

'Do-it-yourself' yule

Handmade goods from local shops and designers are hit gifts this season

By Heidi Moore

Every year discriminating holiday shoppers face the same dilemma: where to find one-of-a-kind gifts that will wow the giftee. The answer can be found online at a number of DIY boutiques that offer stylish, handmade items at surprisingly low prices. We've rounded up a handful of shops whose designers live in and around Chicago. From dog collars to custom baby blankets, there's a unique gift for every hard-to-please person on your list. And, best of all, you'll know you won't be giving the same gift as Aunt Edna.

Polaire, an online shop run by two Chicago designers, showcases everything from screen-printed T-shirts to handmade messenger bags. Polka-dot-pattern messenger bags (\$40)—available in flamingo, aqua or citrus color schemes—are lined with heavy-duty cloth and feature adjustable shoulder straps (up to 51 inches long). At 14 by 11 inches, the bags are large enough to carry a notebook or portfolio, day planner, mobile phone and other daily essentials. Many objects are made to order and may require some lead time, so be sure to shop early. E-mail to isara@polaire-online.com or visit www.polaire-online.com. Some Polaire items can be found at Una Mae's Freak Boutique in Wicker Park (1422 N. Milwaukee Ave.).

Browse the **Walrus & the Carpenter** Web site for handmade goods for your mother, your brother, your pet or anyone special on your list. Don't expect shoes, ships or sealing wax like in the namesake Lewis Carroll poem—the two-woman company based in Prospect Heights makes one-of-a-kind crafts such as tote bags, kimono tops, kids' clothes and bath products. Embroidered handmade pillowcases make a great hostess gift for holiday parties. They're available in soft pink cotton with a fuchsia orchid design (\$24 for a pair of standard-size cases). Vintage typewriter keys are transformed into jewelry with the addition of a red or black ribbon—18 inches long, it can be worn as a choker or bracelet (\$10). Protect your lips from dry, frosty winds with a pot or tube of natural soy lip balm (\$3 each, \$8 for three). Balms come colored or uncolored and in tasty flavors such as amaretto, banana, chocolate-covered cherry and strawberry daiquiri. Visit www.thewalrusandthecarpenter.com; order by Dec. 15 to guarantee shipping by Christmas.

Pamper your pooch with gifts by Diane Lyddon at **Crafty Dog Design** in Springfield. Handmade adjustable dog collars come in funky, space-age designs and bold colors—choose patterns like groovy green, swirly blue and party yellow. Collars are made from cotton fabric and feature a white or black side-release buckle. Available in small



Objets d'Envy's Swarovski crystal bracelets are now available in champagne.



Crafty Dog Design's collars are cute and colorful.



All the cool kids have Atomic Mama blankets.

(\$8, fits necks 10 to 15 inches), medium (\$10, fits necks 12 to 19 inches) and large (\$12, fits necks 15 to 24 inches). Leashes (\$12) are three-quarters-of-an-inch wide and 4 feet long and come in a more limited



Walrus & the Carpenter's typewriter key bracelets



Polaire's messenger bags are anything but ordinary.

number of patterns. Lyddon plans to introduce cat collars soon. Visit online at www.craftydogdesign.com, e-mail to craftydogdesign@yahoo.com or call (217) 523-4533.

Atomic Mama's mission is to "protect the nuclear family from bad taste." The Berwyn-based designer sells—you guessed it—hip baby quilts and blankets for the contemporary baby. Gorgeous satin-edged blankets (\$35) feature cool designs like flames, cherries, china dolls, kids in outer space and, for Harley-riding babies, skulls and crossbones. Customize your blanket for no extra charge by choosing the print and the corresponding cotton flannel backing fabric and silk trim.

Visit www.atomicmama.com, e-mail to atomicmama@ameritech.net or call (708) 205-0519 to order. Items are made to order, so allow at least seven to 10 days to receive your order.

Sparkly Swarovski crystal bracelets (\$180) from **Objets d'Envy** will inspire jewelry envy. The Web site showcases glamorous baubles by Chicago graphic designer and jewelry designer Kirsten Goede. Just over 8 inches long, the bracelets are made from 58 pendant crystals fastened with a sterling silver toggle. Crystals usually are available in bordeaux, grass, clementine, cerulean, lemonade and violet. New to the lineup are champagne, a rich golden hue, smoke, a smoky translucent gray, and frost, which is clear but refracts light in various colors.

Necklaces (\$300) are available in matching colors. Crystal earrings (\$75) make a great stocking stuffer. Made from gold wire, the 3-inch-long dangly earrings feature five round clusters of Swarovski crystals, each a different color.

Order online at www.objetsdenvy.com or call (773) 525-1047.

Chicago jewelry designer **Sara Lenart** fashions unique accessories from sterling silver and semiprecious stones. Check out her line of necklaces, bracelets, earrings, rings and one-of-a-kind pieces at www.saralenart.com or at her shop at 1924 W. Byron. Prices range from \$12 to \$250, with a large selection in the \$30-to-\$60 range. Orders can be placed online or by phone at (773) 880-5850.

In keeping with the "shop local" spirit, an online shopping outfit helps gift givers find bargains in their area. Visit **Shoplocal.com** and type in your ZIP code to find out what's available at local stores. Browse by store, by brand or by a number of gift categories ranging from women's and juniors' apparel to luggage and travel. You can change your "shopping zone"—the distance the engine will search for bargains—and then add gifts to an online shopping list.

Whether you buy gifts online or just scout out bargains that way, shop closer to home this year and you'll have more time to spend with loved ones during the holidays.