

HOLIDAY SHOPPING ROAD TRIPS



We've plotted a few courses to take, so make a list and warm up the credit card(s) for your own journey to the perfect gifts

KANSAS CITY:

It can be done in 36 hours,
even with a husband who hates shopping

BY ELLEN FUTTERMAN
Of the Post-Dispatch

THE CHALLENGE: Scouting the holiday shopping scene in Kansas City.

THE CREDENTIALS: Once had QVC on speed dial; voted "most likely to succeed at a sale" by bargain-shopper support group.

THE OBSTACLES: Time, money and a husband who hates to shop.

With all that in mind, we left at 7:20 on a recent Saturday morning for what turned out to be one of the more rewarding shopping weekends (for better or worse, I've got several with which to compare it).

First, Kansas City is compact, so you can cover a lot of ground in a short time.

Second, the number of independent stores specializing in unique merchandise is fairly substantial, and even better, prices are reasonable.

And third ... given one and two, who needs a third?

Saturday

11 a.m.: The Crossroads District

After a painless 3 ½-hour shot west on Interstate 70, we found ourselves in an eclectic neighborhood adjacent to downtown. Once a square-mile area of abandoned warehouses, the Crossroads District is now emerging as the city's arts center, with galleries, lofts, shops and restaurants.

Its hub is 18th and Wyandotte streets, where local hipsters sipped coffee while seated in front of the corner organic grocery. Among them was Corrie VanAusdal, a striking blonde who is co-owner of Birdies (116 West 18th).

Birdies is a boutique solely devoted to panties. Not bras, not slips, just panties. The store itself is as tiny as the logo underpants it sells for \$10. If Sarah Jessica Parker is on your Christmas list, this is the place to go. And if not Sarah, then maybe that teenage girl in your life.

Two blocks and a different world away is Webster House (1644 Wyandotte), a massive 19th-century public school. Today, former classrooms serve as showrooms for magnificent antiques, decorative art objects and one-of-a-kind accessories. Among the latter: luxurious silk handbags with eye-popping velvet embellishments (\$245); linen hand towels

with sayings such as "Horse lovers are stable people" (\$15), and hand-dipped, 24-karat gold topiaries from Austria (\$17 to \$275, depending on size).

"We carry everything from \$1.75 printed tissues to \$35,000 pieces of furniture," said Keitha Kaminski, Webster House director. She isn't kidding; there's so much to admire within Webster's 30,000 square feet that one could easily spend a half-day looking. As you might imagine, the store is spectacularly decorated for the holidays. Upstairs, a gorgeous restaurant serves lunch.

Other go-to places in Crossroads: Studio Dan Meiners (1700 Wyandotte), a sleek gift shop that sells half-price fresh flowers during "happy hour"; Tomboy Design Inc. (1817 McGee), which specializes in edgy, custom-made clothes by local designers, and Retro Inferno (1500 Grand), a sprawling vintage furniture store with amazing '40s, '50s and '60s pieces. We debated long and hard over a Star of David rattan tiki bar (\$550), but eventually nixed the idea in favor of paying our utility bills.

The Crossroads District celebrates First Fridays every month, with most galleries and stores staying open until 9 p.m.

See Kansas City, T3

Kansas City

Continued from T1

1:10 p.m.: Country Club Plaza

Of course we had to stop at the Plaza, even if the majority of stores there are ones you can find in St. Louis (J. Crew, J. Jill, Sharper Image, etc.). It's just that with its Spanish-style architecture, red-tile roofs and multitude of fountains and sculptures, the 55-acre Plaza is a work of art itself. Never is it more beautiful than at the holidays, when it's decked with hundreds of thousands of holiday lights. (A lighting ceremony takes place at 7 Thanksgiving night. The lights stay on until Jan. 16.)

After a much-needed lunch break, my husband investigated iPods at the Apple Store (4712 Broadway) while I booked it to Anthropologie (531 Nichols Road). Why, oh why, isn't this store in St. Louis? (Rumor has it it's coming to the Galleria, but a mall spokeswoman "could not confirm or deny.")

For the uninitiated, Anthropologie carries well-styled women's clothing as well as children's sweaters, jewelry and a slew of home products. Although nothing is exactly cheap, there's always a substantial sale rack (I snagged a funky raspberry and pink lined jacket reduced to \$30 from \$128). Ah, the possibilities: ruffled cashmere gloves (\$78), a fuzzy yarn poncho adorned with hand-dyed silk ribbons (\$168), a houndstooth knitted sweater for the dog (\$48).

Wait, what dog? Moving on...

3 p.m.: Brookside Shops

A five-minute drive south put us at West 63rd Street and Brookside Boulevard, where a handful of artsy stores is definitely worth a long look.

Stuff, Inc. (316 West 63rd) is literally stuffed from floor to ceiling with whimsical gift items, from a colorful laundry basket fashioned out of recycled flip-flops (\$48) to a bouquet of flowers made by a local artist using buttons (\$2 a stem).

The trend continues at Shop Beautiful (320 West 63rd),

where I couldn't resist a mod painted hairbrush (\$12) for my stepdaughter and several packets of orca-spiced sugar-free chai (worth a gamble at \$1.50 each). As I mulled over a green resin capa shell wire necklace (\$38) for a friend, my husband announced he had had enough.

A good shopper is prepared to handle slackers. I sent him packing to a nearby sports bar while I pushed forward.

Latin American Imports (324 West 63rd) feels like a smaller, neater cousin to St. Louis' Gringo Jones; both are havens for yard decorations, rustic pottery, Mexican glassware, tiles and much more. World's Window (332 West 63rd) has a terrific variety of contemporary natural fabric and ethnic clothes, along with knockout hats and folk art. A set of lacquered bowls from Vietnam (\$26 to \$120, depending on size) would look great on most any coffee table.

4:45 p.m.: Historic Westport

The only disappointment came here, where bars rule and shopping prospects are slim. The wonderful Natural Wear women's clothing and jewelry store, which had occupied a corner of Westport and Pennsylvania roads for years, recently moved to Prairie Village Shops in Prairie Village, Kan. (3931 West 69th Terrace).

Though few and far between, boutiques such as the upscale Imagery men's and women's apparel store (4117 Pennsylvania) and its accessories namesake (4120 Pennsylvania) have a lot to offer. I particularly liked the men's ties with bold geometric patterns (\$60) and an aluminum night light (\$28) shaped like a goldfish bowl; plugged in, the fish light up gold.

Off The Wall (4120 Pennsylvania) has an impressive range of framed movie posters for \$35 (unframed \$15), including "Breakfast at Tiffany's," "Flashdance" (a personal favorite) and "Foxy Brown."

And, unless you're claustrophobic, you'll love Re-Runs (4126 Pennsylvania), a jam-packed second-hand clothing store with great bargains on vintage dresses, coats, men's jackets, shoes and sweaters.

SUNDAY

Noon: Crown Center

Crown Center is one of those rare malls that actually has original stores rather than chains. Sure, there are a few of the latter, but much of what you'll find in the three-level center is one of a kind.

Some highlights: Vinones, a high-end, stylish women's clothing store carrying sizes from 6 to 24; Russian Arts, which carries a startling array of amber jewelry and chess sets with pieces fashioned like traditional Russian dolls (\$89.95); College Craze, where it's possible to buy a Jayhawks piñata among a bazillion logo items; the Best of Kansas City store, a must-see for "Wizard of Oz" fans (at \$12, the ruby red slippers kitchen strainer is irresistible), and Playful Paws, a store that pays tribute to your animals. Of all the riches here the most novel is a glass-top end table (\$99.99), its base your choice of ceramic dog (Scottie, Yorkie, dachshund, etc.) posed on hind legs.

The mall also has a lot to offer children, including the Crayola Store & Cafe, where kids can draw on easels, play on computers and learn how crayons are made, and Kaleidoscope, an interactive arts workshop for children ages 5 to 12.

1:30 p.m.: Getting home

I'd be lying to tell you I was shopped out. After all, didn't the antique stores at 45th & State Line beckon, as well as the West 39th Street shopping district? And what about Cabela's, the mega outdoor and sporting goods superstore on the Kansas City, Kan., side?

But there was my husband (biding time in sports bars and reading newspapers are apparently exhausting) and the matter of my Visa card. It had gotten quite a workout.

On the drive home I started feeling bad about that. Then I remember the only purchases worth regretting are the ones we didn't make:

Reporter Ellen Futterman

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KC lodging & food

Where to stay: Few deals can beat **The Quarterage Hotel**, 560 Westport Road. The \$89 weekend rate includes a complimentary happy hour from 5 to 7 p.m. and full buffet breakfast. The rooms are somewhat drab but comfortable, and the location is convenient. 1-816-931-0001 or 1-800-942-4233

Another option is the newly refurbished, swank downtown **Hotel Phillips**, 106 West 12th Street. Depending on how

you book, weekend rates range from \$77 to \$109. 1-816-221-7000 or 1-800-433-1426

Where to eat: **Classic Cup Plaza**, 301 West 47th Street, provides the perfect respite for serious shopping at the Plaza. Breakfast, lunch, dinner and a late-night menu. 1-816-753-1840

The dining experience at **Bluestem**, 900 Westport Road, should not be missed, though its culinary magic is pricey. With only a dozen or so tables,

reservations for dinner and Sunday brunch are strongly suggested. 1-816-561-1101

Other stuff: Kansas City takes the holiday season seriously, with all sorts of special events planned from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day. Many shops, too, have longer hours. On the weekends, parking lots are free at Country Club Plaza and Crown Center. 1-816-221-5242, 1-800-767-7700, or www.visitKC.com

— Ellen Futterman