

Simon Says

Stick to Stocking-Stuffers; They're Chic and Cheaper

BY SIMON DOONAN

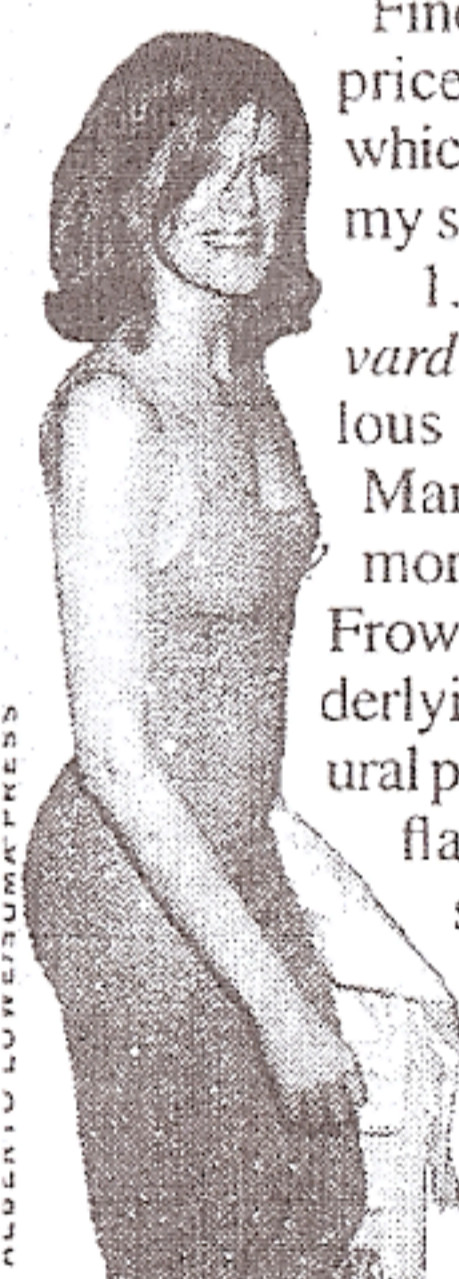
Last Christmas, my sister-in-law found a real surprise in her stockings: my brother.

—Milton Berle

I'm Jewish—my idea of a stocking-stuffer is Shelley Winters.

—Joan Rivers

All joking aside, I have to say I'm mad about stocking-stuffers! If I had my way, there would be no real gifts—only stocking-stuffers. You have to admit that chic little hors d'oeuvres are always more fun to eat than gloppy entrees. Stocking-stuffers (S.S.'s) may lack the luxe and gravitas of larger gifts, but they're always more glee-inducing. And because they invariably cost less, you don't have to feel guilty about re-gifting them. (Duh! Most of them have already been re-gifted!)



Finding great stuff at the right stocking-stuffer-ish price requires an imagination and commitment which you may or may not have. Here, therefore, are my suggested S.S.'s for Holiday 2001:

1. Gloria Swanson wore them in *Sunset Boulevard*: I'm talking about Frownies. These miraculous facial-smoothing patches, invented by one Margaret Kroesen, have been making women more lovely since 1889. The good people of Frownies claim that the pads "re-educate the underlying muscles to re-assume their correct and natural posture." I would poo-poo this if it wasn't for the flawless forehead of Frownie-addicted movie star Rene Russo. I probed the agelessly gorgeous Ms. Russo by phone recently. "I've been using them for over 20 years. I used to wake up with a huge crease in my forehead because I'm a nocturnal frowner," she said. "Not good—especially back when I was modeling. Then I discovered Frownies."

Rene proselytizes passionately to anyone who will listen: "Don't spend your money on botox; get yourself a crate of Frownies."

For best results, apply to the face and leave overnight. A box of 144 Frownies sells for \$13.95 at all Cosmetics Plus stores. Caution: The effect can be quite comical or even Kabuki-like—i.e., not shag-conductive.

2. Bandit, the kinky butch-fem fragrance from Robert Piguet, is back! Mr. Piguet, who also created Fracas, launched Bandit in 1944 (no, I don't remember it!) with a high-jinks fashion show that included masked mannequins brandishing toy knives and revolvers. It was all *très méchant*, and Bandit—with its perverse mix of leather, wood, jasmine and carnation—became the preferred fragrance of the unconventional thespians (Marlene drenched herself in it) and show-offs of the time. And now it's back! A 1.7-oz. Eau de Parfum spray will set you back \$45. If that exceeds your S.S. price threshold, then go for the \$25 8.5-oz. shower cream. Bandit is available at Saks and Bergdorf Goodman.

3. Talking of fragrant relaunchees, Candyass is also back! This New York artist's blockbuster show at the Andrew Kreps gallery

entitled *Gain! Wait! Now!* closes on Dec. 22, so get your candyass over there—pronto! Who the hell is Candyass?? You can be forgiven for not knowing, especially since this Harlem resident now goes by his real name, Cary Leibowitz.

Mr. Leibowitz, whose specialty is pathos, mediocrity and self-loathing of the gay Jewish variety, has returned with a new collection of dippy-but-fabulous paintings. "Hi Jewboy," screams one painting. "Do these pants make me look Jewish?" screams another. The bad news: His paintings' prices—though totally reasonable for art—will put a run in the sturdiest of holiday hosiery. The good news: His limited-edition tchotchkes are totally affordable.



White trash: Cary Leibowitz's limited-edition trash can.

One of the delights of the old Candyass shows—this is his ninth solo show in New York—was always the creative and affordable multiples that were proffered alongside the art: e.g., a pink football printed with the words "The Official Candyass Sissy Football"; dashboard shades that say, "Please don't steal my radio. I'm queer." The current show also offers two affordable, limited-edition multiples at friendly S.S. prices. First, a trash can emblazoned with the words "Gain! Wait! Now!" on one side and a large, depressing color photo of Mr. Leibowitz at his 1976 bar mitzvah on the other. And second, a similarly emblazoned umbrella stand. The difference? The price: The garbage can is \$50; the umbrella stand is \$52. They're identical in everything but name. Pop into the Andrew Kreps Gallery at 516 West 20th Street, or call 741-8849. Hurry while supplies last.

3. I wish I could tell you the low-rise jean was over, but it's not: You can expect to be looking at butt cracks well into next summer. Your best bet is to diminish the amount of undies on view by stuffing the stockings of hip-hugger-addicted chums with low-rise thongs by Lilo. The Madonna plaid in red is the most festive (\$24 at Saks Fifth Avenue).



Superfly: Strawberry's halter top.

4. Photographer Roxanne Lowit has captured the carefree fripperies and butt cracks of the last three decades—that hedonistic time we all enjoyed before the world went strange and nasty—and has thoughtfully

bundled them all into one succulent stocking-stuffer of a book entitled *People*. Life in Manhattan, through Roxanne's lens, looks so much more fun than it actually was—but so what! Give someone a bit of Proustian eye candy to suck on (\$29.95 at all bookstores).

5. The blizzard of patriotica which is bedecking New York—and New Yorkers—is starting to lose its resonance: The standard-issue ribbons and lapel pins now go virtually unnoticed. It's time to ratchet up the stakes. The most hilariously uplifting (literally) item comes from Strawberry. It is—are you sitting down?—a gaudy, tarty, sequined, red-white-and-blue, Stars 'n' Stripes halter top in the shape of an over-sized butterfly. Yah! It looks like something Raquel Welch would have worn in the 1970 movie version of Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge*.

The butterfly is available at all Strawberry stores for \$29.99—and luckily for you, one size fits most. P.S.: This item also doubles as interior décor: strap it round one of the columns in your dusty Tribeca loft.

6. Last but not least: Milton Berle. His massive 1989 *Private Joke File* sells for a stocking-stuffer-ish \$15 (approximately) on Amazon.com.

Wrinkle-reduction tip: train yourself to laugh along with Milt without popping off your Frownies.