



This is a view of some of the Christmas decorations at Bronner's Christmas Wonderland in Frankenmuth.

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COMPLIMENTARY GIFT WRAPPING

These yule gift ideas may even surprise Santa

By Joan Boram
special writer

TRADITION IS the essence of Christmas. The holiday is characterized by carols and wassail and Christmas trees and the exchange of gifts, and that's the way everybody wants it.

Indeed, the very language of Christmas, words like Christmas, yule, wreath, mistletoe, holiday, holly and angels, date from before the 12th century.

We do see the occasional pink plastic Christmas tree and shower curtains that depict Santa in his bath. But such trifling innovations (or lapses in taste) don't alter the spirit of the celebration. Most of us still think red and green, gold and silver.

Mr. and Mrs. Santa reign supreme at The Mole Hole of Birmingham. Created by Apple Whimseys, the pair, dressed in rich red velvet, are an interpretation of the Appalachian folk art of dried apple dolls. The heads are actually made of resin, but are cast in molds made from dried apple heads. They look like the real thing, but won't deteriorate or change color.

Mr. Santa (\$185) has a full pack of toys slung over his shoulder, and his fur-trimmed hat sports a bell. His spouse, gussied up in a fur-trimmed bonnet, carries a fur muff (\$115).

THERE'S A Victorian Gent (\$225) also by Apple Whimseys, that's hard to resist. He's a never-was animal, most resembling a slightly stuffy stuffed bear, fitted out in a black velvet coat and a cravat with a "diamond" stickpin.

His French cuffs are complete with "onyx" cufflinks, and in one hand, he carries a walking stick topped with a "silver" duck. In the other hand are gift packages, wrapped in red plaid, tied with green ribbon and trimmed with tiny rose buds.

Also at The Mole Hole are delicately beaded ornaments guaranteed to enhance any Christmas vignette. There's a scarlet cardinal, with details outlined in tiny gold beads, and a multicolored bird inspired by a peacock's brilliant colors. An ornament with "Noel" picked out in pastels on white is reminiscent of a Victorian ladies' reticule, outlined in gold (\$8.95-\$12.95).

Candles have come a long way since the pristine tapers of earlier times. For example, there are "ornaments" in traditional shapes (Turk's cap, round, pyramidal) in traditional colors (red, green, silver, gold); the taper is almost incidental. (\$16.95).

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Royal Oak likes to refer to itself as "The Midwest's Terra Cotta Cherub Center." There certainly is an abundance of terra cotta cherubs in various sizes and forms, ranging in price from \$4 to \$35.

From the Victorian Essence Collection, there are cherubs blowing kisses, to sit on the edge of a mantle, three-inch seated cherubs, cherub heads to hang on a tree or to adorn a wreath; other hanging pieces are cherubs with horns or flutes. There are caryatid cherubs supporting brackets, other brackets feature cherub details.

Cherubs adorn terra cotta scent hearts: the terra cotta is baked to make it porous. When a small amount of potpourri oil is poured into the six-inch heart, the oil will evaporate through the clay to give a delicious fragrance.

Structural Accents has a fine collection of castings made from medieval architectural details. Among them are four-inch cherub heads, cast from a wood-like composition. (\$8).

Or, if you favor one of the miniature trees so popular now, you might like to place it on one of Structural Accents' Corinthian columns (\$24-\$99). After all, says owner Robert Karazim, "They were all the rage in the year 1. That's about as traditional as you can get."

VICTORIANA IS the Christmas theme at the Old Detroit Shop in the Detroit Historical Museum.

"Appropriately so," says store manager Valerie Revitzer, "because many of our Christmas customs were brought to Victorian England by Albert, Victoria's German consort."

For a bell collector, there's a four-inch brass Victorian lady whose full skirt is the bell (\$14.50). A bisque Santa head bell is \$10.95.

Pink porcelain cherubs (\$20-\$40), sitting, standing or pomanders, are decorated with dried flowers and ribbons. A cherub pillow, complete with wings, is \$21.50.

For nostalgia buffs, or if you're