



Courtesy of Harrods
Harrods, which has made Christmas baskets since the mid-19th century, offers a £5,000 Chairman's Choice hamper that comes in a leather trunk.

Gourmet hamper? 'Tis the season

By Maisie Wilhelm

PARIS
For a perfect day at the races — or any other special day — take a picnic hamper overflowing with the choicest, lightest, richest foods and wines. Fauchon of Paris sells a "Place de la Madeleine" basket for €600, or \$770, featuring pheasant with truffles and Armagnac, Champagne jelly, foie gras, hazelnut oil, babas au rhum, chocolates, fruit jellies, candied chestnuts, bottles of Fauchon port and brut Champagne.

For one-track palates, Harrods also offers an "Everything Truffle" basket, at €315, that packs the fragrant fungus into mustards, chocolates, and many a delicacy between.

Dean and DeLuca, American luxury grocers, have crammed the best from the ends of the earth into their \$1,000 Ultimate Gift basket, a brown leather box that overflows with Siberian sturgeon caviar, foie gras terrine with truffles, Brillat-Savarin cheese, Daniel Boulud smoked salmon, balsamic vinegar from Modena, fig and rum preserves, Hédiard wild strawberry jam and fruit jellies, Tuscan truffle oil, fennel pollen, green peppercorns in brine and Hawaiian white honey; all topped off with Ethiopian Yirgacheffe coffee.

Sumptuous pleasures can also come in small packages: in the case of Petrossian, very small. "Le Tête à Tête" is a caviar gift box containing two 50-gram, or 1.75-ounce, tins of deluxe caviar, two mother-of-pearl spoons, two small bottles of vodka and two shot glasses. For perfection, add one conversation partner in pleasure. Prices vary according to the type of caviar: The Beluga Huso-Huso version costs €760.

For a more substantial snack, Petrossian's "Coffret Dégustation" contains a mammoth 250 grams of caviar along with a large bottle of vodka, a jar of foie gras and a bottle of Sauternes. The Beluga Huso-Huso caviar pack totals €1,865.

Gift baskets also fit well with the holiday season, and nowhere more so than in Britain, where the London shopper can choose between, for example, a Harvey Nichols Christmas hamper, at £1,500, or \$2,845, with options that include pink Champagne truffles, and a suede apron and hand soap for cleaning up after the feast; or a £5,000 Imperial hamper from Fortnum & Mason that includes regional treats such as duck, venison and pheasant pie, chunk honeycomb, King George Christmas pudding, fresh Cognac butter, wild Scottish and Irish smoked salmon, and rose petal jelly.

But for the ultimate experience, try Harrods, which opened its food hall — a gourmet's paradise — in 1849 and has offered Christmas baskets ever since.

The Chairman's Choice, at £5,000, is an Epicurean feast packaged in a leather trunk that brims with beluga caviar, truffled foie gras en croûte, a whole York ham, Christmas pudding, fresh quail eggs, Château D'Yquem, wild boar pâté and much, much more. A magnum of Krug Champagne with six crystal flutes to sip it from, two silver candlesticks and a damask linen tablecloth complete the general sense of well-being.

Compared to this behemoth of yuletide hampers, other offerings, even those from Harrods, can seem almost plain, in a classically British and understated way.

And yet, if the Chairman's hamper fails to excite the appetite enough, Harrods has one last trick up its impeccably tailored sleeve. The bespoke Ultimate hamper, starting at £10,000, can be assembled to the recipient's command.

An in-house chef, to prepare the feast before your eyes? Certainly, Sir: or a monogrammed Louis Vuitton trunk stuffed with your favorite chocolates? Mais oui, Madame.

After which, Ho Ho Hic, you can go back to watching the reindeer race — unless they've been at the champagne and truffles too.

Pardner, saddle up and hit the gift trail



By Gina Rarick

PARIS
H eads of state get them, and celebrities too; but gift horses are not exclusively for the rich or privileged. There are many ways to give a horse — not all requiring hands-on horsemanship, though some horse sense is desirable to look them meaningfully in the mouth.

The cost depends on you — and the impression that you want to make. A gold-plated racehorse Christmas-tree decoration costs \$12.99 from horse-gifts.com. More upscale, \$112,000 is the average selling price of a thoroughbred yearling at the Keeneland sales in Kentucky, the leading market world-wide for future racing steeds.

Buyers should beware, or at least be aware that matching a horse to a rider is no easy task. A plugger without much in the tank may seem a trifle staid; but the gift of a fire-breathing stallion can land the happy rider in hospital — or worse. No gift horse is free; there is the cost of keeping it to consider.

Before investing in horseflesh, gift certificates for riding lessons could make sense. Signaturedays.com, for example, offers a gift pack of five, one-hour private lessons at an equestrian center in Rome, Georgia, for \$250. Other locations across the United States are available in various price ranges. Local equestrian centers across Europe also offer gift packages.

For skilled riders in search of adventure, Equitours, based in Dubois, Wyoming, offers vacations on horseback around the world, and will customize packages on request. A 13-day ride across Namibia, finishing with a bareback gallop across the dunes of the Atlantic coast, runs \$3,115 per person. More details and booking can be found online at ridingtours.com.

Bareback gallops aside, a saddle from Hermès is likely to be appreciated, starting at \$4,400 from Doversaddlery.com. But



Breyer Animal Creations (far left); Studio des Fleurs (left); Quentin Bertoux
A thoroughbred on the run. Two saddles from Hermès, which can start at \$4,400. Buying a saddle requires intimate knowledge of the size of the backsides of both rider and horse.



Courtesy of RacingShares



Courtesy of RacingShares



Keeneland

The average price of a thoroughbred yearling at the Keeneland sales, left, in Kentucky, a leading market for future racing steeds, is \$112,000. But a stake in Spirit Rising, above, or Merlin's Quest, far left, can cost only a few hundred dollars, or a few thousand with a share in any winnings.

remember that buying a saddle requires intimate knowledge of the size of the backsides of both rider and horse.

Perhaps less risky, no fashionable rider would be disappointed with custom-made full-calf leather hunt boots from Dehner, starting from \$650 and going up to \$900 at Dehner.com. But again, measurements would be necessary, destroying the element of surprise.

For a horse lover who would rather look than touch, a racehorse could be the perfect gift. Depending on the depth of your pocket, you can buy anything from a few tail hairs to the whole beast.

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Mosey along and you can lasso an assortment of horsey delights, at almost any price, that will fill up your favorite corral.



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