

A Mediterranean Medley of Color and Crunch

By Susie Iventosch



Garbanzo Bean Sun-dried Tomato Salad

Photo Susie Iventosch

Garbanzo Bean Sun-dried Tomato Salad

(Serves 6-8 as a side dish, or 3-4 as a luncheon course)

INGREDIENTS

1 can (15 oz.) garbanzo beans, drained
3 tablespoons sun-dried tomatoes, julienned and packed in oil, drained
2 stalks celery, finely sliced
½ cup marinated artichoke hearts, cut into bite-sized pieces
1 small clove garlic, crushed
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1-2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

Place first four ingredients in a bowl. Mix olive oil, vinegar, and garlic and drizzle over salad. Toss well and season to taste with salt and pepper. Store in refrigerator and remove about 20 minutes before serving to allow dressing to warm up a bit.

I like to serve this over a bed of lettuce, and it makes an excellent accompaniment to eggplant or lamb dishes.

Susie Iventosch is the author of *Tax Bites* and *Tasty Morsels*, which can be found at *Across the Way* in Moraga, www.amazon.com, and www.taxbites.net.

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This recipe can be found on our website: www.lamorindaweekly.com. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.



Have a Cup of Cheer at Rustic Tavern

By A.K. Carroll



Photo A.K. Carroll

Burl Ives sang it best: “Have a holly jolly Christmas, it’s the best time of the year. I don’t know if there’ll be snow, but have a cup of cheer.” Here in Lamorinda, chances for a snow are scarce, but opportunities for cheer abound in bistros, bars and restaurants. This week make a slight diversion from the hunt for happy hour in order to sip on some seasonal cocktails and share a cozy moment in Lafayette’s Rustic Tavern.

The holiday season – that festive sweet spot between Thanksgiving and New Year’s – brings moments of merriment, bouts of busyness and an abundance of excuses to meet up for a drink. With a sparkling new libations menu featuring seasonal flavors and festive cocktails, Rustic Tavern is ready to accommodate for any occasion, and in a setting that invites you to sit back and sip slowly.

Intentional simplicity marks the

menu and the atmosphere at Rustic Tavern. Small details like the polished reclaimed wood, fresh cut flowers, flickering tea lights and parchment paper menus create an overall artisanal ambiance. Arrive just after sunset for dimly-lit drinking (and dining) that is cozy and romantic. Take your pick of seats from the dozen bar stools, plentiful two tops, family-sized table or space-heated outdoor options. Then make your libation selection.

Designed by newcomer and front of the house manager AJ Verzosa, Rustic Tavern’s fresh seasonal cocktail selections range from merry drinks to serious swills. The bright fuchsia Blood Moon Margartia looks (and tastes) like a party in a tumbler. Made with fresh-squeezed blood orange juice, lime, solerno and tequila blanco, this lush pick-me-up is served with a slice orange and a chile salt rim that provides just the right balance of

sweet, sour and spicy. Meanwhile, the Pear and Spice and everything iced provides more subtle sipping option in which notes of clove and rosemary muddle with sweet pear puree and botanical gin. For the wine enthusiast who has a hankering for something special, there’s the singular Grape Stomp Martini – a vodka-based beverage crafted with lemon, St. Germain and a reduction of Concord grapes, making for a jammy burgundy martini that dares you to describe it without using the term “tannic.” More serious swillers may opt for the straight-forward flavors of the refashioned old fashioned, made with Bulleit bourbon bitters, muddled orange and a smoked maple syrup that gives depth to a classic.

For the less complicated crowd, Rustic Tavern also offers a rotation of four draft beers (including the Racer 5 IPA, Trumer Pils, and an 8 Bridges brown ale), as well as standard well drinks and plentiful wine options, all of which are discounted during their 2:30 to 5 p.m. happy hour, which runs Tuesday through Friday afternoons. Drafts are priced at \$3 each, with house wines and wells going for \$5.

Whether it’s a holiday drink, a catch up with an old friend or an afternoon escape while the family is in town, with its new selection of seasonal cocktails, happy hour options and charming twinkle lights, Rustic Tavern has your cup of cheer covered.

Rustic Tavern

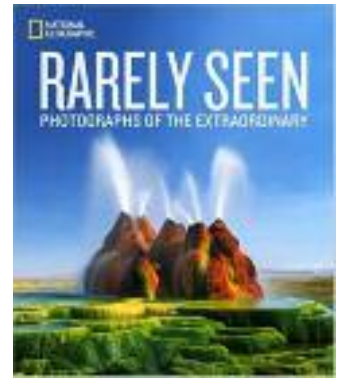
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Holiday Gift Ideas, Both Big and Small

By Lou Fancher



Hammacher handcrafted Hippopotamine sofa
Photos provided



So now it’s down to the wire. If you don’t have that spectacular gift for a special someone, you need to think simple. Recognizing the possibilities are infinite, hone the choices to big or small and stay local or go online. Why spend hours in bad traffic when you could be home, lounging on a hippo – which kicks off our last-minute something-for-anyone list.

Yes, count on Hammacher Schlemmer to come up with something “big” and unneeded for people with too much spare change. The 198-pound Handcrafted Hippopotamine Sofa made with “tufted full-grain leather” and covered in “pebbled leather-like polyurethane” is meant to simulate a hippo’s hairless skin and comes with a hefty price tag: \$95,000. Does that include shipping? We didn’t even ask, so stunned were we with the idea of also ordering a fleet of remote control snapping crocodiles, a bargain at \$39.95 apiece.

Should the hippo hangout ever disappoint you, it comes with the company’s lifetime guarantee and can be or returned for credit or exchanged. What, they have an elephantine bed?

OK, now for small – and local.

Moraga-based Hollie’s Homegrown company specializes in culinary and medicinal herbs, herbal teas, bath and body products, and herb-infused olive oils, vinegars and honey. Owner Hollie Lucas-Alcalay brings her extensive marketing know-how, three generations of farm family experience, herbs grown in her own backyard and a mother’s love to items that help you “take good care of yourself and your family.” From tiny lemon-scented candles to tall, slender bottles of Tuscan Rosemary Olive Oil, everything offered takes care of the large (sustainable farming practices protect the planet) and smaller needs: lips, throats, taste buds.

Conceding a strong bias toward books as best-of-all gifts, shopping at Orinda Books is a no-brainer. The independent bookstore stocks local art, photography, music and jewelry, but the main ingredient is books.

Speaking of ingredients, one “big” book of the year is a standout: the 6-pound, 9-ounce cookbook, “The Food Lab: Better Home Cooking Through Science” (W. W. Norton & Company). Serious Eats Culinary Director and Internet cooking guru J. Kenji López-Alt backs up everyday foods like mac’n’cheese, steak, cheeseburgers, risotto and roasted vegetables with rigorous science and over 1,000 full color images. The 960-page behemoth (29 copies equals 1 hippo couch) from the San Mateo-based author is in many ways a bargain at \$49.95 and a great gift for foodies. To discern its value, think

about how many times you will peek at its pages as you prepare the best boiled eggs, savory smashed turkey, or fried chicken with skin that’s nothing like pebbled polyurethane. With invaluable science-backed advice about knives, freezing foods, grass-fed versus grain-fed beef and how to make the best pancakes ever, get a doorstop to match that living room furniture – make a hippo happy.

The perfect counterpart to all that heft is Cheryl Strayed’s 135-page “Brave Enough” (Knopf). The roughly 5-by-7-inch edition, a collection of quotes from the New York Times best-selling author of “Wild” – the first selection of Oprah’s Book Club 2.0 and an Oscar-nominated film starring Reese Witherspoon – feeds the soul after Food Lab has taken care of the stomach. Including advice that Strayed followed on her Pacific Coast Trail journey and words to which we all aspire, the missives are scrubbed of pretense and introduced with brief essays that are in themselves truly brave enough. Parents note, this is for the plus-16 crowd.

Harmony often comes in threes so strike the perfect chord with National Geographic’s “Rarely Seen” (\$40). Pictures of wonders of the world captured by photojournalist Stephen Alvarez during his 20-year career as a National Geographic photographer are thematically organized around phenomena, life, places, objects and moments. Words pale when attempting to define the images, but suffice it to say that stars pinwheeling above granite arches, 650 zigzag steps resembling a corset up the face of the Rock of Guatapé, a worker resting on cauliflower-like bails of cotton in Côte d’Ivoire and red-jacketed ecotourists labeled as “Penguin Paparazzi” as they line up to document a lonely penguin are only a few of the book’s rarely seen splendors.

Of course, if you are really jammed for gifts, there is always cash. You can go big, like do a Zuckerberg/Chan and give \$45 billion in stock to a charitable foundation in your kid’s name – and watch them scream. Or go small. The younger generation will be wowed by the old-fashioned novelty – anecdotally proven by a teenager who, when handed a \$5 bill said, “Wow, paper money, how retro.”

But the one gift you can give that will never be refused, never be too silly, never get old and worn or smeared with potato chip grease (what else are you going to eat while sitting on that hippo lounger?) and will never cost a dime, is love.

Give some love. Get some love. Be grateful. It’s that easy.

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