

welcome

Shopping List

I don't usually write shopping columns, and only a month ago I was writing about getting rid of things. This isn't hypocrisy. It is a submission to the great Cycle of Belonging, which can never be at rest. Things go out. Things come in. A few things caught my eye recently, and they're worth sharing.

Hats. Everyone could do with the sun protection lecture; I will reserve some special words for gardeners. Just because you are looking down at weeds all day long does not mean that your face is protected. You need a hat. Just because you need a hat does not mean you have to look like someone's embarrassing, well, suburban mother. (I say this referring to myself, according to my son.) Why is it that gardening clothes have to look like the sartorial equivalent of granola? Worthy, good for you, either too serious (another denim work shirt?) or too silly. I'll walk in the footsteps of the legendary Katharine White, who wore her Ferragamos in the garden out of respect for her flowers. There are dozens of gorgeous hats out there, for which we pay a small fortune, and which we never wear, because they are too nice, and who really goes to garden parties anymore? Meanwhile, we all wear the plain brown straw things, and of course everyone comes by to visit and have a glass of wine and a good gossip while you are weeding. Time to wear the nice hat to do the hard work. The loveliest hats I've seen recently are at the splendid new shop at the New York Botanical Garden (and while you are there, visit the best and biggest garden bookstore in the country). The hats, by Peter Beaton of Nantucket, are pale straw and wide-brimmed, but the most cunning thing about them is that the interior is lined in pink straw. I once visited a very pink bedroom (canopy bed covered in chintz, lined in pink silk) and I asked a prestigious decorator what man would sleep in such a bed, and he said, "Don't be silly, all men want to climb into bed with Mummy, and anyway, pink is so kind to the skin." Just as true in the flower bed, dear readers.

The Horchow catalog is advertising a chess and checkers set for playing outdoors, and though my 15-year-old thinks this is a revolting idea (his idea of outdoor play is a Game Boy in the hammock), I think it is terrific. Since this is the modern age, the knee-high pieces are made of resin and fiberglass, but that means a normal person can move them. I have never been able

to play chess, but the size of this game might make the whole thing more obvious, and anyway, what's there to lose, wandering around the lawn with a whiskey sour and a white knight? What better gift for someone who has lent you their house in the mountains for a week?

Sheer fabrics. Say the kids are sharing a room at the beach and they can't stand each other. Say you have a porch at the beach—why not a quick wall of sheer fabric hanging across the side, or draped over a four-poster bed or off the rail of an arbor, or tented under the branch of a tree? Hotels are often the best source of decorating ideas, and though it has been around for a while, every time I see the two-story sheer white curtain rippling across the porch at the Delano, I am delighted by the effect.

Daybeds. A completely underrated piece of furniture; no room should be without one. I'm not talking about the chaise longue, which really doesn't belong anywhere but the bedroom. I'm talking about antique pieces, such as those found at Amy Perlin Antiques, preferably Italian or Spanish, eighteenth or nineteenth century, that look like long benches with wooden sides on either end and a narrow mattress or pallet of upholstery. They are easy to move. Two people can sit on one together; they are perfectly positioned in window bays or in front of fireplaces or alongside bookcases. The point is obvious: a day bed for daydreams.

And for that new daybed, there is a new translation of Proust's masterpiece out from Viking Penguin, and it's so good that even those of us who have never made it through the first volume might actually have another crack at it. I know Proust didn't get out of bed much, but judging from his fixation on the things around him, he must have made some pretty great shopping lists. Or go get a DVD of *Five Easy Pieces* and ponder the consequences of a generation that began by making the existential crisis a term of high art, only to end up in the warm domestic embrace of *Something's Gotta Give*. Two movies (and a book) in which the houses are at least as significant and interesting as the characters. Living well begins at home.



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