

Christmas

An old-fashioned

Take a deep breath, pause, and resolve to take time to have a more traditional Christmas this year

Story and photos by
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The floor was already ankle deep in opened boxes and shredded wrapping paper, and an excited Boston terrier ran from one person to another, wanting to be a part of the action. That was the scene when we brought the rocking horse into the room, a gay ribbon around its neck. Our grandson had just opened another present, an electronic bongo drum, and he was beating on it lustily as it attempted to teach him the fundamentals of rhythm.

We were sure that the rocking horse would be ignored, that no child of the digital age would even recognize what it was, let alone know how to use it. We'd spent evenings for several weeks building it. I did the cutting, routing, and gluing; Rhonda did the sanding, staining and varnishing. We had underestimated both the time required and the time available, so the last coat of varnish had gone on the night before. All this, to have our handiwork ignored for some digital drum?

We needn't have worried. He took one look at that horse, knew immediately what it was and whom it was for, climbed aboard, and began rocking, hell-bent for leather.

It seems to me that something handmade, whether a labor of love with your own hands or something made by another's skilled and caring hands, is the finest gift. Craftsmanship, joy in one's



All-things-Scandinavian shop Finn Ware is stocked with Christmas candelabras, dolls and more.



Old Things and Objects in Astoria has an old P-38 airplane toy.



Rhonda Grudenic, right, smiles as she watches her grandson enjoy a handmade wooden rocking horse last Christmas.

work, caring for another, that's what gift-giving should be about, and it makes a family Christmas special.

Take it beyond the gifts. Are your ornaments manufactured in China, or have they been added over the years, each one having meaning for you? Does the food you serve come from a freezer in a big box store? Is the holiday season a hectic rush to spend money on things that won't last? Do you spend the wee hours of Christmas Eve reading incomprehensible instructions for the assembly of something nobody really needs?

Take a deep breath, pause, and resolve to take time to have a more traditional Christmas.

Our guide was the "Better Homes and Gardens Treasury of Christmas Crafts and Foods," published in 1980 but available, sometimes as new copies, from Abebooks.com or Amazon.com, for as little as \$4. Here we found patterns for the rocking horse, log cabin dollhouses, wooden toy cars and airplanes, ornaments, heirloom embroidery, dolls and puppets. And a lot more. This book will keep us busy for many Christmases to come.

What if you don't have the skills, time or inclination to make your own ornaments or gifts? Traditional doesn't mean you have to reproduce 19th century items. Think "handmade" or "artisan," and then go to the many small stores that line local streets. You won't find as many items

produced in Chinese factories, but you will find gifts that speak to you and the recipients of those gifts.

The corner of Commercial and 10th streets in Astoria is a good place to start. A store named In the Boudoir may not sound much like Christmas, but it has a cypress and fir potpourri that will make your home smell like the holidays. If you're looking for a crèche In the Boudoir has a nice selection, as well as candles and gifts. Walk a block east and you'll find yourself at Forsythea. Known for handcrafted ceramics, clocks and the like, the shop's children's section in the back is a treasure trove of educational toys, puppets (from finger to marionette), and the secret decoders may not be artisan, but the small boys on your list won't mind.

Next door to Forsythea is Finn Ware, with a stock of Christmas candelabras, dolls and nutcrackers, as well as exquisite Scandinavian crafts. If you want real traditional, go across the street to Old Things and Objects. You'll find things like antique ornaments, dolls and a metal P-38 airplane toy.

Walk farther east, and you'll discover hand-dyed silk scarves at Adagio, wooden alphabet blocks in many languages (including Braille) at Purple Cow Toys, and advent candles, Christmas cookbooks and children's books at Lucy's Books on 12th Street. Or stop by an art gallery

and purchase a work of art, the ultimate handmade gift.

We decorate and we give gifts, but what really brings families together on Christmas? The food — and I can't think of anything that says "traditional Christmas" better than roast beef and Yorkshire pudding; if you go to the Cellar on 10th they'll recommend the Dave Phinney F-2 red blend (\$20) to go with it or the 2012 Cadence Ciel du Cheval (\$55).

If your ancestors came from Scandinavia, you might think instead of baked ham or a smorgasbord overloaded with robustly flavored meats, fish, cheeses and breads. Our "Christmas Treasury" book is a source of wonderful recipes of all sorts, but so is the Internet. I've include a few here that remind me of Christmas when I was a child, and one more adult recipe.

However you celebrate Christmas, keep it a time of peace and joy, a time to count the blessings of family and friends, to let bygones be bygones, and to enjoy the winter warmth of the season.



Find wooden block toys in many languages at Purple Cow Toys in Astoria.

Pfeffernusse Cookies

Ingredients

1/2 cup dark molasses
1/4 cup honey
1/2 cup unsalted butter
2 eggs
2 teaspoons anise extract
4 cups all-purpose flour
3/4 cup white sugar
1/2 cup brown sugar
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
1 1/2 teaspoons cardamom
1 teaspoon nutmeg
1 teaspoon cloves
1 teaspoon ginger
1 teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper (as fine as possible)
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1 cup powdered sugar for dusting
Optional: 1/2 cup sliced almonds, toasted

Directions

1. In a saucepan over low heat, combine the molasses, honey, and butter. Stir until the butter is just melted and ingredients are

blended. Remove pot from heat, and pour into a large mixing bowl to cool.

2. In a separate mixing bowl, sift together the flour, white sugar, brown sugar, cinnamon, baking soda, cardamom, nutmeg, cloves, ginger, black pepper, salt and sliced almonds.

3. When the molasses mixture is cool, gently stir in the eggs and the anise extract.

4. Slowly add the dry ingredients into the molasses mixture and mix on low until everything is thoroughly combined into a thick dough.

5. Cover the dough with plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours.

6. Preheat the oven to 350 F, and line baking sheets with parchment paper.

7. Roll the dough into small 1 inch balls and place them on a baking sheet. Bake the cookies for 12 to 14 minutes until done.

8. Let cookies cool slightly, and while they are still warm roll them in the powdered sugar and then set them on a warming rack to finish cooling.

Roast Beef and Yorkshire Pudding

Ingredients

2 pounds rump or standing rib roast
Garlic powder to taste
Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 cup all-purpose flour
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup milk

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375 F.
2. Wash roast and sprinkle with garlic powder,

salt and pepper. Insert a meat thermometer into the thickest part of the roast, making sure it doesn't touch any bone or fat.

3. Bake on a wire rack inside a large roasting pan in the preheated oven for 90 minutes, or to desired doneness. For medium-rare, the meat thermometer should read 135 F. Remove roast from pan, reserving drippings.

4. In a small mixing bowl, beat the two eggs until frothy. In another small

bowl, mix the salt and flour. Stir the beaten eggs into the flour. Stirring constantly, gradually pour in the milk.

5. Preheat oven to 400 F.
6. Pour the reserved pan drippings into a medium muffin tin. Place in the preheated oven for 3 minutes. Remove from heat and pour the egg, flour and milk mixture into the hot drippings. Return muffin tin to the oven and bake for 20 minutes, or until fluffy and golden brown.

Scandinavian Glogg

Serves a large party

Ingredients

5 bottles port wine
1 bottle bourbon
1 bottle white rum
3 whole cardamom pods, cracked
1 small cinnamon stick
4 whole cloves
1 strip of orange peel
1 cheesecloth and twine
3/4 cup sugar
1 pound dark raisins
6 ounces blanched slivered almonds

Directions

1. Heat the port wine in a large stockpot with lid over medium heat until almost simmering. Add the bourbon and rum, and bring the mixture back to just below a simmer.

2. When mixture is hot, carefully light it with a long-handled match and pour the sugar into the flames. Let the mixture burn for 1 minute, then extinguish the flames by putting the lid on the pot. Let the glogg cool, covered, for 10 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, place cardamom, cinnamon stick, cloves, and orange peel onto the center of the cheesecloth and tie into a bundle with twine. When the glogg has cooled, uncover and add the cheesecloth bundle, raisins and almonds to the warm wine mixture. Let it cool to room temperature.

4. Strain the cooled glogg, reserving the raisins and almonds. Strained glogg, sealed and stored properly, will keep for a year, but usually disappears long before that.

6. To serve, heat the glogg and ladle into cups, garnishing with the reserved raisins and almonds.

An angel crèche, or nativity scene, at In the Boudoir in Astoria.