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Blue Sky Galleries is part of the artist cooperative in the old Northrup King Building in Minneapolis.

CRAIG BORCK, PIONEER PRESS

Holiday shopping stress can be eased with clever alternatives that can turn Black Friday into a colorful, peaceful experience.

Right: Personalized photo pillows handmade locally by designer Robin Getsug Taple are sold at Artful Belongings in St. Paul.



BY ALLISON KAPLAN
Pioneer Press

Imagine a weekend of holiday shopping devoid of long lines, pushy bargain hunters and bad parking spots. The dream can be yours ... if you shop someplace other than the malls and big-box retailers. Here are a few ideas:

Independent gift shops. Do the math. There are little shops all over town that sell gifts,

which is what you're shopping for. Most will even wrap your purchases or at least provide a pretty bag, which is convenient. But because they're not in the most obvious places and aren't next-door to a Wal-Mart, the pace is likely to be more civilized this weekend. A few to check out: Artist Mercantile (24 W. Seventh Place, St. Paul, 651-222-0053), downtown St. Paul's one true gift store featuring jewelry, bags, clocks, vases and much more made by local artists; Artful Belongings (42 S. Oxford St., St. Paul, 651-225-1422), a tiny and often overlooked shop just off Grand Avenue offering journals, jewelry, personalized pillows and other functional objects that look lovely; Two 12 Pottery (212 13th Ave. N.E., Minneapolis, 612-331-1556), a quaint store in Northeast Minneapolis featuring pottery and much more, including cookbooks, tableware, jewelry and toys.

A new jewelry studio. Talk about off the beaten path. Sepia, a locally produced collection of Latin American-inspired jewelry that has been featured at Marshall Field's, just

opened a showroom on the lower level of a residential building in Northeast Minneapolis (201 Sixth St. S.E., 612-379-0309). Co-founder Karina Bernoti says she wanted a unique location, and she got it. The space is bright and loftlike. More important, the stylish jewelry is surprisingly affordable. You'll find cuff bracelets and colored-glass necklaces, earrings and rings for \$50 or less. Note: The studio will be closed Friday but open Saturday and Sunday.

An artists' cooperative. The Northrup King Building (1500 Jackson St. N.E., Minneapolis,

www.northrupkingbuilding.com) is the consummate anti-mall. It's tricky to find, lacks public amenities and provides workspace for artists who pride themselves on selling unusual handmade goods. Many studios will be open Friday and Saturday, including Blue Sky Galleries (612-789-9868), which is known for wood furniture but also sells small objects like bowls, bottle stoppers, picture frames and fine jewelry. Custom Woven Interiors (612-788-7800) sells bags, throws, table runners and wall hangings. Ernest Miller (612-386-2291) features fine porcelain pottery vessels and sculpture with prices starting around \$10. And the building does have one true gift shop on the first level: Dunlaoghair (612-788-8788) sells handmade soaps and gifts, including spartan gift baskets ranging from \$5.95 to \$75. Teas and chocolates will be 20 percent off for the holiday weekend.

CALM, 3E



CRAIG BORCK, PIONEER PRESS

A catalpa bowl by Roger Meyer is one of the items offered for sale at Blue Sky Galleries.



FILE PHOTO BY JEAN PIERI, PIONEER PRESS

Intelligent Nutrients in Minneapolis sells environmentally conscious gift baskets, including organic teas and chocolates. And, when you need a break from shopping, you can settle in at the in-store cafe for lunch or a smoothie.

INSIDE

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Listen Up includes reviews of the latest music from the Who, Dierks Bentley, Barry Manilow and Meat Loaf.

FAMILIES | 3E

Decorative chair toppers add a festive look to your holiday table. Columnist Donna Erickson explains how to make them, and get the kids involved.

MONEY | 3E

Before you sit down at your computer to do your online gift shopping, check out the Everyday Cheap-skate's tips for staying safe.

SAVVY SHOPPER | ASK ALLISON

Q. Is there someplace in town that appraises pearls? If so, where and how much does it cost?

A. If you know where the pearls were purchased, your best bet is to take them there for an appraisal because most jewelers will provide free appraisals on items they sold. Otherwise, go to an independent jeweler. Most small shops have a certified gemologist on site daily who can do an appraisal on the spot (depending on traffic). Prices generally start at \$65. I was shocked to find that mall jewelers and chains like Jared typically charge a whopping \$90 for an appraisal — and it can take a week or more because they do not regularly have a gemologist in the store.

Have a shopping or style question for Allison? Visit the Savvy Shopper forum at www.twincities.com/living. By posing your question, you give us permission to print and edit.



ALLISON KAPLAN

POP MUSIC

Boxed sets: because you can't put an MP3 under the tree



BY ROSS RAIHALA
Pop Music Critic

The CD boxed set may feel like a bulky dinosaur in the iPod age. But instead of slimming them down, record labels have embraced what made boxed sets so special in the

first place.

The latest multidisc collections offer packaging that's more lavish than ever and even rich DVD content. You can't get that from a mere MP3 file. That's why they still make a great gift.

Here's a look at what's new on the shelves this season. And a note for those watching their wallets: Most retailers sell the sets below the list price.

THE BEE GEES, 'THE STUDIO ALBUMS 1967-1968'

Specs: The feathered hair and polyester jumpsuits of the Bee Gees' disco era looms so large over the band's legacy, its early days aren't just underrated, they're barely rated at all. This box collects new deluxe

editions of the group's first three internationally released albums, each with a second disc of extra tracks and rarities.

List price: \$74.98

Pros: The boys clearly loved the Beatles, as these three albums are filled with infectious, sunny and mildly psychedelic pop clearly inspired by the Fab Four's "Rubber Soul"/"Revolver" period. (The song "In My Time," for example, could easily pass as a Lennon-McCartney number.) Fellow music nerds will appreciate that each album is presented in both stereo and mono, a welcome new trend that seems to be taking hold in the reissue market.

BOXED SETS, 2E