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Gifts from Recycled, Reused and Natural Materials

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Swap-o-Rama-Rama: Reclaiming Fashion

About 500 people gathered at the Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center on Manhattan's lower east side on October 9 for the first public Swap-O-Rama-Rama -- an event consisting of a clothing exchange, hands-on workshops teaching participants to both redesign and recycle used clothing and intermittent fashion shows. During the five- hour event, attendees learned how to embroider, knit, crochet, turn old brassieres into new handbags, and create high-tech pocket-protectors impervious to electronic snooping.

"The vibe was extremely intimate, and the people were lovely," said organizer Wendy Tremayne. "They were really meeting and bonding over creative projects, learning how to make things in a community."

Participants contributed a suggested entry fee of \$5 (no one was turned away for lack of funds) and a bag of unwanted clothing when they arrived. Then they selected new-to-them items from the collective mass of clothing. But free fashion was just the start.

With the help of knowledgeable seamstresses and costume designers, who provided free lessons and assistance with alterations at on-site sewing stations, Swap-goers created "new" fashionable clothing from their finds.

Swap-o-Rama-Rama started three years ago as "a fantasy thing," a seasonal do-it-yourself event in Tremayne's friends' New York apartments. As



Amy, shown here, wears a prize-winning, updated outfit she made at Swap-o-Rama-Rama. She had cut off the bottom of a dress she culled from the collective donation pile and used the fabric to add a border and a pocket to plain trousers she had brought from home. The tote bag was donated as a prize to the Swap by Eco-Artware.com.

the events grew, she began to think about the connection between creativity and community.

"I feel strongly about deconstructing the consumer," Tremayne said. "We've become removed from our own creativity by industry, and in turn, our connection to community. I want people to take back their creativity ... and discover the playful endeavor of making things."



Bag designer Itsy Atkins taught a workshop on turning brassieres into bags and belts at Swap-o-Rama-Rama.

Calling on her contacts in the underground art/music scene and far-flung Internet list-servs, Tremayne assembled an array of workshop leaders with varied sewing and clothing design skills. Using her experience as an event organizer and fund-raiser, she secured financial backing from the Black Rock Arts Foundation, part of the Burning Man organization. And acknowledging her interest in mystical traditions, she added the extra Rama to the event's name in honor of a Hindu divinity.

The clothing swap generated between 2,000 and 3,000 pounds of duds. At the end of the day, 25 bags of leftover clothing were donated to the St. Martin de Porres women's shelter in Brooklyn.

Tremayne is currently planning the next Swap-o-Rama-Rama in January and plans to write guides to help others produce

swaps in their own neighborhood. For more information, visit www.gaiatreehouse.com.

O Waste-Free Tree, O Reuse Tree

Canadian City Promotes Christmas Ornaments Made From Recycled Materials

Christmas holiday celebrations are some of the most extravagant in North America. In 2003, consumers spent \$7.6 billion on Christmas decorations – about \$115 per decorating household – and two-thirds spend about the same on new decorations every year, according to a study by Unity Marketing. Although some are destined to become treasured heirlooms to be displayed every year, they still consume a lot of new material in their manufacture.

But can holiday ornaments made from reclaimed materials be as festive as the store-bought kind? Yes, according to Amy Baxter, Reuse Coordinator for the city of Edmonton, Alberta, where recycling has been a civic priority since 1988. To prove it, volunteers in the city's Master



Composter/Recycler program decorated a Christmas tree with ornaments crafted from items otherwise destined for the landfill: foil coffee bags, single socks, walnut shells, tin can lids and the like. It took about 250 hours to create the 400 traditional-themed ornaments for the 6-foot-tall tree; the materials cost less than \$50. Then the tree was entered in Edmonton's annual Festival of Trees in 2002 under the title O Waste-Free Tree, O Reuse Tree.



Prize-winning decorated tree decorated with ornaments made from cast-off materials.



Ornaments made from salt shakers.

Up against more than a hundred tinsel-draped tannebaums decked out by designers and artists from across the city, the trash tree won the second-place design award from the festival judges as well as being voted most popular by festival-goers. At the end of the festival, all trees were auctioned off to raise money for charity.

The Reuse Tree was so popular, Edmonton's Master Composter/Recycler volunteers entered another the next year, this one with a contemporary theme, and won more awards.

Now two booklets with instructions on how to create your own holiday Reuse Tree, either traditional or contemporary, are available online from Edmonton's Waste Management Branch – go to www.edmonton.ca/waste, then click on the Reuse and Reduce tab on the left-hand menu.

There you will also find information about the city's Reuse Fairs, community-based events designed to divert useable waste from the local landfill. Started in 1992 as Garbage Fairs, their motto is, "Don't need it? Couldn't sell it? Don't chuck it."

Citizens are encouraged to bring such unwanted items as old jewelry or broken watches, books and magazines, cards (greeting and playing), eyeglasses and hearing aids, art supplies, onion bags and pine cones to the Fair rather than the local landfill. The city then turns over the collected treasures to charities and services that in turn find someone to put them to good use, such as emergency relief shelters and food banks. In 2004 alone, Edmonton's eight Reuse Fairs collected 57,000 pounds of materials, which were distributed to 115 organizations and individuals.

Guidelines on how to organize a Reuse Fair in your town can be downloaded from www.edmonton.ca/waste -- then click on the Reuse & Reduce link on the navigation bar on the left side.

Please note: Eco-Artware carries a collection of [ready-to-go ornaments](#) from recycled materials.



Ornaments made from light bulbs.

More Wrap Art from John Boak

Gift wrapping is an old, old idea — it started in China when paper was invented in 105 A.D. — and people have been enhancing their gifts with different types of paper ever since. Revisionist wrapper John Boak continues to add new ideas to this tradition with his Wrap Art system, a year-round way to reclaim scraps of paper, plastic, fabric, twine, ribbon or other to-be-discarded items for decorative purposes.

In general, Wrap Art consists of combining more than one piece of material per package with a glue gun, attaching them in interesting combinations. (For a full description, see the [Rag, Spring 2005](#)).

Here are two new examples of John's Wrap Art as an inspiration for drawing on our inner creativity — and scrap piles — to enhance our holiday gifts to others. Perfect for people who like surprises, art lovers or sophisticated friends who think they have seen everything.



1) This package was wrapped with two pieces of found paper and two ribbons. The top piece of paper is a promotional poster for Adobe Photoshop from seven years ago. The lower is an indigo proof for a postcard with a rose on it. The blue rectangle and silver initials tag are added on. One ribbon is white gauze; the lower, red ribbon covers the client logo on the rose-postcard paper.



2) A radio remote wrapped in red tissue paper, then in green foam, burrito-wrap style, closed up with red Christmas gauze ribbon. A wooden half-sphere glued on to the ribbon finishes it up.

Web Citings

Aluminous Publishing

www.aluminouspublishing.com offers craftspeople instructions for making wreaths, baskets, Christmas ornaments, stars, flowers, necklaces and more from ubiquitous, lightweight and recyclable aluminum cans. The safe, strong, lightweight, compact, impermeable containers for food and drink for people and pets have been recyclable since they were introduced in 1965.

Publisher and artist Alice Lund has designed these projects and provides easy-to-follow directions for transforming containers into brightly decorative objects to add pleasure to our lives. Five projects are available free of charge and the remainder are downloadable

for a fee, either as a single project or in two books of 50 patterns each. See our crafts section for Aluminous' step-by-step instructions for a [Holiday Wreath](#).



Art Exhibits

The Schuylkill Center For Environmental Education

8480 Hagy's Mill Road; Philadelphia, PA, www.schuylkillcenter.org (215-492-7300) -- In partnership with the Philadelphia Sculptors, the Center presenets Re-Use Refuse, works by six artists who transform discarded objects into functional pieces for everyday use. Through January 7, 2006.

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