

Present Tense

Looking for the perfect gift for your holiday host or hostess? Take a tip from some local luminaries. By MARYANN LoRUSSO

While it's considered a no-no to show up at a holiday fête empty-handed, it can be challenging to come up with something new and meaningful every year. For inspiration, we asked some of San Francisco's most influential style makers and consummate hosts to tell us what they like to bring to the season's soirees.

Interior designer extraordinaire **Ken Fulk** likes to present hosts with a taste of his travels. "I shop for a living, so I'm always

finding wonderful things that make the perfect hostess gift ... many of which are vintage and one of a kind," he says. "Recently, I purchased a beautiful set of ten champagne coupes from Paris, which I'll divide up into pairs and give with a split or bottle of champagne. I also love to find wonderful vintage

cocktail napkins. Another fave is an antique Limoges cup that I fill with specialty sugar cubes—great for neighbors who get a kick out of a cup of sugar."

As fundraiser **Mary Poland** knows, the most delightful gifts are sometimes the most unexpected. "One year, I purchased these adorable slippers in bulk," she says. "They came in pink and green and were so comfy, and on the bottom were dusters—so you could clean your hardwood floor as you walked around your house. I packaged them beautifully and gave them to women like **Suzanne Tucker,**

Joanne Horning and **Carol**

Dahl, and to women I knew from the Opera Guild. They laughed hysterically, because they probably had this vision that I was going to give them a scented candle or something from the sixth floor at Neiman Marcus."

Arts patron **Nancy Livingston** always tries to give something that is readily used. "We all have too many things," she explains, "so I try to find something either edible or consumable. I'm particularly enamored with these large, beautifully wrapped and fabulously scented soaps from Gump's.

They have elegant graphic packaging and look great in any bath or powder room. They're also perfect for regifting."

Sometimes, the best hostess gifts come straight from home—or one's vineyard. "Our family has a small crop of cabernet grapes up in the Rutherford area of Napa," says philanthropist **Suzanne Levit**. "We decided that instead of selling the grapes we'd make our own wine. People are always shocked when they get a bottle from us, because they usually don't know about our vineyards."

Civic activist **Mark Buell** also likes to give something homegrown and from the heart. "We live much of the time in Bolinas, so a good bottle from [local winemaker] **Sean Thackrey** goes a long way," he says. "We have olive trees, and our olive oil has won the blue ribbon at the Marin County Fair, so a small bottle of olive oil is another idea. We've also given flowers from our garden, or apples, or whatever else is in season. I also have a wood-fired oven and often bake bread for gifts."

Food is also a popular theme with philanthropist **OJ Shansby**. "My year-round, go-to hostess gift is Partida tequila. My husband, Gary, is the founder, and we like to share it with everyone and make sure they have a bottle featured in their bar," she says. "During

Christmas, I give Enstrom toffee from Colorado. It's truly addicting, and a very evil thing to ensure holiday weight gain. But every year, friends ask me when their box will arrive."

Lisa Grotts takes a different approach.

"With the amount of food and beverage consumed during the month of December, I tend to steer clear of edible hostess gifts," says the writer and etiquette expert.

"Finding a unique gift is the goal.

Some of my favorites: For the hostess, monogrammed linen tip towels. For the avid traveler, an Uber gift card. For the fashionista, a subscription to British or Italian *Vogue*. For the royalist, a subscription to *Majesty* magazine. For the party-circuit girl, a pillbox filled with ibuprofen for those aching feet! And for every host, anything from Gump's first floor, such as SF-themed stationery or coffee table books."

For interior designer **Jeffrey Weisman**, the holidays are a time to share one's passions. "Our current favorites are scented candles from our Casa Acanto shop in North Beach," he says. "They come in tin boxes with a marvelous antique feel, and the scents—inspired by our garden in Mexico—are heavenly."

Everyone knows Olympic figure skating champion **Brian Boitano's** passion, and thanks to his friend **Tai Babilonia**, he'll be able to share it this season. "Tai makes these really cute chocolates in the shape of ice skates (and butterflies, and crescent moons) that make great hostess and holiday gifts," he says. "I've been looking for a gift that's associated with skating, so I'll be giving these out this year."

A great hostess gift is one that's highly personal, according to **Elisa Stephens**, president of Academy of Art University. "Whether it's finding the person's favorite bottle of pinot noir or recalling that peonies are their favorite flowers, bringing something personalized shows that you appreciate both the host and the invitation," she says.

Retailer **Julie Young**, owner of RSVP on Sacramento Street, couldn't agree more. "I like to give monogrammed soaps, cups, wrapping paper or guest towels around the holidays," she explains. "For example, I'll put the recipient's monogram, ZIP code or street address on a personalized cup. People are usually very touched to receive a personalized gift."

Philanthropist and entrepreneur **Pam Baer** can't pass up the opportunity to honor the Giants this year. "Our gifts will be from my new company, For Goodness Sake [forgoodsake.org], but we're sticking with orange: bow ties for men, scarfs and throws for dear women friends." Twenty-five percent of the net proceeds

are donated to Bay Area philanthropies—definitely the hostess gift that keeps on giving. ■

Maryann LoRusso is a San Francisco-based freelance journalist who writes about fashion, culture and lifestyle. She also edits an online magazine for women at redtypewriter.com.



CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: Enstrom Milk Almond Toffee, \$20.95 per pound. For Goodness Sake Throw Blanket, \$270. Slipper Genie from Amazon.com, \$10.95. Dachshund Soap from Gumps.com, \$25. Boxed candle from Casa Acanto, \$65.