You'll Need

- 25 brightly colored socks, mittens or pockets sewn from fabric (or a mix of all three)

- 25 wooden clothespins
- 6-foot length of string, yarn or garland

- Small trinkets to put inside socks or creative message cards (ideas below)

- Push pins, tape or small photograph nails to hold the calendar in place

- Marker

1. Using the marker, number each clothespin from 1 to 25.

2. String the 6-foot cord through the rings of the clothespins in numerical order.

3. Fill the socks/mittens/pockets with your treats.

4. Clip one item to each clothespin.

5. Hang the "calendar" to a mantel, wall or within reach of kids eager to discover the treats

inside.

Ideas for treats:

- small candy canes or candy bars

- coupons to get out of chores
- voucher for a car trip to see Christmas lights

- voucher for a Christmas movie night

- retail store gift cards
- a joke or puzzle per day
- gingerbread cookies

- an ornament to add to the tree

- voucher for making a donation to a charity

