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## Gift & Holiday: Thinking Ahead

Jennifer Polanz



You may be in the thick of the holiday season for 2016 at the moment, but winter gift shows are just around the corner. So if you have a holiday shop, it's time to get crackin' on 2017.

We asked a couple of experts who routinely travel to China (in fact, both were leaving the week after these interviews) to give us a sneak peek at what's in store for the next holiday season and they didn't disappoint.

"For the 2017 Christmas holiday, we have seen and heard from our customers that they are selling Traditional Christmas looks and themes very well," says Philip Horton, design specialist at RAZ Imports based in Arlington, Texas. "So, we have based our ideas into this category, blending it with ideas that make it fresh and new."

They're focusing on the traditional rich colors of red, green and gold shown in textures and fabrics such as thick velvet with slight glittering jewels in the Trimmed with Tradition theme, he adds. Think opulence for that particular theme. Another popular styling, he notes, is the fresh cut tree idea that incorporates the ever-popular ideas of the farm, like galvanized items and Christmas signage.

Beth Lorentz, vice president of product development for Midwest Seasons in Cannon Falls, Minnesota, also pointed out a new style of urban farm country, as well as luxe and glamour, both of which are complemented with the Farm House Christmas Collection, and Aurora and Winter Solstice collections, respectively.

"Light and motion continue to be popular," she notes, "And lighted designs play a role in nearly every Midwest Seasons holiday collection. We also have five collections dedicated to lighted holiday items, including Wonder Lights, Mini Shimmers, Lights in the Night night lights and Holiday Shines."

Another interesting point Beth brought up is that Christmas décor is highly regional, with customers buying based on their geographic location. Themes from the cabin to the lake, seaside to western—it all depends on where you live. "State pride is also stronger than ever in gift and home décor, which Midwest Seasons is incorporating into holiday gifts and décor," she adds. "For example, a collection of specialty ornaments

feature state icons such as the Golden Gate Bridge, Statue of Liberty and the Space Needle. Also new this year, the Original S'mores State Collection features the classic s'mores characters holding graham crackers in the shape of each state imprinted with state abbreviations."

As far as design elements, Beth identified several to watch for: mixed materials and distressed textures, laser cut details, vintage inspired, natural elements, metallic luxe finishes, embellished details and typography/text.

Philip also mentioned a trend that continues is anything bird-related for the holidays. "We have found that birds in general are always great sellers," he notes. "Customers seem to love that little touch of life that they bring to their designs. But it is not limited to birds, as we see an uptrend to animals in general and offer them in several themes."

He offers a piece of advice to those looking for holiday-themed accents at the gift markets: "Look for functional items that work for an everyday consumer, but (can be) incorporated into 'holiday feel.' This way, many of our items could be sold long after the holidays are over." **GP**