



STYLE

The Most for the Host

What to give when you are a guest—plus a bonus for Secret Santa

by Steven Schelling

“It is better to give than to receive.”

Few people encounter the prosaic sentimentality of this euphemism quite like the host or hostess of a holiday party. They give the gift of hospitality at the busiest time of the year, and, almost invariably, they receive something they’d sooner be without.

If—to roll out another seasonal saying—it’s the thought that counts, what does your perfunctory present say about you as a guest (not to mention an employee or an employer)?

The perfect host/hostess gift must appeal broadly but appear personalized with the lustre of thoughtfulness. Should your proffered box of After Eights suddenly appear at the end of the buffet table for everyone to enjoy, you have failed. And failure is not an option.

Herewith, some of the more vexing holiday house party (plus Secret Santa) situations and the gift suggestions that will get you through the merriment of the season. →



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- 1.** Marshall Stanmore Speaker, \$499.99 from *London Drugs*, londondrugs.com
- 2.** Long Table Cucumber Gin (\$49.99), Marc du Soleil (\$39.95) Bourbon Barrelled Gin (\$35.95) and Långbord Akvavit (\$46.90) from longtabledistillery.com
- 3.** Odd Society East Van Vodka (\$36), Wallflower Gin (\$44) and Crème de Cassis (\$22) from oddsocietyspirits.com
- 4.** 2010 Jackson-Triggs Okanagan Valley Grand Reserve Entourage Sparkling Brut, \$30 from jackson-triggswinery.com

- 5.** Haywire The Bub 2012, \$25 from okanagancrushpad.com
- 6.** Serendipity Devil's Advocate, \$25 from serendipitywinery.com
- 7.** Victorinox Swiss Army Spear Point Straight Knives (part of 5-Piece Utility Set with Mini Block), \$42 from swissarmy.com/ca
- 8.** Endurance double jigger, \$10 from longtabledistillery.com
- 9.** Kate Duncan mini board, \$80 from kateduncan.ca
- 10.** Fever Tree Bitter Lemon mixer, \$7.95 from longtabledistillery.com

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- 1.** Himalayan Handmade Candle, (\$24-

- \$58) and Simpatico Home Hobnail Candle (\$39), from kissandmakeup.com
- 2.** Escents Arctic Reed Diffuser, \$24.95 from escentsaroma.com
- 3.** 1-Face watch, \$50 from 1facewatch.ca
- 4.** Salontea signature tins of loose (\$18.89) and sachet (\$15.89) varieties and gold-plated porcelain teapot (\$65) from salontea.com
- 5.** Ned's Wild Caught Sustainable Albacore Tuna, \$10 per can from cookworks.com
- 6.** L'Épicerie Gourmande's organic artisan-produced flavoured olive oil

- and balsamic vinegars, \$10-\$50 from lepiceriegourmande.com
- 7.** 49th Parallel coffee gift set of Holiday Espresso Blend and Coffee Mug, \$35 from 49thparallelroasters.com
- 8.** Le Creuset French press, \$100 from Hudson's Bay Company, thebay.com
- 9.** Chocolate Arts Brownie Bouche tree (give 24 hours' notice), \$60 from chocolatearts.com
- 10.** Eight-to-32-piece chocolate boxes, \$18-\$58 from temperpastry.com
- 11.** Christian Woo black walnut cutting board, \$150-\$350 from christianwoo.com

For your 65-year-old boss and his partner at their annual Christmas party

Thanks to a change in provincial regulations, B.C. has found its spirit in a plethora of independent distilleries. A bottle of artisan Cucumber Gin, flavoured with cucumbers grown on the Sunshine Coast, from Vancouver's Long Table Distillery or small-batch East Van Vodka from Odd Society (distilled from barley grown in Prince George) signals to the boss that you are up-to-date on current trends and support small businesses. For a more continental offering, pair Odd Society's Crème de Cassis (meticulously prepared by Hervé Martin, former personal chef to the late King Leopold III of Belgium) with a B.C. sparkling wine like Okanagan Crush Pad's Haywire The Bub or the award-winning Entourage by Jackson-Triggs. The boss and his loved ones can cheers to your health on Christmas morning with a Kir Royale. Nothing makes you more golden with the higher-ups than impressing those who have the greatest influence on them.

For your co-worker's ugly sweater party

Rally the other poorly dressed parties to your side with a kitschy bit of chocolate overload. The Brownie Bouche from Chocolate Arts is 50 bite-size chocolate-coated brownies stacked to form a Christmas tree, and is topped with a solid chocolate star.

For your partner's parents' holiday dinner

Perk things up with the future in-laws by pairing 49th Parallel's Holiday coffee blends (regular or espresso) with a ceramic French press from Le Creuset.

For your partner's work Christmas party

Are you the "plus one" for your partner at her boss's house? Did she remember to pick up a gift? If not, play mother with Salontea's selection of artisanal brews. The Fashionable Dandy's Earl Grey will appeal to more conservative tastes, while the chai of The Writer injects a little spice into every cup. (And it was one of Oprah's favourite things—before she started her own chai tea line with Starbucks.)

For a co-worker's "Orphans Christmas Party"

You've just transferred to a new city, you're not going home for the holidays, and a charitable colleague has invited you to break bread with his family. Yes, a roomful of strangers and uneasiness. The cool, subtle mix of peppermint, spearmint and anise in an Escentis Arctic Reed Diffuser is calming for all involved.

For the big-fish client's house party

The person who pays for your mortgage, braces on the kids and the extension on the kitchen deserves a killer gift. The Marshall Stanmore Speaker uses Bluetooth technology to play music from just about any device and looks rock 'n' roll cool while doing so.

For your executive assistant's holiday party

"Oh! You came! How wonderful!" You've committed to a perfunctory stop-in and a drink or two before leaving her to enjoy the holidays with her friends and family. Your gift will be opened in front of everyone. A scented Himalayan Handmade Candle in a shabby-chic tin is a safe go-to. So is a bottle of Serendipity's Devil's Advocate red wine, the creation of a Toronto lawyer who followed her dream to the vineyards of the Okanagan. And if you want to play it cheeky, the gift of a 1:Face watch will not only support a specific charity, it will keep all assembled wondering if you're making a dig about your employee's time management skills.

Secret Santa!

No one enjoys Secret Santa (minus that person in accounting who has kitten posters in his cubicle). But if you have to do something, at least do it well. Instead of the ubiquitous Starbucks gift card, select artisanal, flavour-infused olive oils and balsamic vinegars from the taps at Granville Island's L'Epicerie Gourmande. Ranging from just \$10 for 150 mL of organic walnut oil up to \$50 for a litre of first-pressed EVOO, there's something for every office's price range. □

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