



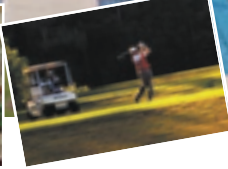
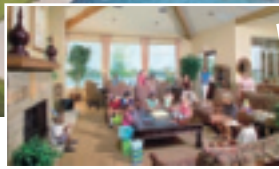
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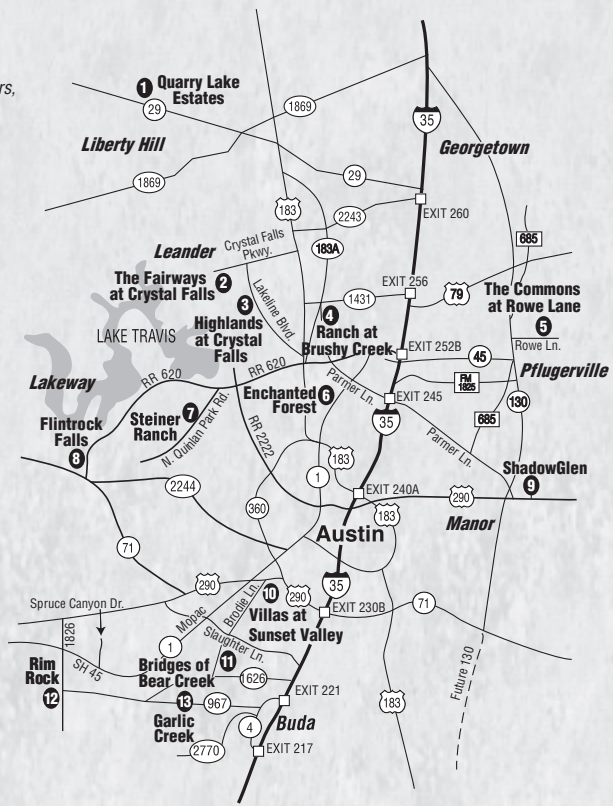


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## The Garden of Good & Better

THE 'CHRONICLE'S NOD TO LIVING SOUTHERN by Kate X Messer

With all the big-box chains taking their cue from that four-letter word for Scandinavian, it's totally easy to succumb to the design-in-a-box mentality – that IKEA-fication behind so much contemporary decor that has so many Downtown lofts looking like boring Swedish theme parks. While refreshing on the outset, a little bit of stark, clean line goes a long way and can be just as overdone as the Eighties love of dusty rose and slate blue or the Nineties affinity for the overstuffed.

Hence our salute to Southern living. No, not so much the mag (although we won't deny the occasional guilty page turn), but more the *mise-en-scène*, the genteel

feel, the eclectic shotgun wedding of tacky and taste. Southern style is not all mint juleps and bourbon & branch (a little sip can, however, prime the creative juices). It's as breezy as a streetcar, as languid as a Georgian drawl or a slow pungent draw from a Cuban cigar, as cozy as a backyard barbecue or as mannered as an afternoon tea: elaborate, excessive even, yet deliberately modest and understated just as often. Hopefully some of our suggestions herein will help slow down your interior design process, inspire you to reconsider some classic Southern home decor elements. It's time, darlin', to stop and smell the gardenias.



## Show Us Your Bulbs

RECYCLING ARTISTS TAKE NEW ORLEANS TRASH AND MAKE ILLUMINATING MARDI GRAS TREASURE

by Richard Whittaker

“So what did you *do* to get them?” This leering question is inevitably asked to anyone decorating their home with Mardi Gras beads. Wouldn't it be nicer if they asked, “Where did you get those?” With

**Mardi Lights** made from the recycled

plastic baubles, designed by New Orleans-based **Unique Products**, they will. Based out of a little gallery and workshop in the historic Crescent City Garden District (although eagle-eyed Austinites may recognize the lights from last October's Maker Faire at the Travis County Expo Center) recycling artists **Heather MacFarlane** and **Mark Kirk** gather the thousands of necklaces that are left to litter the streets after being thrown to the crowds from the floats during the city's monthlong parade season.

As legend has it, Mardi Gras beads must be caught. When the bead-thrower looks you in the eye, he or she is deeming you worthy of the beads and the magic they contain. If you miss the beads, they “lose their magic” and are to stay on the ground. Plus, considering the size of cramped parade crowds and the increase in pickpockets, it's not safe to scramble for them. Needless to say, New Orleans city streets are covered with the trinkets after each parade.

Each Mardi Light takes roughly 2 pounds of beads, but they're easy enough to find. “They're literally hanging from the trees,” explained MacFarlane. While tourists and partygoers will scabble on the ground, aggressively elbow innocent bystanders, and even expose

themselves for the treasured strings of doubloons and prized pendants, it's the small, cheap beads that catch the attention of these artists. They collect them, take them home, unstring the beads, and pass them through a series of kilns and ovens to melt them into flat sheets. They then shape the delicately translucent and uniquely patterned plastic into everything from wall sconces to sun jujus (the voodoo equivalent of a dream catcher).



“The joke around here is that it took a thrifty Scot to work out what to do with all those beads,” said MacFarlane. She's originally from Edinburgh, and Kirk is from the cold, wet Northern English town of Macclesfield (famous only for being the place where Joy Division's Ian Curtis decided to kill himself). It was beads that brought them together. Ten years ago, Kirk was driving from San Jose, Calif., to Pensacola, Fla., and decided to detour to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. He met MacFarlane on the street when they were both collecting beads, and now these migrants are helping the city deal with an eternal problem of very shiny trash.

How many beads are thrown during Mardi Gras each year? “No one really knows, because there are 10 major businesses importing them,” said Mardi Gras historian Arthur Hardy, “and they don't want to tell each other.” Many are left on the streets or get hung up on overhead obstacles. This means a real headache for the city, with the parade routes looking all year-round like they're bearing a strange, plastic fruit. “We're less than one month away from this year's Mardi Gras,” said Mary Beth Romig, communications and public relations director for the New Orleans Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau, “and we've still got beads hanging from trees up and down Saint Charles and from balconies in the French Quarter.”

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“It's all about recycling,” explained MacFarlane. Since Katrina, the city has stopped all free recycling pickup services. This means residents can either pay \$15 a month for the privilege of not filling up a landfill, they can settle for mixing all their recyclables in the trash, or they can come up with innovative uses themselves. The artists of Unique Products have taken some of New Orleans' distinctive trash and turned it into something gorgeous and maybe even lucrative. As well as the lamp shades, the company makes messenger bags out of recycled Federal Emergency Management Agency tarps and desk lamps out of detergent bottles and transforms old fiber-optic cable into garden lights shaped like – like so many ornaments in the city – a fleur-de-lis.

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# spaces

# Pinkies High

ELEGANT OR FUNKY, TEA SETS SPIFF UP ANY DECOR by Terry Ornelas

When most Southerners think of tea, the first thing that comes to mind is a cold, sweaty tumbler full of iced sweet tea. That is certainly steeped in tradition, as long as the day is hot. But for many generations we've tipped our teacup to an adopted tradition from our British brethren – the tea service.

The days of big hats and white gloves are no longer de rigueur for serving tea, but there's something to be said for dressing the part if you're so inclined. Either way, no true Southern home is complete without the tools of the trade. You'll need a cream pitcher, sugar bowl, strainer, tea tray, teacups, and of course, a teapot. There are a million embellishing accessories out there you can use to accompany and accent, but this list fills your basic needs.

Now if you want to do it up right, get an unglazed earthenware or ceramic steeping pot, as well as a serving pot. The serving pot should be porcelain, as it retains heat better. You can strain the tea when changing pots. Also, an electric kettle is fantastic for boiling water quickly. Let the water sit for a moment once it's boiled so you don't risk scalding the leaves.

Locally, all the big-box shops like Crate & Barrel, Bed Bath & Beyond, Macy's, Sur la Table, etc., will carry sets and accessories. But our tea leaves tell us to buy Austin! Locally brewed **Breed & Co.** (with their fantastic china selections), **Faraday's Kitchen Store**, and the ever-popular **Tea Embassy**.



JOHN ANDERSON

Hands down taking the cake as Austin's premier tea experience, Tea Embassy offers a mind-boggling assortment of more than 150 teas from all over the world. They come the local market on selections, with a wide array of green, black, oolong, white, pu-erh, South African rooibos, and a large selection of herbal tisanes (medicinal herbal infusions). For flavored teas, they carry combinations of unimaginable concoctions such as Love Story (chocolate and rose petals) and Genmaicha

(rice and popcorn-flavored). They even stock a margarita black tea – lime with a hint of salt – that was featured in December's *Southern Living* magazine. All of the flavor, none of the hangover. Add to that a selection of tea sets, and knowledge and service that would impress the queen. They don't offer afternoon tea or lunch in their shop, but they do encourage you to attend one of their catered tea events.

If you want to trade in white-glove service for fingerless knitted *très* chic service, check out **Top Drawer Thrift**, **Uncommon Objects**, **Room Service Vintage**, or any of Austin's myriad secondhand stores, and build your

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own tea set out of a vintage assortment. Tea poured from a funky, made-to-order, mix-matched service can be just as fabulous as antique-fancy rose bone china. It's all in the hospitality. One lump or two, how you choose to give and take your tea can be as original as you.

As far as the perfect cup goes, there are a hundred ways to achieve it, each method insisting on its own superiority. Your best

bet: Always use fresh, cold, purified water. Tea connoisseurs far and wide cannot insist on this one enough. Don't oversteep your tea. If you insist on using bagged tea, never squeeze the bag, or you'll release too many tannins and spoil the flavor. Finally, always add milk to the cup *before* pouring in the tea and not the opposite. Enjoy with gorgeous nibbles of your choice, and keep your pinkie finger raised high.

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## Nice Knobs

IT'S AMAZING WHAT A FEW SMALL THINGS CAN DO FOR AN ENVIRONMENT

by Matt Patin

The big things – couches, armoires, end tables, and the like – are definitely the staples of any home decor, but nothing showcases how freakishly attentive to detail you are like some thoroughly researched and meticulously placed knobs and switch plates. Yes, you read correctly: knobs and switch plates.

Knob may be one of the least inspiring words in the English language. Few other words connote an object so devoid of aerodynamics, elegance, refinement, or subtlety. But there are few things as practical as knobs in your homestead. Without them, *su casa* would be a wasteland of naked, inaccessible drawers and cabinetry, and doors would be limited to the kinds that swing and slide (like those Western saloon doors that keep you in constant fear of spur-wearing gunmen).

But, despite the stark utility of this essential hardware, knobs can, in fact, be very, very slightly interesting. In fact, there is a dizzying variety of knobs in the knob family, crafted from several materials that each say something different about your aesthetic tastes. (Insert private-parts joke in five, four,

three, two ... “The knobs purchased from Adult Megaplexxx, for instance, are made from silicon or glass. Snare, bass, cymbal crash. But seriously, folks, careful with those glass ones. Ouch!”)

So, if knobs could talk, what would they say?

**Wooden Knobs** I’m old-fashioned but timeless, and I can accommodate most of your drawer and cabinet accessibility needs. Be careful placing me in rooms that are often wet or damp, though, like kitchens or laundry rooms, as I don’t want to get moldy. Oh, or bathrooms either. I’d rather not be privy to your antics in there anyway.

**Plastic Knobs** I’m the most versatile knob of them all. I come in limitless colors and designs, and can be placed almost anywhere. Boo-yah!

**Aluminum and Stainless Steel Knobs** I’m sleek, I’m sexy, I’m rust-resistant, and I love getting wet. Place me on antique-inspired chest of drawers and dressers to create some interesting juxtapositions. Plus, I’m great for accenting your kitchen or bathroom cabinets and drawers. (I’ll be discreet!)

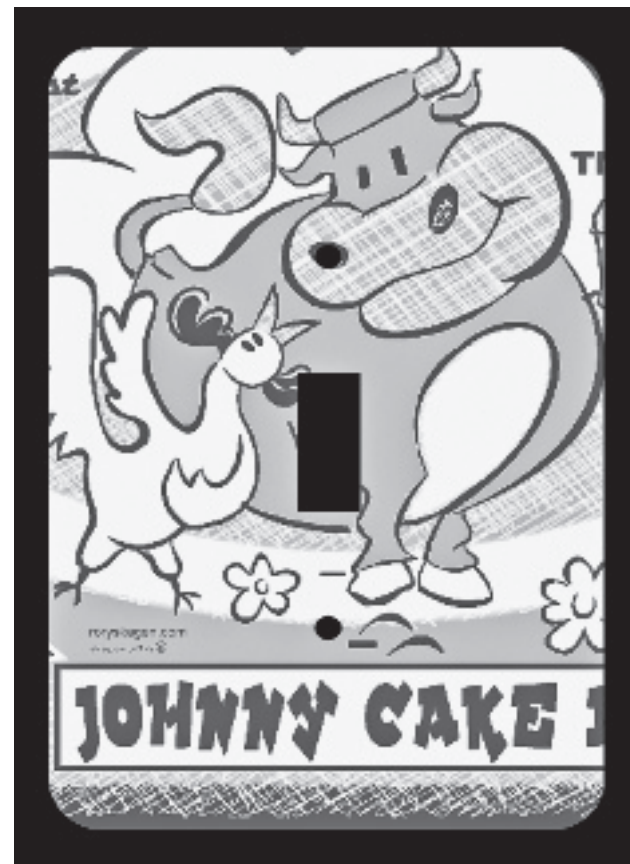
Oh, that’s just the beginning. There are even more options for the fanatic knob lover. Austin’s own **Carina Works** – who, no kidding, once created a \$30,000 diamond-encrusted metal tile – manufactures and sells their sea glass series knobs starting at \$14 each. Some glass colors include periwinkle, ice, amethyst, and – perfect for those Southwestern accented homes – gunmetal. Those are some of the more affordable knobs in the Carina catalog. More expensive knobs and pulls have, errr, well, birds, bunnies, and bears wearing sunglasses on them. These are part of Carina Works’ handcrafted, artsy and craftsy collection of knobs and pulls for children’s rooms.

Enough about knobs already, you say? Well, all right. How about switch plates then?

Nothing says “I want to turn you on!” like a light switch ensconced in a \$14.50 switch plate shaped and painted to look like a cowboy boot. That’s just one of thousands of switch-plate designs for New York-based SwitchHits.com. You know the drawl: *New York City*?! Hold your horses. It’s Hamburg, N.Y., which is almost rural enough to be Texas-like. **SwitchHits.com** has more than 50 categories of switch plates to browse through, including a Western section that includes 36 different designs. Take your pick: Barbwire Black, Longhorn Brown, Bull Rider, Big Ol’ Cowboy, and more. Some are made of plastic and some are ceramic, but – and we speak from experience on this one – be careful when buying plates made of metal, particularly the ones that frame electrical outlets. We’ve paid for this mistake with an occasional electrical shortage.

Here’s a mind bender: What do the giant armadillo atop Threadgill’s, the Aztec and Mayan artwork at Casino el Camino, and the Paul Cézanne-inspired mural in Central Market have to do with switch plates? Stumped? They’re all the products of Austin’s own **Blue Genie Art** and its CEO and art director **Rory Skagen**, who just so happens to design and paint his own brand of decorative switch plates. Check them out online.

Now you know how knobs and light plates can help you dress your home to impress. So let the search begin. And to make your search more interesting – even intrepid – seek further advice from that burly, hairy mountain man in the big-box hardware store and ask him to kindly show you his favorite knob.



**Blue Genie Art**  
P.O. Box 684832  
Austin, TX 78768  
866/611-6655  
www.roryskagen.com

**Carina Works**  
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## Blind Items

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Shades of Miz Scarlett, plantation blinds (sometimes called plantation shutters) have made a huge comeback. No longer a relic of dilapidated antebellum mansions, the thick, louvered wooden blinds are the window treatments of choice, from summer cottages to Manhattan pieds-à-terre. Gone, gone, gone are the hideous miniblinds and vertical blinds of yesteryear (and don't even mention Roman shades), replaced with the more substantial look that recalls sturdier construction, better quality, and permanence.

Unlike miniblinds, vertical blinds, drapes, or shades, plantation blinds can retain their value better than almost all other window coverings.

And of course there is a range of quality from vinyl to faux wood to genuine and sometimes exotic wood. Faux wood is often recommended for damp areas such as bathrooms and pool enclosures, as well as for areas frequented by children and pets. Vinyl is great for outdoors, or indoors for the budget-conscious homeowner, and the wood, well ... the wood bespeaks hearth, home, and heritage ... and a larger budget.

Regardless of the materials, the effects of the plantation shade are many. Sometimes just used across the bottom of the window, the adjustable louvers allow you to filter, regulate, and direct the light, and they provide effective insulation when closed. And just imagine the luxury of having them motorized so that they can all open and close just the right amount all at once.

The plantation blind can work with virtually every decor; the beauty of is in its simple, clean design. Used in single or multiple panel installations, they can even be ordered to fit arched or unusually sized windows. Many prefer to use them unadorned, but they may also be hung with drapes.

From \$27 for a small single window (at Lowe's) to the sky's-the-limit pricing for custom work, virtually any style and material is available. Locally, **Blinds of All Kinds** offers their showroom on Highway 620 and free in-home consultations. **Austin-tatious Blinds & Shutters** also offers free in-home estimates and gives a single price that will include everything from measuring to installing. Family-owned **Window Fashions of Texas** is one of the largest factory-direct sources for plantation shutters in the nation and on their website, under Specials, has coupons for discounts and upgrades.

Choosing plantation blinds, as with choosing any home-improvement item, can be an exercise in frustration, endlessly searching stores, catalogs, and the Internet for just the right look. Often these choices are best made with professional design advice. Buy an hour of a designer's time to get a different viewpoint. But shop carefully. Plantation blinds, like good intentions, can easily go awry. There is one particular website that shows you how to cut artwork into strips and apply the strips to the blinds so that when you turn the blinds, they look like those annoying and distracting billboards that change every few seconds. *Don't* try this at home.

**Blinds of All Kinds**  
1017 Hwy. 620 S., #101  
Austin, TX 78734  
899-8787  
www.blindsforallkinds.net

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Austin, TX 78738  
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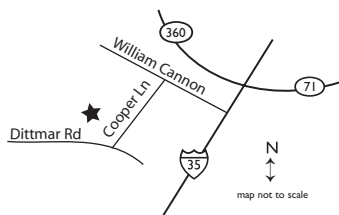
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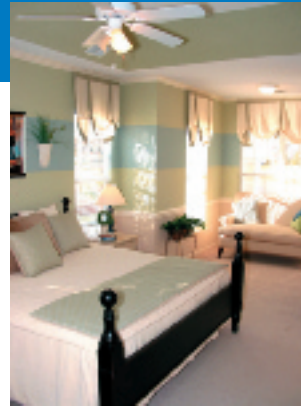
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