

Handmade in HOUSTON

LET'S FACE IT: Every year we present at least one of our loved ones with that not-so-perfect present. How many Whataburger gift cards and Saint Arnold six packs can one person hand out each holiday?

This year we at *Houstonia* turned to a few of the Bayou City's finest artisans for help finding the most thoughtful selections. And we do mean *help!* Because who has the time or—more crucially—the talent to pull off knitting the perfect beanie or scarf this year? Well, our city's incredible craftspeople, that's who, and boy do they have talent to spare. From the simple and elegant to the unique and unexpected, there's a hand-crafted option for everyone on your list, each with its own intriguing story. It's going to be your best gift-giving year ever.

BY
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H-Town Beanie **Claire Drennan Knits**

East End textile artist **Claire Drennan** first fell in love with knitting when she went back to school for fashion design several years ago. Her first knit collection of hats, scarves, and leg warmers was inspired by a favorite children's book, but, in 2017, she created her popular H-Town Beanie.

Using soft, organic merino wool from Maine (the company's been spinning the material for 100 years), Drennan spends at least three hours sewing each beanie on a manual knitting machine, which works a bit like a loom, as she passes the knitting carriage across the bed of latch-hook needles. The result? An unassuming, two-tone cap that reads "H-Town" again and again just above the lip—a Fair Isle design that's 100 percent Clutch City. Get it in Astros orange with gray text or in gray or pebble blue with tangerine text. Either way, this timeless accessory is perfect for expressing Houston pride. "It's a pretty universal design that just about anyone can pull off," says Drennan. "I make them for everyone, from kids to your grandad."

\$75, clairedrennan.com >





Black and Gold Lidded Vessel Box Sparrow Studio

Although Etsy-featured artist **Abbie Preston** struggled in her first ceramics class back in 2009, something kept her coming back. In 2014 she started her own ceramics business, Box Sparrow Studio. And today she can sit down at the wheel and bring just about anything she imagines to life, including a line of elegant dishware.

Among the must-haves are her lidded vessels, which are challenging to create because they can so easily go wrong in the kiln if the sides warp or shrink or the glazes seal the lid to the body. "I like the challenge and attention to detail that they demand and the pure satisfaction when you unload them from the last firing and they fit perfectly together," she says.

The creations in Preston's new abstract collection, with freeform swooshes and flicks of white, some of which are overlaid with 22k gold luster atop a sea of black, are a sight to behold. Applying the glazes (many of them mixed from scratch) is all intuitive, says Preston—the exact opposite of the technical precision it takes to make the clay form beneath. Sometimes it's a layer or two of glaze that takes only a few minutes to apply. Other times it's weeks of tests as Preston overlaps and combines colors while searching for that perfect finish. Since these gorgeous containers are multi-use, you're bound to find a place for them in your home.

From \$80, boxsparrowstudio.com

Antler Razor Kit

MC Shave Gear

Brady Orand, co-owner of Richmond-based craftsman grooming company MC Shave Gear, learned how to turn (the craft of spinning wood on a lathe while using hand tools to cut and carve a symmetrical shape) from his father nearly 45 years ago. After four decades of experience, he can carve razors out of any kind of domestic or exotic woods—from West African black limba to Texas Mesquite (a bestseller of the brand, which has been around since 2014). But Orand's antler razor is next level.

The unique product was added to MC Shave Gear's line in 2016 after a retired doctor turned fallow deer farmer challenged Orand to make a razor from one of his animal's shed horns, says wife and business co-owner Monica Orand. After cutting the horn—sourced from the Texas Hill Country—to size, Brady then turns, chisels, sands, and seals each piece by hand in his shop, a process that takes about four hours for the razor and stand. If you're real lucky, you might find a kit that includes a hand-turned brush made entirely with soft, badger hair bristles.

From \$139, mcshavegear.com



Portia Earrings

Summer Bucket

For Seabrook-based designer **Debra Lochridge**, who's operated jewelry line Summer Bucket since 2011, there's an elegance in minimalism. A seemingly simplistic shape can easily elevate a look without overpowering it, she says. Better yet, minimalist designs transcend the fashion moment of today, and offer a bang for our buck—something we're all looking for right now, even when it comes to jewelry, right?

Made from thick strips of 14-karat gold plate and sterling silver that Lochridge cuts, smooths, hammers, and polishes by hand, Summer Bucket's Portia Earrings are timeless. Of course, she isn't using any old hammer; it's a special texturing tool that imprints the metals with subtle striations that give the earrings an "overall edgy yet feminine look," she says. It also makes them glint when they catch light, ensuring you'll soak up some seriously envious looks along with a sunny sparkle.

\$88 summer-bucket.com





Chevron Teardrop Cheese Board Workshop on Sara Rose

There's a kind of magic that happens when finishing oil touches a freshly cut board, according to **Meggie Bernards**, a Timbergrove-based woodcarver. "The various colors and patterns of grain emerge," she describes. "It's like revealing something that was previously hidden." That's part of the reason Bernards hand-selects each piece of hardwood she uses in her custom woodcraft shop. Every shade that emerges as the oil soaks in is completely au naturel, drawn out of the wood itself (yes, even the reds, purples, and yellows) without the aid of any dyes or stains. "I hand-select every piece of wood based on the variation and intensity of color," she adds.

Bernards originally got into woodworking as a hobby when she decided to mend a pair of vintage lawn chairs years ago. From there she so enjoyed learning the craft it turned into a side hustle, which has become a fulltime enterprise since she was furloughed from her day job earlier this year because of the pandemic.

Since starting Workshop on Sara Rose roughly two years ago, Bernards has carved everything from bottle openers to wine caddies to lazy Susans. Her most popular products are handmade cutting boards, which take her a few days to cut, plane, glue, smooth, and oil, and come in a variety of sizes and styles—some as big as your torso, others shaped like U.S. states.

Then there's the chevron-patterned teardrop boards. Those take Bernards nearly a week to make as she glues strips of red oak to form stripes, cutting, rotating, and then regluing it all together as she goes (sanding and oiling have to wait until all that glue dries). Though challenging, creating the pattern is like solving a puzzle, she says. "I mix and match, and arrange and rearrange, until the colors and patterns all look whole." \$54, www.workshoponsararose.com



Zig Zag Handle Baguette Ceibo

When **Maria Cadena** moved from Ecuador to the Bayou City in 2015, she wanted to bring a piece of her home with her. Thus, after starting her purse and accessory line a year later, she named the business Ceibo (pronounced say-bo) for the trees that grow along the Pacific coastline. Given the green origin of her company's name, it's really no surprise that Cadena's brand specializes in environmentally conscious, vegan designs. "There are plenty of cruelty-free and eco-friendly materials, natural fibers that simulate leather," Cadena says, "and sometimes they are even more beautiful than leather."

A perfect example of this is Ceibo's Zig Zag Handle Baguette, first introduced in 2018. Between the hand-cutting, gluing, sewing, and painting, Cadena spends approximately four hours making each of these geometric shoulder statements. The design combines a classic baguette shape with a funky, zig-zag shoulder strap to create a look that's as sleek as it is practical. Stylish yet sensible, the bag features a color block composition, with the body in one tone and the handle in a different, complementary color—the first collection of the baguettes (a few are still available) were made out of polyurethane and came in four vibrant colors, including navy blue with a yellow handle and fire-engine red with a hot pink handle. Her newest batch are cut out of Piñatex, a natural leather alternative made from pineapple leaf fibers.

\$110, shopceibo.com

Bourbon Barrel Honey Hive Bee Farm

When lifelong entomophobe **Cyrus Nasr** watched his wife set up two beehives in their Garden Oaks backyard in 2016, he had a simple response—"Okay, I will support you. From the other side of the bedroom window." Two years later he became a fulltime beekeeper with 150 hives across Houston. Of course, Nasr doesn't just partake in the care and keeping of bees; he uses all that golden nectar his buzzing buddies produce to make delicious products, including raw, bourbon barrel-aged honey. "It's got a nice light smoke, just the right amount of bourbon flavor, and a touch of spice."

Nasr let his first batch sit in an Elijah Craig cask for 90 days, giving it plenty of time to soak up all the bourbon goodness. His newest, however, has been absorbing all the sweet, smoky flavor of a Whitmeyer's Distilling Co. rye-blend barrel since September. Whether you bake it into your holiday sweets, swirl some into your tea (or your old fashioned, we don't judge), or slather it on your festive ham, this honey will fit right at home in any gourmand's kitchen.

\$30. hivebeefarm.com

