

The hunt for last-minute gems

BY JENNIFER FOLEY
STAFF WRITER

From daggers to wooden children's toys, Sandra Collins has art for a spectrum of customers from collectors to those just looking for a well-crafted gift.

In fact, variety tends to be the driving force of her life and the reason she opened not one, but two galleries in Birmingham.

Collins grew up in Hawaii, known for its picture perfect weather, but she has no intentions of moving away from her Birmingham home before the temperature begins to plummet.

"I really do enjoy the change of season and the change of clothing," Collins said. "It's just for more interesting to me."

Sandra Collins Gallery mainly features the highest level of contemporary art craft. Mediums include wood, glass metal clay and fiber. In Gallery Nikko, customers will find handcrafted, imaginative pieces in a wide variety of styles for varied budgets.

"In my primary gallery you have much more serious pieces and people really think before they buy down here," Collins said. "And I just wanted to do something fun."

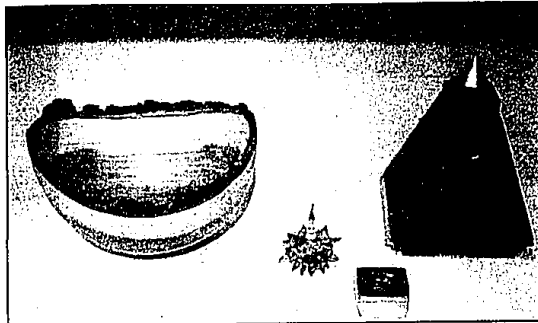
Gallery Nikko features handmade wooden toys, colorful fleece blankets and other baby to toddler items from large stuffed puppets to mosses, and gifts for weddings and graduations. The gallery also features holiday items like hand-blown glass ornaments, gifts for men such as jewelry boxes, cufflinks, and pen desk sets and gifts for women including jewelry, wooden box purses and unusual hand knit scarves.

"I found a lot of wonderful artists that do fabulous wooden toys," she said. "They're very well-made at reasonable price points."

Prices range on average from \$10 to \$150 at Gallery Nikko. The lower prices can be a draw for younger buyers.

"If you expose youth to well-made hand-crafted items that becomes part of their life style," Collins said.

Her education in art history at the University of Michigan drew her to Michigan. After working as a curator of arts at the DIA, a desire to research the contemporary art and craft scene led her to open



Bowls and bottles: This one-of-a-kind walnut, natural edge, classic bowl retails for \$130. Another good choice for any woman is the lamp-worked glass perfume bottle, \$200. The pewter box has an intricate berry design delicately stamped on the top, \$37. Or the "Rasputin" three-layer box incorporates wood and recycled wood turnings. It is also hand painted using colorful automotive lacquers and metallic finishes. A variety of styles and sizes are available. Retail for \$195.

the Sandra Collins Gallery and later, Gallery Nikko, located one floor above.

The thrill of the hunt

Collins enjoys the hunt to find the perfect art for her galleries. In fact, that's mainly what led her to plunge into custom made knives as an art form.

"My husband has thrown knives for years. He had these custom made throwing knives," said Collins, who also throws knives as a hobby.

"I just became aware that there was this field out there that no one really had researched," she said. "We are the only gallery (in America) that recognizes the knives as an art form and we exhibit art knives. No other gallery exhibits this medium."

Love them or hate them, there's no middle ground when it comes to the impression custom made knives leave on customers, Collins said. But the work that goes into them drives her love for the art.

Custom knife designers even make the metal for the blade.

Sandra Collins Gallery is the exclusive representative in the United States for South Carolina jewelry artist Lynn Strong who makes interchangeable jewelry sets. She has a patent on her modular line of jewelry which features parts that can be linked together or attached to other jewelry.

"It's a very sophisticated concept in which you can interchange and exchange pieces," Collins said. "It's really a versatile system and it allows you a lot of flexibility."

Whether you're looking for an expensive piece or one a little less pricey, gallery employees will be able to give you the background on the piece and the artist.

Nikko is located at 470 N. Old Woodward in Birmingham. Gallery hours in December are Tuesdays - Saturdays 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. and Thursdays until 8:30 p.m. or by appointment.

Three area inventors sell family game

Here's a gift that is fun for practically everyone in your life — from the boss to the kids.

And it was invented by three Oakland County men who've shared a friendship since high school.

The invention is a game called *Aeroshuffle*, presented by Timeless Toys, created by friends and business partners Chris Hoffman, Larry Hoffmann (no relation) and Brian Russell. It's a competitive indoor/outdoor aerial shuffleboard game with bean bags as discs that can be played with two, three or four players ages 8 and up.

It's a perfect game for families, or groups of friends, who are looking for fun to get them through the winter months.

So fun is the game that it's taken Hoffman, Hoffmann and Russell quite a few years to get the game



Playing a round: One of the games co-creators Larry Hoffmann plays a round of *Aeroshuffle*.

public — one partial reason is that they're always too busy having fun playing their creation.

Aeroshuffle contains a bumping bean bag discus that can be tossed or slid onto a 28-by-72 inch reinforced vinyl playing surface. Similar to shuffleboard, it has a scoreboard where players can use pennies, nickels or dimes.

"It's fun, it's competitive and can get really exciting," Chris Hoffman said. "And it takes skill."

The game is already a hit at the Clawson Teen center where Chris Hoffman's teenager works — teens there have been playing the game constantly.

"We also like that it's gender friendly and age friendly. Older can beat the younger and vice versa," he said.

Chris Hoffman, who's father was also a toy inventor, says he has other creative game ideas swimming in his head. But, for now, *Aeroshuffle* is his main focus.

Hoffman, along with pals and business partners Hoffmann and Russell, said they came up with the idea together ... it just evolved over time, he said. The men all have careers and *Aeroshuffle* is their "side" project that seems like an obvious success.

The men get together every year for an annual summer canoe trip — realizing the importance of friendship. Like a vacation, *Aeroshuffle*, being that it can be played as teams, is great for bonding.

The creators hope the game is one that families will want to play during the holiday break. So far, it's selling well.

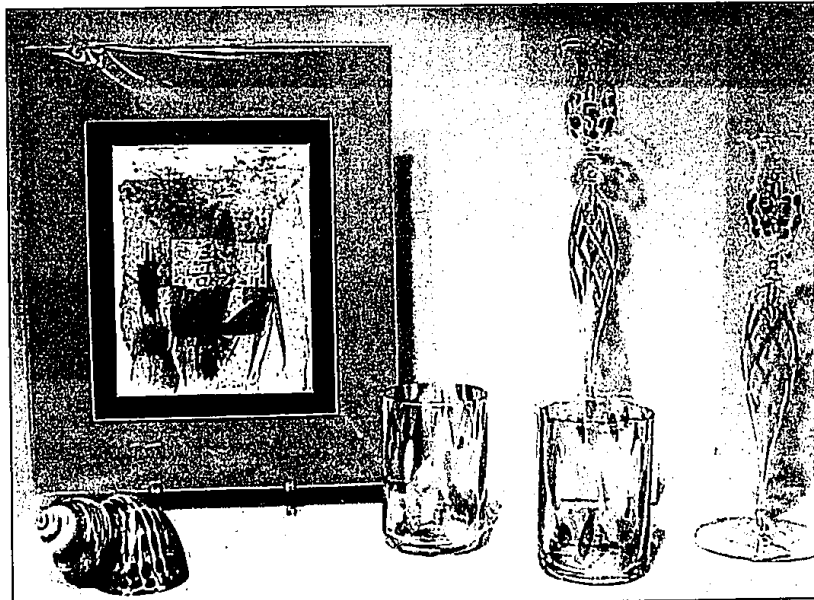
Aeroshuffle can be purchased at Adventures in Toyland on Maple in Birmingham and Metro Sports of Michigan on 14 Mile in Clawson. Or at www.tmttoys.com

—Staff writer Lana Mini



Fun and games: Chris Hoffman sits with *Aeroshuffle*, a new game he and his partners invented and which is now out in time for the holiday.

PHOTOS BY TOM HOFFMEYER



Stunning: Traditional hand blown glass candlesticks, \$62; hand blown glass watercolor tumblers, \$28; and hand blown glass shell paperweight with iridescent shell, \$100, would make good gifts. The "Longevity" hand-dyed rice paper collage retails for \$130.

INSIDE



MARTY FIOLEY

Holiday blooms

Gardenia and other plants make wonderful holiday gifts.

Garden Spot,
Page 3



JOE GAGNON

The Appliance Doctor

The Appliance Doctor says be safe for a happy holiday.

Appliance Doctor,
Page 2

INSIDE THIS SECTION

Don't miss ...

ECCENTRIC LIFE