



# *Last Minute* **Holiday** **Gift Guide**

A supplement to the *Cortland Standard*  
Thursday, December 5, 2019  
and *Celebrate!*  
Saturday, December 7, 2019



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**SEE OUR AD  
ON PAGE 16**

# Try to re-use, not re-gift

Consumers and companies look for a more sustainable gift wrap



Ten Thousand Villages via AP

Gift wrap made from saris that are recycled by artisans in Bangladesh. The company says sales have been growing steadily.

By DEE-ANN DURBIN  
AP Business Writer

Growing unease about waste has some Americans rethinking wrapping paper.

Gift wrap is still a huge business. U.S. sales of wrapping paper climbed 4% to \$8.14 billion last year, according to a recent report by Sundale Research. But sales of reusable gift bags rose faster, the company said. Sundale said it's also closely watching green trends — like furoshiki, the Japanese art of wrapping with fabric — because they could impact gift wrap sales in the coming years.

Marie Wood, a student at Northern Arizona University, started wrapping Christmas gifts in brown paper grocery bags a few years ago when she saw the bags piling up at home.

"It wasn't consciously around environmentalism, but a good way to use these bags that aren't going to get used otherwise," she said.

Now that her parents carry reusable bags to the grocery, the pile is getting smaller. Wood says she might switch to fabric wrapping that she can reuse each year.

"I want to change the disposable nature of my wrapping," she said.

Some consumers are ditching wrapping altogether. In a survey released last month, half of U.S. respondents said they will give holiday gifts without wrapping this year to avoid using paper, according to Accenture, a consulting firm. Nearly two-thirds said they would happily receive gifts without wrapping.

Gift wrap companies are taking notice. IG Design Group, a United Kingdom-based maker of stationery and wrapping paper, said earlier this year that it removed glitter from its paper because it's not recyclable.

Paper Source, a Chicago-based chain, introduced a recyclable wrapping paper made out of crushed marble and limestone that uses less water to produce than regular paper. A limited release of the paper sold out before the holidays last year. This year, about one-third of Paper Source's holiday wrapping papers will be stone-based.

"Our customer is more aware of sustainability and their carbon footprint," said Patrick Priore, the chief marketing officer for Paper Source. "We would be foolish not to go in that area."

Here are some wrapping and recycling ideas:

◆ **Choose recyclable gift wrap.** Papers that contain foil, plastic coating, cellophane and glitter are not recyclable, according to the American Forest and Paper Association. The association says a general rule of thumb is to crumple up the paper; if it stays in a tight ball, it's paper-based and can be recycled. Kula, Hawaii-based Wrappily uses old printing presses to print designs on recyclable newsprint. A three-sheet set of its paper is \$10. Hallmark sells a set of four rolls — 35.2 feet in total — for \$14.99. Paper Source says its stone paper can be recycled; it costs \$9.95 for a 10-foot roll.

◆ **Go with gift bags.** Westlake, Ohio-based American Greetings says gift bags now make up 30% of its wrapping business. They cost more up-front than many wrapping papers, but they're easy to reuse; just cut off ribbon handles — which aren't recyclable — if you're putting paper gift bags in the recycling bin. Many sizes and varieties of gift bags are available at Etsy.com. Philadelphia-based VZ Wraps sells a set of three cotton wine bags for \$13.59. Amazon has a set of five cotton bags for \$23.95.

◆ **Wrap with fabric.** An ancient craft in Japan is gaining converts elsewhere. Ten Thousand Villages, a fair-trade retail chain, sells gift wrap made from saris that are recycled by artisans in Bangladesh. The company says sales have been growing steadily since the wraps were introduced in 2013; so far this year, sales are up 20% over 2018. The 26-square-inch wrap, which comes with instructions, sells for \$12.99. Or go even simpler; wrap a gift in a pillowcase or a T-shirt.

◆ **Recycle it all.** New Jersey-based recycling company TerraCycle promises to recycle everything — including ribbons, bows, tissue paper and wrapping paper with glitter — in its Gift Zero Waste Box. The company sends customers an empty box with a paid return label; once it's full of gift wrap, customers send it back. TerraCycle says it has processes for even hard-to-recycle products like ribbon, which it uses for insulation or melts into plastic pellets. The company says a medium box is the most popular size for family gatherings; it costs \$147.

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# G oop

## Discover the weird and wild of Gwyneth Paltrow's notorious gift guide

By **CHRISTIE D'ZURILLA** Los Angeles Times (TNS)

### THINGS WE LOVE

Surprisingly, there was much to love on the Goop list, even after you took out the not-quite-sleazy sexual accoutrements sprinkled throughout.

◆ Misfits Market's misshapen-produce delivery service, \$22 a month. This is the Hallmark Christmas Movies version of a fresh fruits and veggies subscription. It's like rescue puppies you can eat. Unattractive produce gets a second chance at love with recipients who can judge it based on how it tastes, now how it looks. Much like in Hollywood, however, even the ugly veggies are pretty decent-looking.

◆ Brass fire extinguisher, \$250. Because it's cool, that's why. Plus, in a pinch, it can double as a weapon.

◆ Salami subscription, \$13 a month. There's something slightly hilarious in knowing that a friend will get a monthly salami in their mailbox and, well, they'll think of you.

### THINGS WE HATE

Have we simply been living in Los Angeles too long, and "weird" doesn't seem all that weird anymore? Very few suggestions fueled our rage, which is a disappointment. But here are a few items that induced at least some anger.

◆ Codi the Storytelling Robot, \$125. A click through to the Pillar Learning website reveals that Codi's been marked down 20%, probably because too many people saw the Miley Cyrus episode of "Black Mirror" and were as freaked out as we were by the notion of a storytelling robot that has "super cute outfits." Put Netflix on pause and read the kid a stinkin' book, for Pete's sake.

◆ American Heirloom walnut base cake stand, \$90. When was the last time anyone used a cake stand? It's time to stop bringing cake stands into the world, where they procreate and make even more cake stands that nobody will ever pull out of the cabinet. Eat that cake on a level playing field, people.

◆ Dehydrated Calvisius caviar bar, from \$99. There is just too big a chance of this "delicacy" accidentally being mistaken for a chocolate bar. Way too big. Nonstarter.

### THINGS THAT MAKE US GO 'HMM'

Here's where Goop goes crazy. These are but a few of the items that at first glance sound almost cool — until their excess grosses you out.

◆ Ember travel mug, \$180. It's a travel mug. That's all it is. And it's only 12 ounces. And it's nearly \$200. But it does keep your coffee warmer than a \$10 insulated Contigo mug, so if "having your coffee to-go turn tepid while you're in the throes of enjoying every sip" makes you very, very sad, perhaps this would be more cost effective than, say, medication or a therapist. Then again, it might be time to simply get over yourself and drink your coffee faster.

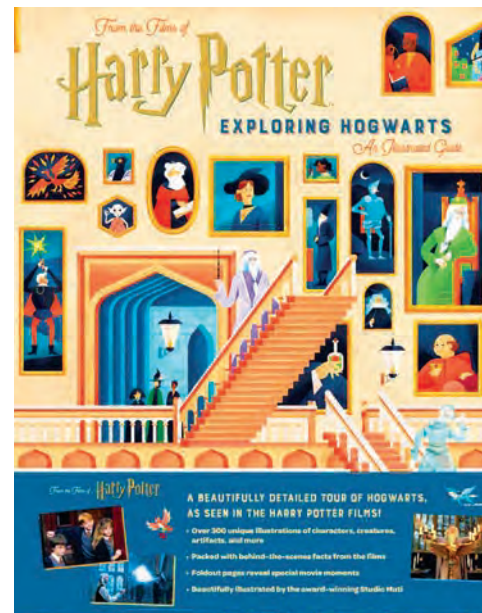
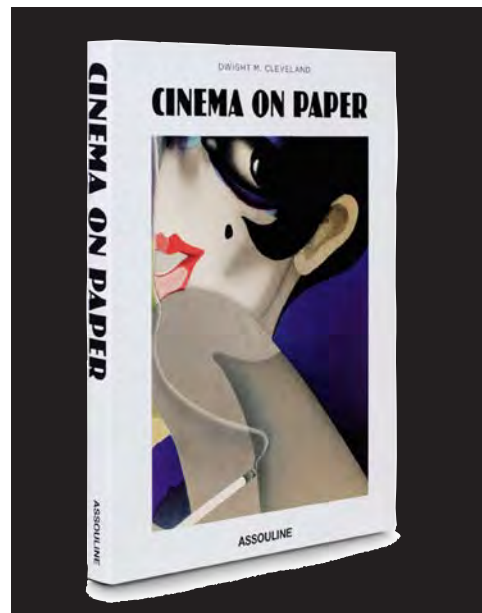
◆ That Book by photographers Eszter+David, from \$75,000. Think nobody wants to look at your vacation photos now? Wait until you tell them you spent \$75,000 to have two people with cameras follow you around on your vacation, documenting your every move, then had a custom-made luxury album made of your adventure. Sure, "every book is its very own bespoke work of art," the makers say, but that's cold comfort when you have absolutely no friends left.

◆ Lunar Rock Edition of Norman Mailer's book "MoonFire," meteorite included, \$275,000. It's hard to out-and-out hate anything to do with books or the moon or astronauts, but this collector's item — only 12 available, one for each astronaut who walked on the moon! — seems dreadfully overdone. Get the book for \$15.70 new on Amazon, or upgrade to \$30.49 for the 50th-anniversary edition of Mailer's story of the Apollo 11 missions. Forget the box that looks like the lunar excursion module, with a lid that looks like the lunar surface, because you'll never use it for anything, anywhere.

### AND THE THING THAT COSTS MORE THAN \$1 MILLION

◆ The Journey to Nature's Edge Expedition from Momentum Adventure, \$1.3 million. It's a dozen trips focused on endangered species, to be taken a month at a time or all at once, depending on how much paid time off you have. A better move, if you have already paid L.A. rent and still have \$1.3 million to spare? Give the money to take care of endangered species instead of spending it to go look at 'em.

We're thinking elephants this year.



# ‘REEL’ GOOD IDEAS

By **KENNETH TURAN** and **GEOFF BERKSHIRE**  
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

## FOR THE LAUGHS

“Who’s on First?” You’ll get the answer, sort of, in “Abbott & Costello: The Complete Universal Pictures Collection (80th Anniversary Edition).” This complete collection includes 28 films from the com-

edy duo at the height of their popularity, including “Buck Privates,” “Who Done It?” and “Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein.”

## ‘KING OF THE MONSTERS’

In “Godzilla: The Showa-Era Films, 1954-1975,” all 15 legendary films from the original defining run of Japan’s own “King of the Monsters” in a lavish boxed set from the ex-

perts at Criterion, loaded with revelatory special features and dressed up with arresting original art. Collectors bonus: It’s officially the 1,000th Criterion release.

## ANIMATED MASTERPIECE

A limited-edition release of Hayao Miyazaki’s Oscar-winning animated masterpiece, “Spirited Away,” the collector’s edition, is packaged in

a beautiful hard slipcase with a commemorative 40-page booklet and the exclusive U.S. printing of Joe Hisaishi’s indelible soundtrack.

## LONG OVERDUE

Celebrating its 100th anniversary and fresh from its cinematic closeup in “Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood,” this Los Angeles landmark gets a coffee table book — “The

Musso and Frank Grill,” by Michael Callahan — overflowing with recipes, historic photographs, portraits of staff and stories of the famous folks who’ve walked through its doors. About time too.

## A GORGEOUS COLLECTION

“Cinema on Paper” by Dwight M. Cleveland gathers

See REEL, page 5

## FROM TOP LEFT:

*The Criterion Collection*  
“Godzilla: The Showa-Era Films, 1954-1975”

Assouline  
“Cinema on Paper” by Dwight M. Cleveland gathers together more than 100 vividly designed film posters from top-of-the-line publisher Assouline that display not only classic American items but posters from overseas.

Simon & Schuster  
Stunning full-color illustrations matched with interactive elements takes you inside the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry from JK Rowling’s beloved Potter novels and the blockbuster film adaptations. From the Forbidden Forest to the Great Hall, “Harry Potter: Exploring Hogwarts.”

GKIDS/Shout! Factory  
The collector’s edition of “Spirited Away.”

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# REEL

continued from page 4

together more than 100 vividly designed film posters from top-of-the-line publisher Assouline that display not only classic American items but posters from overseas purveyors like Cuba, Italy, Poland and the Netherlands.

### CELEBRITIES IRL

Counter-intuitive though it may sound, movie stars and major tomes have often been paired in all manner of vintage publicity photos. “The Hollywood Book Club” by Steven Rea is an engaging book that rounds up dozens of rarely seen, always surprising images (yes, that’s Marilyn Monroe reading Heine on the cover).

### ON THE PAGE

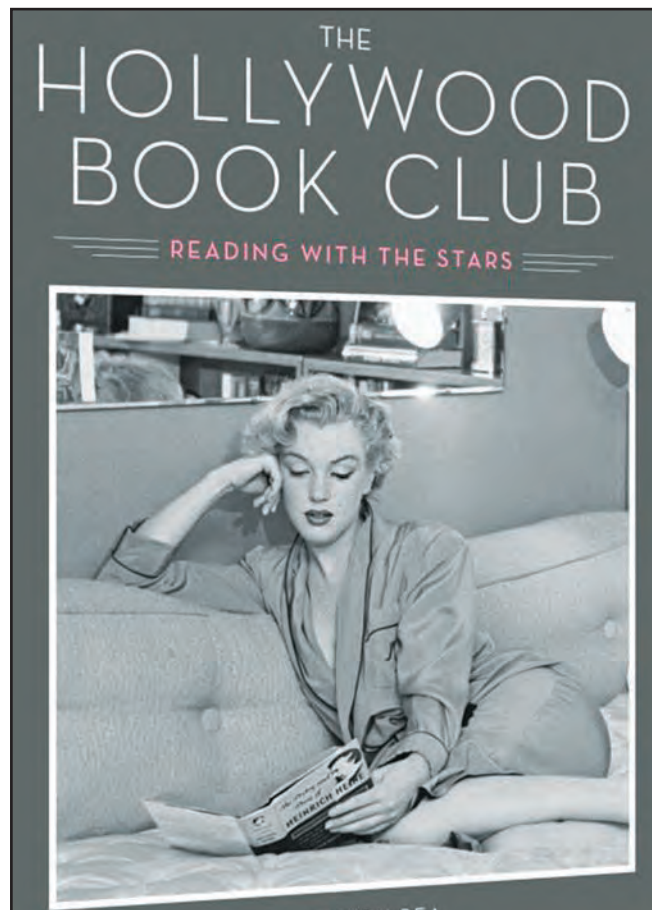
“The Big Book of Reel Murders: Stories That Inspired Great Crime Films,” edited by Otto Penzler, is a whopper of a tome (1,200 pages and counting) that collects in one place more than 60 short stories that were the basis of films like “Psycho,” “The Wild One,” “Bad Day at Black Rock” and “On the Waterfront.” Penzler, a veteran editor, expertly introduces each entry.

### “HARRY POTTER: EXPLORING HOGWARTS”

Stunning full-color illustrations matched with interactive elements takes you inside the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry from JK Rowling’s beloved Potter novels and the blockbuster film adaptations. From the Forbidden Forest to the Great Hall, it’s all here in “Harry Potter: Exploring Hogwarts.”

### COOL CAVES

Why do bad guys always have the coolest cinematic abodes? “Lair: Radical Homes and Hideouts of Movie Villains” is a deep dive into unique buildings from 15 films, including “Dr. Strangelove Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb,” “Star Wars” and “The Incredibles.” It’s both an architecture and movie fan’s dream.



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## Give a green thumb this year

By **JEANETTE MARANTOS**  
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

### RAKE ASSASSIN

Anyone who has raked anything knows the frustration of raking up debris in a garden bed or gravel path — and then struggling to pick up the rakings while leaving the good soil or gravel behind. Enter the Rake Assassin, a handy tool that doesn't just rake but has strong enough tines to shovel up the debris while leaving the good stuff behind.

### MAKING GARDENING SEXY

"The Drunken Botanist" by Amy Stewart makes gardening sexy and, as one reviewer says, even a little dangerous, as with her 2009 treatise "Wicked Plants: The Weed That Killed Lincoln's Mother and Other Botanical Atrocities" and 2011 follow-up, "Wicked Bugs: The Louse That Conquered Napoleon's Army & Other Diabolical Insects." Her most recent bestseller, "The Drunken Botanist," is a deep and often humorous dive into every plant that's been wrung into something alcoholic. Indeed, she writes, "Around the world ... there is not a tree or shrub or delicate wildflower that has not been harvested, brewed and bottled." Her books are the perfect companion to a comfortable chair, a roaring



*Garden's Supply Company*  
**A handsome herb-drying rack**

tools, since weeds are an omnipresent part of any garden and our quest to kill them is unending. The goal is to find a tool that doesn't poison our precious organics but still does the job with a minimum of fuss. That's why many gardeners and farmers praise this elegant and efficient Japanese tool: the Kusakichi Nejiri Scraper, a sort of short-handled hoe designed to scrape young weeds from the soil while providing a sharp edge to dig out stubborn roots.

### HERB DRYING RACK

Maybe once upon a time our kitchens had handy ledges for us to hang parsley, thyme and our other harvested herbs, but it's not so easy in today's sleek modern kitchens. Enter Gardener's Supply Company's handsome herb-drying rack, a powder-coated steel circle that only needs one hook to hold at least a half dozen good-sized bunches of herbs. What better way to make a sleek modern kitchen feel homey and delicious! (The extra thoughtful gift giver can purchase three additional hooks — and offer to install it as well).

### ADVENTURE HAT

Neck burns — those nasty sunburns on your tender exposed

fire and your favorite libation and make a great gift for anyone interested in plants and keen writing. (Note: If you have an artistic gardener on your list, check out her Wicked Plants coloring book too!)

### BANISH WEEDS

Any serious gardener is bound to be a connoisseur of weeding

**See GROW, page 7**

# GROW

continued from page 6



neck — are a common complaint for anyone who spends time outdoors looking at the ground. And as our sun rays get sharper, a cool, well-fitting hat is mandatory these days for any gardener, says Tom Carruth, rose curator for The Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens, in San Marino, Calif. He keeps his Adventure hat from Sunday Afternoons at the ready whenever he goes outside: This nylon hat is lightweight, stain resistant and even floats in water. Bonus features: It has a roomy and adjustable crown, the 7.5-inch neck flap folds up when you want a breeze and it comes in lots of colors — pink, purple and blue for the bold and neutrals for the camo crowd who just want to blend in.

## TOOL CADDY

One of gardening's biggest hassles is toting all the tools you need to do the job at hand. Many gardening tools are too tall or bulky to fit in a gardening bag or bucket, and then there's the problem of not remembering where you last left your shovel or rake, when your hands were full carrying other items back to the garage. Enter this brilliant Mobile Tool Storage Caddy by the Gardener's Supply Company, which resembles a modified golf bag on wheels, designed with plenty of pockets and handles to carry tools of all sizes. There's even a smaller bucket on the back to hold harvested produce or garden debris. And when you're done, you can store all your tools in the same place! This may be the next best thing to having your own (human) garden caddy.

## NIGHTTIME IN THE GARDEN

Nighttime can be one of the most magical times to be in your garden, eating dinner or just relaxing with a beer, but garish overhead lighting can dim those special effects. This Mission-style solar lantern — 10 inches square and 11 inches tall — will class up any outdoor table while providing just enough light to show off what you're eating while maintaining the evening's ambiance. The flitting dragonfly design looks nice from indoors too, hanging outside a window. And because it's solar-powered, no need to fuss with power cords or candles.

## FOR THE BIRDS

The mottled copper (or smooth berry) finish on these doughnut-shaped feeders make them attractive enough to install close to a window, so you can at least admire the simple, clean design when the birds aren't feeding. Don't expect it to be empty long, however. Each feeder holds up to a cup of bird seed, and the open design makes it easy to admire who is visiting today. In rainy weather, one or two birds can even hop inside while they dine. The feeders are 7.5 inches in diameter and come with their own 17-inch metal hanging cord.

## FELCO GARDENING CLIPPERS

These Swiss-made clippers are the best choice for gardeners who grow roses and other flowers. They're designed to cut and hold stems or branches until you can put them in a collection bin, eliminating the need to cut with one hand and grab with the other. This is particularly useful for rose bushes, when you don't want to fish fallen flowers from thorny branches.

## MICRO SNIPPERS

OK, it's a given that gardeners can never have enough hand clippers, but these sturdy, lightweight Felco F100 snips are perfect for precision trims, whether you're manicuring your marijuana plant, pruning sucker branches from tomatoes or trimming the perfect bloom from a thicket of flowers. The long, slender cutting head makes it useful indoors too when preparing flowers for the vase.

## HIP-TRUG

Holsters have always been hip for gunslingers and business execs; now gardeners can up their coolness and efficiency with the Hip-Trug, a sleek bucket-like holster that lets gardeners weed, deadhead or harvest with both hands, while stuffing their bounty (or clippings) into the bucket attached to their waistband or belt. Hip-Trugs are made by Burgon & Ball of England, a sister company to Southern California's premiere garden tool maker Corona Tools, which is selling this unique gift on its U.S. website. (Joe Cool sunglasses not included.)

**TOP: The Rake Assassin** (Root Assassin)

**MIDDLE: Dragonfly Solar Lantern** (Gardener's Supply Company)

**BOTTOM: The Kusakichi Nejiri Scraper** (Eastern Leaf, Inc.)

# To whom it may concern?

## Advice on addressing holiday cards

By **TRACEE M. HERBAUGH**  
**Associated Press**

It's that holiday-card time of year again.

But before you open up the address book or spreadsheet, read up on some modern etiquette for addressing those to whom you're sending your jolly good tidings.

Holiday cards, particularly Christmas cards, are big business. Leading greeting-card maker Hallmark estimates 1.3 billion Christmas cards are sent annually in the United States.

Every holiday season, I receive a handful of cards addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. Mark Peacock" — my husband's name. And every year I'm flummoxed that some in our circle haven't noticed that Mark and I have never shared a last name.

Eighteen years into her marriage, Karen Greco, a publicist and writer who lives in Rhode Island and New York City, says friends and family are finally starting to use her surname.

"I just kept using my own name when sending thank you cards or other correspondence," she says. "Sometimes I made a point to say, 'I kept my name, like, to my dad.'"

Greco's father, who she described as "kind of old school," was surprised at the correction.

"But I think he was also happy about it," she says. "He totally got it, and he never even asked why. Just said OK and addressed me correctly."

Etiquette is based on historical precedent, but also follows cultural shifts, of which there have been

See **CARDS**, page 9



Julio Cortez/Associated Press



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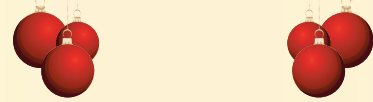
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# CARDS

continued from page 8

many in recent decades. In other words, “Mr. and Mrs. Husband’s Name” doesn’t cut it anymore for a lot of people.

“To address people that way is pretty outdated,” says Arden Clise, who owns Seattle-based Clise Etiquette and wrote the book “Spinach in Your Boss’s Teeth: Essential Etiquette for Professional Success” (Silver Fern, 2016). Nowadays, Clise said, many women have also disavowed the title Mrs. for Ms., which does not spotlight one’s marital status.

### IF YOU DON’T KNOW, ASK

Experts agree that the first step in addressing holiday cards is to know your recipients’ preferences.

Are they married with separate or hyphenated names? Was a new, blended name created? Do their children have different surnames?

“If you ever have a question, just send the person a text or email and ask,” says Jodi R.R. Smith, owner of Mannersmith Etiquette Consulting in Marblehead, Massachusetts. “You should know if a name is hyphenated, and which name comes first, which comes second.”

You can use a less formal approach by writing one family member’s last



Jan Boyd via AP

This undated photo shows the use of the gender-neutral honorific title, Mx.

name, usually the person you know best, and addressing the card to the “family”: “The Jones family,” for instance, or “Ralph Jones and family.”

A new courtesy title, Mx. (pronounced “Mix”), has been embraced by some transgender, nonbinary or gender-neutral people as an alternative to Mr. or Ms. It was added to the Oxford English

Dictionary in 2015, but the etiquette is evolving, and Smith recommends tailoring “Mx.” to the recipient’s preference.

“I actually recommend contacting them individually and asking how they prefer to be addressed formally,” she says.

Traditionally, the man’s name came first in addressing a married couple,

but now the opposite is proper, Smith says. Address a card with the woman’s name first. And for any married couple, she says, etiquette requires an “and” between the two names.

### CUT SENDERS SOME SLACK

There are lots of new rules; understand when it is and isn’t appropriate to be an etiquette cop.

“Don’t bother trying to change your elderly relative,” Smith says. “But if your cousin doesn’t know your name, send him a gentle email after the holidays are over and suggest he make the change in his master list.” Close the email with a positive note or two, she says, something like “Can’t wait to see you at the family reunion next fall!”

And don’t let address worries scare you off from sending these annual greetings. People love getting cards in the mail.

Hallmark’s website says nearly 75 percent of consumers who send holiday cards do so because they know it feels good to receive them.

“When in doubt, always send the card,” Smith says. “This is such a wonderful way to keep in touch with family and friends.”



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# Gadgets for the discerning gizmo-phile

By **DON LINDICH**  
Tribune News Service

## Bluetooth speakers and soundbars

**Soundcore Flare Mini and Flare+ Bluetooth speakers:** The best speakers you can buy for under \$50 and \$100, Soundcore's Flare Mini (\$49) and Flare+ (\$99) look, feel and sound much more expensive than they are. The LED lightshow can be adjusted or turned off at the touch of a button.

**AxiomAir N2 Freedom, \$529:** This advanced and customizable wireless speaker from high-end manufacturer Axiom Audio is based on a Raspberry Pi minicomputer, allowing it to be updated with new features easily.

**ZVOX AccuVoice AV203 TV Speaker, \$199:** With six levels of voice boost, this is one of the most advanced dialogue-enhancing speakers you can buy. Reduced from \$269 until the end of the year, it is a great deal, too. Veterans save 15% by calling ZVOX directly.

**TCL Alto 7+ soundbar, \$179:** This soundbar with wireless subwoofer is an ideal match for TCL's excellent line of affordable TVs.

## Cellphone and tablet accessories, earphones and headphones

**Anker PowerCore Fusion, \$25:** This



**The Cambridge Audio Melomania.**

Cambridge Audio

high-speed wall charger has a built-in battery than allows it to function as a power bank, so it can charge your devices even when an outlet is not available.

**ZVOX AccuVoice AV50 noise-canceling headphones, \$119 each or 2/\$199:** Available in four colors, the combination of AccuVoice and active noise cancellation makes them perfect for viewing in-flight entertainment. Veterans save 15% by calling ZVOX directly.

**Cambridge Audio Melomania, \$129:** Melomania is "love of music" and these true wireless earphones have excellent sound quality in the finest British tradition.

**Grado SR60e headphones, \$79:** Grado's wired, open-back headphones are where high-end sound quality begins, and are handmade in the USA.

**Apple AirPods with wireless charging case, \$199:** Good sound and seamless Siri integration make the AirPods a great gift for any iPhone user.

**Soundcore Liberty 2 Pro, \$99:** These excellent true wireless earphones are endorsed by 10 Grammy winners and include HearID, which allows you to scientifically optimize the sound for your own ears and hearing.

**Apple iTunes and Google Play Store Gift Cards:** While some may consider gift cards unimaginative, most tablet

or Smartphone user will appreciate being treated to some apps or music from the Apple and Android online stores.

**Gabb Phone, \$99:** This kid-friendly ZTE phone is limited mostly to talk, text, and camera, stripping the apps and browser to provide young ones a safer experience. The monthly cost is \$19.99/month and there is no contract.

## Hi-Fi, TV and home entertainment

**Audio-Technica AT-LP60 turntables:** Improved and updated for 2019 and starting at \$99, Audio-Technica's AT-LP60 automatic turntables come in many varieties including USB and Bluetooth models, as well as in packages with headphones and speakers.

**LP Gear Vessel A3SE, \$99:** With its affordable price and clear, sweet and dynamic sound, this is a great upgrade for entry-level turntables. Available in a pre-mounted set for \$148.

**Music Hall Classic turntable, \$599:** A breakthrough in sub-\$1,000 turntables, the Classic must be touched and heard to be appreciated. It is easily the best combination of sound quality, features, good looks and solid construction you can get under \$600.

**Spin-Clean Record Washer, \$79:** This affordable manual record washer uses an ingenious design to give your records a deep cleaning comparable to what you get from an expensive vacuum record cleaning machine.

**TCL 5-Series and 6-Series televisions, \$299-\$1,299:** The 5-Series easily outclasses TVs selling at similar budget prices, and the 6-Series competes with the big boys without the big expense.

**Samsung Q90 QLED televisions, \$2,199-\$4,499:** Available in sizes from 65 to 82 inches, the Q90 produces picture quality approaching OLED televisions but without the burn-in worries.

**Panasonic UltraHD Blu-ray players:** Expensive but absolutely 100% worth it, the \$499 UB820 and \$999 UB9000 have picture processing that is beyond state-of-the-art. They made DVDs look so good that viewers thought I was playing Blu-rays on my 50-inch plasma, and both 1080p and

See **GADGETS**, page 11

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# GADGETS

continued from page 10

4K Blu-ray on were rendered with sheer perfection on 4K sets. Noticeably better than even the vaunted Oppo players, if you have a 4K TV and like to play movies from disc you need to buy one — today.

**Roku Players:** Roku continues to be the best way to add streaming services to your TV. The Roku Express (\$29) is perfect for 1080p televisions, and 4K television owners may want to look towards the Roku Premiere (\$39) Roku Streaming Stick+ (\$49) and Roku Ultra (\$99) to get the most out of their televisions.

**Q Acoustics 3020i bookshelf speakers, \$319:** The award-winning Q Acoustics 3020i speakers have rich, clear sound that makes it the best speaker you can buy in the \$300 price range.

**Emotiva T-Zero tower speakers, \$399:** The T-Zero uses exotic tweeter technology to bring airy, high-end sound to your room and was one of my most-loved recommendations of 2019.

**Wharfedale Linton speakers with stands, \$1,499:** These beautiful speakers have cutting-edge sound quality, boxy mid-century modern looks and a furniture-grade wood finish that work together to provide both musical enjoyment and great pride of ownership. The stands double as record racks and should be considered mandatory for anyone purchasing these speakers. wharfedale.com

**Samsung HW-Q90R soundbar, \$1,699:** The HW-Q90R includes wireless surround speakers and a wireless subwoofer to bring high-quality Dolby Atmos sound to your room easily and relatively inexpensively. Frequently available for well under MSRP.

## Gaming

**Sega Genesis Mini, \$79:** Retro video games are all about great gameplay, and the Sega Genesis system of the 1990s had some of the best games of all. The Genesis Mini includes two wired controllers, connects to your TV via HDMI and includes 40 classic Genesis games and two bonus games.

## Cooking and outdoors

**MEATER, \$99 to \$199:** MEATER wireless meat thermometers measure ambient and internal temperatures from a single probe. My favorite is the \$99 MEATER+ with its extended Bluetooth range.

**Pelican Elite 20 cooler, \$149:** Compared to its \$199 Yeti competitor, this rugged cooler has a superior latching system, better insulation performance, is available in a wide variety



The MEATER wireless thermometer.

of color combinations, includes a lifetime warranty and is made in the USA.

**Thermopop, \$34:** An excellent instant-read thermometer that is reliable and looks great, too, with many different colors available.

**Smoke 2-Channel Alarm, \$99:** Another winner from Thermoworks, Smoke monitors the temperature of your BBQ and meat using the included probes and transmits the information to a pre-paired handheld receiver.

## Smart home

**Amazon Echo Show 8, \$99:** The Echo Show 8 provides Alexa functionality, solid sound quality and a sharp 8" HD screen in a single package.

**Philips Hue A19 Starter Kit, \$69:** A great way to get started with the industry-leading smart lighting system, this kit provides two bulbs and a hub you can build on.

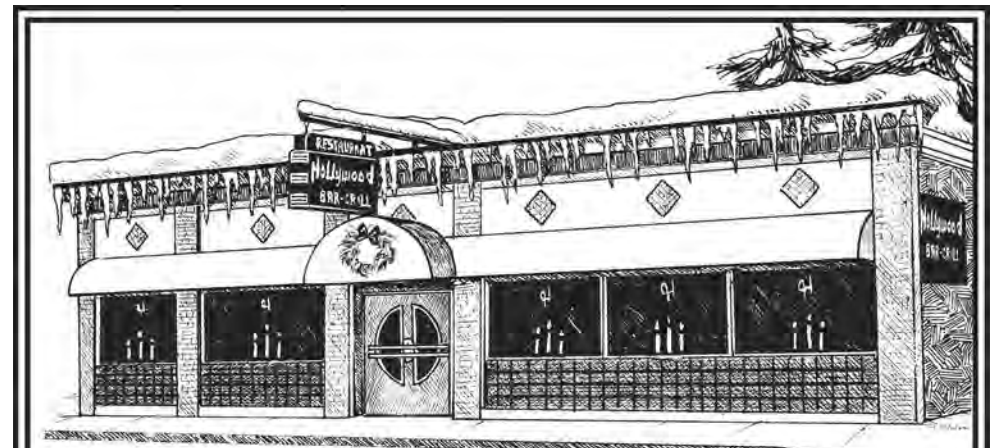
**Wyze Cam, \$20:** Wyze HD security cameras with night vision are the best value on the market, with good video quality and a built-in adjustable foot stand. You can record 14 days of rolling coverage to the Cloud for free.

## Special mention

**Orient Altair Watch, \$130 on sale:** Orient watches are loved by watch

enthusiasts for their affordability, accurate mechanical movements, good looks and solid quality. The stylish Altair dress watch is a great introduction to mechanical watches and includes the date, a 24-hour dial, and

a day of the week dial. This combination is unheard of in a good quality \$140 mechanical watch and that makes it a bit of high-tech in itself. I bought the white face with blue hands and markings, and absolutely love it.



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# The gift of community

Coming together for local theater is a holiday tradition

By **MELISSA KOSSLER DUTTON**  
Associated Press

The Railsback family in North Carolina enjoys lots of conventional holiday festivities — get-togethers, special meals, exchanging gifts. But for the last several years, they have added another tradition that illustrates the meaning of the season for them: performing in the High Point Community Theatre's "A Christmas Carol: The Musical."

"It's a huge part of our Christmas," said Kristina Railsback, who has played the role of Mrs. Cratchit since the theater first presented the production five years ago. Her husband, Eric, and sons, Liam, 14, and Caleb, 18, also have taken part every year, either performing onstage or working in the production crew.

She loves that the commitment brings the family together often for rehearsals, and she finds the message of Charles Dickens' classic



Jerri Shafer/Little Theatre off Broadway via AP

See **COMMUNITY**, page 13

For many, community plays are a holiday tradition.

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# COMMUNITY

continued from page 12

tale sets the right tone for the holidays.

“It’s such a story of redemption that the Scrooge character has a chance to become a better person — it moves me every single time,” she says.

More than that, she relishes the energy and feeling of kinship produced when people of all ages and backgrounds come together to do something creative. “I look forward to it all year,” she said.

Community theater productions take on special meaning at the holidays, agreed Tabi Bryner, who has been directing plays in Hemingford, Nebraska, since 2008. The performances give audience members a way to reconnect with the meaning of the holidays, said Bryner, who studied theater in college and worked as an Equity stage manager for over a decade.

“Live entertainment takes you away from reality for a short couple of hours,” she said, and the holiday-themed plays “help create wonderful memories. We always choose a heartwarming story. Attending the play has become ingrained in the community. It’s what they do.”

Bryner said the performers in her community productions range in age from toddlers to seniors — “It’s what makes the plays so popular,” she said. “Hometown folk acting as though they are paid professionals — they take it very seriously to create great theater. The laughter is hearty and the tears become real from the audience.”

In Grove City, Ohio, Lisa Radwanski says she regularly takes her family to see friends perform in the holiday shows put on at the Little Theatre Off Broadway. Past performances have included “The Twelve Daze of Christmas,” a comedy based on the Christmas carol and “’Twas The Night Before Christmas,” which retells the classic poem with the focus on a mouse and a reindeer.

And in St. Paul, the Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company launched a holiday show in 2000. Initially, the intended audience was Jewish families, but the annual production, which uses both paid actors and community volunteers, has become a holiday tradition for people of many faiths, said Katie Howells, manager of communications and audience engagement. “It’s just really grown,” she said.

The theater, which sometimes commissions playwrights to create shows based on Jewish children’s literature, looks for themes that promote cultural unity and help educate the community about Jewish traditions, while setting the mood for Hanukkah, she said. This year, the troupe will perform “Hanukkah Lights in the Big Sky,” a commissioned work based on the true story of a community in Billings, Montana, that rallied around its Jewish neighbors after a brick was thrown at a menorah in a child’s window.

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# It's a beautiful day

## Book and DVD fans have wide variety of options

By **BROOKE CAIN**

**The News & Observer (Raleigh, N.C.) (TNS)**

Many of us rely more and more on streaming services for TV shows and movies and on Kindle downloads for the latest best-sellers. But the market for DVDs, Blu-rays and good old fashioned books remains strong.

At no time is that more true than at gift-giving time.

With that in mind, we've put together a short list of some of our favorite TV shows and movies on DVD this year, and some books we think would make great holiday gifts.

We've listed the suggested retail prices, but keep in mind that many retailers offer discounts off the list price, so you'll most often pay much less than the prices listed here.

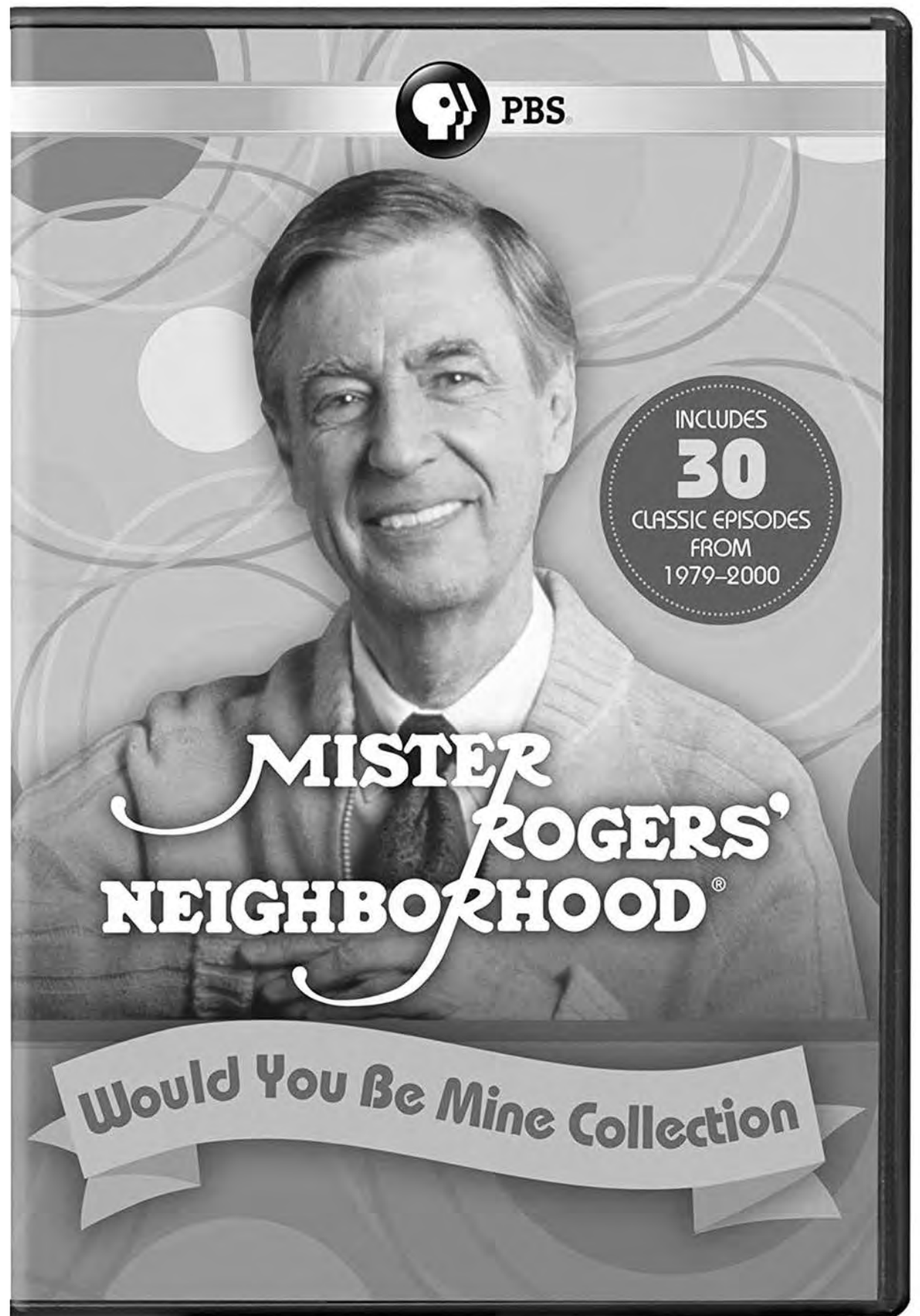
### 2019 BEST TV SHOWS AND MOVIES ON DVD AND BLU-RAY

**"Country Music: A Film by Ken Burns"** — This spectacular 16-hour documentary on the roots of country music and its trailblazers — Jimmie Rodgers, the Carter Family, Johnny Cash, Patsy Cline and literally a hundred others — is one of the most fascinating documentaries we've seen. It's the ultimate gift for a country music (or bluegrass) fan. The box set has the full 16-hour run plus three hours of bonus footage that did not air on PBS. The DVD retails for \$99.99 and the Blu-ray at \$129.99.

**"Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: Would You Be Mine Collection"** — While we're in the PBS world (and in the middle of a national Fred Rogers lovefest), this four-disc set is a stroll down memory lane for those who loved the iconic children's series, and it's still extremely relevant for kids today. You get 15 hours of content at a suggested retail price of \$19.99.

**"Star Trek: Discovery — Season Two"** — "Star Trek" fans love this series, and the second season was even stronger than the first. The series, set in the pre-William Shatner Trekiverse, streams on CBS All Access, a pay streaming service. Not everyone subscribes, so this is a great chance to make a non-streaming Trekkie very happy. The DVD retails at \$29.99 and the Blu-ray at \$34.99. (Note: There are some other great CBS All Access shows on DVD that you might consider, like "The Good Fight," which now has all three seasons available on DVD, and the first season of "Tell Me a Story," a horror anthology series created by North Carolina native Kevin Williamson.)

**"Robin Williams: Comic Genius"** — A super-sized version of this Robin Williams collection was released last year, but with a super-sized price tag: \$200 (the



"Mister Rogers'; Neighborhood: Would You Be Mine Collection."

PBS/Amazon/TNS

# BEAUTIFUL

continued from page 14

price has since come down a little). This much more manageable 5-DVD set retails at \$54.95, but is usually available closer to \$40 at most retailers. It includes all of Williams' HBO specials and other bonus materials.

**Disney Classics** — With the debut of the streaming service Disney+, “the vault is open.” But Disney knows that not everyone can afford (or wants) streaming services. That's why Disney still releases a few of its Signature Collection classic movies onto DVD and Blu-ray every year. These stories are timeless and adored by kids and adults. Some of this year's big titles include “The Little Mermaid,” “Cinderella,” “Aladdin,” “101 Dalmations,” and “Sleeping Beauty.” Most of these list at around \$19.99 each, but there are some special sets that could go up to around \$40. Note: If you want to go beyond classics, the recent live action versions of “Aladdin” and “The Lion King” are also now on Blu-ray and DVD.

**“The Wizard of Oz”** in 4K UHD — 4K televisions are expected to be one of the most purchased items of the 2019 Christmas season, and those lucky folks will need some good 4K Ultra High Definition movies to watch on their crisp new screens. What could be more thrilling than flying monkeys in 4K UHD? This version, released in October, is a Blu-ray + DVD + Digital Code combo. It lists at \$22.99.

**“Batman Beyond: The Complete Series”** — A little pricier (but very cool) is the “Batman Beyond” box set, which features all three seasons (52 episodes) of this Emmy award-winning series about a man who steals Bruce Wayne's batsuit to avenge his father's murder and fight crime. This special collection features a metallic Funko POP and collectible art cards, plus tons of extras. The retail price is \$99.99, but you can find it around \$69.99.

**“Gunsmoke”** and **“Bonanza”** — Don't scoff. The DVD collections for these old-fashioned TV westerns are extremely popular and make great gifts for fans of classic TV. If you search these titles



DC/Amazon/TNS

## “Batman Beyond: The Complete Series.”

on Amazon, you'll find a lot of versions that are of dubious quality, so for the best sound and picture transfer, look for the ones that are titled by season with “Volume 1” and “Volume 2.” Volumes 1 and 2 of the fifteenth season of “Gunsmoke” were just released this year, and the tenth season of “Bonanza” releases Dec. 17. Expect to pay about \$30 each for the later seasons, and around \$15 for earlier seasons. Bonus classic TV recommendation: A special colorized collection of “I Love Lucy” was released this year, featuring 16 classic episodes.

### 2019 BEST BOOKS FOR HOLIDAY GIFT-GIVING

**For the literary fan: “Alice Adams: Portrait of a Writer.”** Fans of literature will love Carol Sklenicka's biography of novelist and short story writer Alice Adams, who grew up in Chapel Hill during the Great Depression and came of age during World War II. Adams wrote about women trying to find fulfillment in a man's world and struggled in the early stages of her career. But she eventually became a regular contributor to The New Yorker and the winner of the O. Henry Special Award. It

lists at \$35 (release date Dec. 3).

**For the history lover: “Midnight in Chernobyl: The Untold Story of the World's Greatest Nuclear Disaster.”** If someone on your shopping list loved the enthralling HBO miniseries “Chernobyl,” they can go even deeper with Adam Higginbotham's detailed account of the 1986 nuclear power plant explosion. This was named by The New York Times as one of the best books of the year. List price is \$29.99.

**For the Southerner: “Southern Women”** from the editors of Garden & Gun magazine. This 2019 release features essays on more than 100 Southern women (both living and passed on) who are innovators, artists and icons. You'll recognize a good number of North Carolina women in this collection, including Ashley Christensen, Vivian Howard, Amy Sedaris, Rhiannon Giddens, Lee Smith, Michelle Dorrance, Maya Freelon and Laura Vinroot Poole. List price \$32.50.

**For the Michelle Obama fan: “Becoming: A Guided Journal for Discovering Your Voice.”** This journal is meant as a companion for Obama's

best selling memoir, “Becoming,” and will help guide readers to write their own story by providing quotes and prompts from Obama to get them started. Suggested retail is \$19.99.

**For the cook: America's Test Kitchen collection.** If you're not a pro in the kitchen, it's hard to go wrong with any of the books from the America's Test Kitchen collection, known for recipes that are tested to death to find the absolute best methods, and then explained in a way anyone can follow. ATK has had some particularly great releases in 2019: “The Side Dish Bible” (\$35), “America's Test Kitchen Twentieth Anniversary TV Show Cookbook” (\$40) and “The Perfect Pie” (\$35) are just a few of the standouts. The “Side Dish” book has more than 1,000 recipes for almost every kind of side dish you can imagine, from simple staples to special sides for special occasions. The TV show book is a collection of the best recipes from two decades of the show, plus all recipes from Season 20. It's a great cookbook for basic dishes and the slightly more complicated. “The Perfect Pie” is pretty self-explan-

atory: it covers classic and modern pies, tarts, galettes and regional favorites, in addition to great instructions on how to master crusts, creams and sauces.

**For the budding artist: “Draw Any Animal Book.”** This book would be great for kids, with its simple, step-by-step lessons from French artist Robert Lambry on how to draw animals. These tutorials were originally published in a children's paper in the 1920s and 1930s and then published in a book called “Les Animaux tels Qu'ils Sont” (“Animals as They Are”) almost 100 years ago. The book has found new life this year from publisher Quarto. And it's darling. Retail price: \$16.99.

**For the fiction (mystery) fan: “The Last House Guest.”** This is author Megan Miranda's third novel and it was picked as the August selection for Reese Witherspoon's book club. Though Miranda lives in North Carolina, the story is set in a small coastal town in Maine and tells the story of the longtime friendship between two women — a local and a vacationer — and what happens when one of those women is found dead. List price is \$26.99.

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