

christmas unwrapped

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how to spend it
special festive edition

Reviewing a book by the late, great florist Jane Packer some years ago – *Jane Packer: Flowers, Design, Philosophy* – made me realise that flowers are just as fraught a social minefield as clothes or food or interior design. They may look so innocent and pretty sitting there, but they're filled with hidden taste booby-traps waiting to catch out the unwary. Ms Packer was quite, quite clear that the flowers you buy and the vessel you choose to put them in tells the world a great deal about you. As I surveyed my clutch of standbys (the simple white ceramic cylinders, the clear glass bowls of various sizes, the vintage china jugs I love so much), I realised that for the Packers of this world a collection like mine was nothing like as big – or smart – enough to cope with the modish world's demanding floral standards.

According to Packer's dictat, what the fashionable floral statement seemed to require was flower-specific containers. Page upon page filled with ravishing photographs followed, each arrangement bearing a different container matched carefully to each petal, branch, stalk and leaf. Where the average house was supposed to store all this paraphernalia was not vouchsafed. But what it does is highlight the fact that few of us have enough vases to cope with every floral eventuality. So come Christmas, when brows are furrowed as to what might give pleasure and fulfil a need, a new, carefully chosen vase could well be just the thing. From small specialist galleries with an array of artist-made glass vessels and ceramic containers, to the grand stores, there has seldom been so much choice.

When thinking about what to give, florist Rob Van Helden makes the (obvious) point that "a vase needs to be in keeping with its environment". He and his fellow weaver of horticultural magic, Stephen Woodhams, turn to the pieces from William Yeoward's beautiful hand-cut lead-crystal collection (from £33) when something formal and classically elegant is required. Though today Yeoward purveys a complete home-interiors range, he started back in 1996 by collaborating with Timothy Jenkins to sell fine crystal made in the traditional way. Now he also creates splendid crystal flower containers, ranging from bud vases (£115), through some art-deco designs (£665 for the spherical Inez; £663 for Aurora, a vase like an oversized wine glass), to a huge and striking centrepiece, Xenia (£11,750).

Woodhams likes Yeoward's Strata vase in amethyst (£99). "It is so easy to arrange just a few stems of



DISPLAYS *of* AFFECTION

Vases as striking and sculptural as these are as much beautiful objets d'art as receptacles. And at this time of year, they make the perfect gift, says Lucia van der Post

From far left: William Yeoward glass Favorita vase, £289. Jonathan Harris for Asprey crystal Four Seasons Autumn vase, £3,000. Baccarat crystal Spirale vase, from £305. Kate Hume glass Pebbles vase, £339, from The Conran Shop



flowers in it, while even a single head of hydrangea will look divine," he says. He is also a fan of Yeoward's fuchsia-coloured glass vase, Favorita (£289, pictured on previous pages), which he likes for its lovely curved shape, "as it makes it very easy to pop a hand-tied bunch straight into it, which looks great".

Another source of beautiful and traditional pieces is Asprey, which has commissioned studio glass-artist Jonathan Harris to create a series of large mouth-blown lead-free vases that celebrate the four seasons. The urn-shaped Autumn (£3,000, pictured on previous pages), for instance, is 19cm high, has a nice wide mouth and features hand-carved acorns and oak leaves, all layered with several enamel amber tones to give a rich, deep-relief effect. Winter (also £3,000) is the same size and shape, but comes in layers of dark navy and blue enamel, embellished with a wintry scene of leafless trees. For those who prefer simpler designs



Clockwise from left:
BCXSY rubber/wire vase, €188. Iittala glass Alvar Aalto vase, €209. Mark Braun for Lobmeyr glass Fortune vase, €720. Habitat Eli vases, from €30. Lynn Read glass Aurora bottles, €240 each

elusive Mr Vesque way back in the early 1920s. Drawing on Chinese imagery is the Golden Dragon vase (£2,900) in the same series, which is a recreation of a design originally created in 1882, when

Baccarat used this mythical creature on a lot of its lighting. This version (also a limited edition of 99) emulates the shape of a Chinese jar, while the black crystal is emblazoned with a hand-engraved and gilded dragon.

For something more classical, Alvar Aalto's wavy vases for the Finnish company Iittala (example pictured left, £209), which come in various sizes and colours, are hard to beat. I have a group of three in milky white and love them to bits. They were first launched in 1937 at the Paris World Fair and have been a hot seller ever since.

For big branches and dried-twig arrangements, the wonderful Dutch design company BCXSY (short for Boaz Cohen and Sayaka Yamamoto) has created some fascinating vases that are made entirely from rubber-coated wire mesh (example pictured top, €188). They come in four different shapes and look utterly intriguing even

on their own. These aren't sold in the UK, but they can be bought online from the BCXSY website. Meanwhile, the company's limited-edition pieces, featuring two vases "merging" into each other (not available online), are €254 each.

For something very simple, there is Dartington Glass's large green flower bottle (£65) – a row of these on the dining table or on a sideboard would look tremendous, so if you're feeling generous you could perhaps give a set of three or five (florists being partial to using only odd numbers). The Conran Shop also has an elegant selection of vases – currently there are some Kate Hume Pebbles designs in a range of glorious colours (example pictured on previous pages, £339). And at Habitat the Eli collection (from £30, pictured left) comes in plain white porcelain and a variety of different shapes that are perfect for showing off single blooms or tall branches.

Then there is the art-glass route, which many a serious collector follows. Design curator Janice Blackburn, for instance, has a vast assortment of glass and ceramics at her home; sometimes they bear flowers or branches, sometimes they are just left to be admired and enjoyed as fine pieces of work in their own right. She is particularly fond of the embellished glass vessels from the Upgrade range (examples pictured overleaf, £300 each) made by the designer/maker Tomas Kral for his 2008 MA graduation show at the Ecole Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne. Libby Sellers so loved them she bought the lot, and she still has a few for sale at her gallery. The notion behind the Upgrade project was to bring two contrasting aesthetics together, applying the

Sometimes these vases bear flowers, sometimes they are left to be admired as fine pieces of work in their own right



there is a series of differently sized cylindrical Bubble vases (from £210) that are perfect for short-stemmed flowers, as well as Eden (from £1,000), a ridged 35cm-high design in lead-free crystal that comes in rosalin, aquamarine or clear glass.

Meanwhile, the grand old French company Baccarat has a vast and lovely choice of vases, many of which are created by the resident in-house designer, Thomas Bastide. There's something for every stem and flower, but possibly the most all-round useful ones are the elegant Spirale (from £305, pictured on previous pages), which features a twisting ribbon of crystal coiling through the clear glass; the Ginkgo (from £240), whose shape echoes the large, wing-like leaves of the ginkgo biloba plant; and the Corolle (£135), created by in-house designer Nicolas Triboulot, which is a mere 11.5cm high and comes in clear crystal with a very slightly nipped-in waist (a group of the Corolle vases, each holding some country roses, would look fabulous). For something infinitely grander and more decorative there is the Mémoire 2011 vase (£5,260) from the collection of the same name. It is a 26cm-high black-enamelled crystal design with an art-deco blossom motif inspired by Japonisme, which makes an extraordinarily strong visual statement on the front, and comes in a limited edition of just 99. Baccarat describes it as being designed by an

Right: **Tomas Kral glass Upgrade vases, £300 each.** Below: **Johannes Nagel sand-cast porcelain vase, price on request**



elaborate decorations typical of precious Bohemian cut glass to simple, recycled jars and bottles. By cutting, engraving and gilding the glassware, Kral has created what Sellers calls “a truly beautiful yet unassuming series of vessels”.

Also currently in Sellers' gallery is the striking Marc Braun series for Lobmeyr (example pictured on previous page, £720), featuring simple water carafes that have been handcrafted by Lobmeyr and then engraved by Braun with an image of one of seven glaciers, lakes or rivers from around the globe. The range is called Fortune, to remind us that water is the real luxury here.

Sellers also has an extraordinary vessel by Peter Marigold (£6,000), who made it by taking a single piece of wood to use as the mould. He then pasted it with hot wax to extract an impression of its grain and texture; after repositioning the wood, he repeated the process until a unique form had been created. Finally he cast it into either plaster or metal to produce an entirely original piece.

Gallery Fumi, always a great source of interesting glass and ceramics, has a ravishing collection of four vases created by the artist Johannes Nagel (example pictured above, price on request). These are made from sand-cast porcelain, some parts of which are unglazed, others glazed in a beautiful sea-green. The gallery would like to sell them as a group, but that makes them serious collectors' items. Those interested in buying a single piece should contact the gallery.

At Vessel on London's Kensington Park Road, there are objects that are officially designated as “vases”, while others are clearly works of art, but would do brilliant double-duty holding flowers or leaves – a fine example of the latter

being the delicately coloured Aurora bottles made by the American glass artist Lynn Read (£240 each, pictured on previous page). I also like a series of white porcelain Issey vases (from £180), recreated from Rosenthal archives dating back to the 1950s, as well as a newer Rosenthal collection designed in 2005 by Dror Benshetrit (from £89), which consists of some lovely vessels featuring what looks like a punched-in section on the side. They come in three sizes and in black or white. Examples now reside in the Staatliches Museum in Munich and the Eretz Museum in Tel Aviv. ♦

BEST OF THE BUNCH

Alvar Aalto, www.alvaraalto.fi and see [iittala](http://iittala.com).
Asprey, 167 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7493 6767; www.asprey.com) and branches/stockists.
Baccarat, 020-7925 2998; www.uk.baccarat.com and see Harrods. **BCXSY**, +316-4716 2410; www.bcxsy.com. **The Conran Shop**, Michelin House, 81 Fulham Rd, London SW3 (0844-848 4000; www.conranshop.co.uk) and branch. **Dartington Glass**, 01805-626 262; www.dartington.co.uk and stockists. **Dror Benshetrit**, www.studiodror.com and see Vessel Gallery. **Gallery Fumi**, by appointment only, 16 Hoxton Square, London N1 (020-7490 2366; www.galleryfumi.com). **Gallery Libby Sellers**, 41-42 Berners St, London W1 (020-3384 8785; www.libbysellers.com). **Habitat**, 196-199 Tottenham Court Rd, London W1 (0844-499 1122; www.habitat.co.uk) and branches.
Harrods, 87-135 Brompton Rd, Knightsbridge, London SW1 (020-7730 1234; www.harrods.com).
iittala, 25 Pohjoisesplanadi, 00100 Helsinki (+358-2043 93501; www.iittala.com and branches/stockist. **Johannes Nagel**, www.johannesnagel.eu and see Gallery Fumi. **Jonathan Harris**, www.jhstudioglass.com and see Asprey. **Kate Hume**, www.katehume.com and see The Conran Shop. **Lobmeyr**, Kärntner Strasse 26, 1010 Vienna (+431-512 0508; www.lobmeyr.at).
Lynn Read, www.vitreux.com and see Vessel Gallery. **Mark Braun**, www.markbraun.org and see Lobmeyr. **Peter Marigold**, www.petermarigold.com and see Gallery Libby Sellers. **Rob Van Helden**, www.rvhfloraldesign.com.
Rosenthal, Kurfuerstendamm, 10719 Berlin (+4930-8868 1574; www.rosenthal.de). **Stephen Woodhams**, www.stephenwoodhams.com.
Tomas Kral, www.tomaskral.ch and see Gallery Libby Sellers. **Vessel Gallery**, 114 Kensington Park Rd, London W11 (020-7727 8001; www.vesselgallery.com). **William Yeoward**, 270 King's Rd, London SW3 (020-7349 7828; www.williamyeoward.com) and stockists.