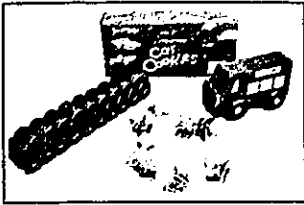


Presents that prove the thought counts

BY KELLY TERRY
SPECIAL WRITER

"Gifts should be fabulous. They need to save you time, embellish your life, and they shouldn't be dust collectors," says author and consumer advocate Robyn Spizman.

That's a pretty tall order. But Spizman - also known as gift guru and super shopper - assures that with a little time and imagination, you can give creative, useful gifts for under \$25.



Candy and cars: Ribbon candy, Candy Bouquet, \$3.25, Farmington; Corvette car cookies, \$1.75, Village Hidden Treasures, Farmington; Genuine Vermont Montgomery School-house wooden truck, \$3.80, Angel Treasures, Farmington and glitter paint with hair clips, \$5, at Koochie-koo, West Bloomfield.

Spizman knows her stuff when it comes to gift giving. She's written more than 64 books in her 16-year career as a consumer advocate. The most recent is "The Perfect Present," which came out in 1998. She's also made more than 1,200 TV appearances, including spots on CNN and NPR. She has appeared in Family Circle, Parent's Magazine and Parade Magazine.

"The reason a gift is so important, is that gifts make us feel like someone knows us," says Spizman. It's a major faux pas to give someone something they don't like, says Spizman, citing the time she was given perfume, to which she is allergic.

Hilka Klinkenberg also has some pointers for gift giving on a budget. Klinkenberg is managing director of Etiquette International, a consulting service on business etiquette and author of "At Ease ... Professionally," which includes a chapter on gift giving.

"One of the trends I have really noticed so far this year, is that people are going toward a very celebratory mood or wanting to simplify. One thing people don't want is junk; no gadgets, no dust collectors."

"You want to feel as though you're special by having received the gift," says Klinkenberg.

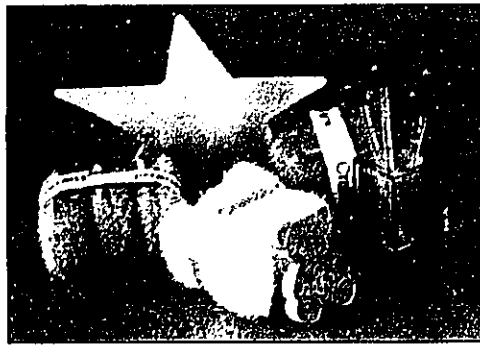
"That isn't a money issue; it's a thought issue."

Here are some thoughts from Spizman and Klinkenberg on gifts under \$25:

- The gift of organization: Select an

attractive crate or storage bin of some kind and fill it with colorful file folders, Rolodex cards and other organizational tools. Wrap a festive ribbon around the container and bestow it on someone who could use a little bit of order in their life. Spizman even recommends offering to come to their house and help get them started.

- Music: "Find out when the person was 'Sweet 16' and give them the music from that year," Spizman urges. "That's the time when every one of us locked in to some type of music." Further personalize the gift, she says, by telling the person 16 reasons why you adore them (Spizman often uses number themes for her own gift giving).
- Personalized stationery: Spizman



Sponge & stir: Prima sponges, \$2.50 for a package of three, Crate & Barrel, Somerset Collection, Troy; Aluminum star coaster, \$4, The Green Bee, Royal Oak; Candle shaver, \$4, The Green Bee, Royal Oak; Glass olive picks, \$4.75 set of four, Crate & Barrel, Somerset Collection, Troy and Teddy bear brown sugar saver, \$3.75 at Deb's Crafts, Farmington.

went to her local quick copy store and had note cards made up with a drawing by her six-year-old daughter, whom she calls "her own little Picasso. I'm still using them six years later," she reports. According to Kinko's Copies, you can

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