Wrapping presents is relatively easy. But wrapping them creatively requires the skill of a thousand Santa's workshops. "Wrapping is a reflection of you," says New York-based fashion designer Shannon McLean. "What's inside the box is what you give a person to enjoy, but what's outside is how you express yourself. A gift is a two-person affair: the gift itself is about what will make the recipient happy; the wrapping is about what makes you happy."

"A really great gift makes you feel understood," adds Liz O'Brien, the proprietor of a 20th-century decorative-arts gallery in Manhattan. "When you get something that's completely off base you think, 'That person doesn't even..."
WRAP PARTY

Enough with pre-packaged gifts and a-dime-a-dozen wrapping paper. Holiday presents should have presence

know me. It's just as important that the box be personal and well thought-out.

Perhaps the best thing about opening a present is the excitement engendered by its wrapping. Anyone who has been given a hopelessly tangled parcel wrapped by a child knows she has already received a priceless gift. For grown-ups, however, style and taste are something to be reckoned with. In the spirit of the season, we asked several style-setters to take the wraps off their best packaging secrets. Each received a standard shirt box from Turnbull & Asser, which they did up with their customary panache. The holidays never looked better.
CAROLINA HERRERA: Always the epitome of glamour, the fashion designer covered her box with lavender silk shantung and topped it off with a "peony pink" flower hand-embroidered with Swarovski crystals. The colors are from her Spring 1999 collection. DONALD KAUFMAN AND TAFFY DAHL: The color consultants chose a 1979 watercolor sketch that isn't holiday-specific. Robert Isabell gave them the piece of silk ribbon, meant to evoke the horizon. STEWART MANGER: The decorator wrapped his box in a strié red silk faille with a playful trim and bow, all from Scalamandré. "The colors are not only festive," he says, "but strong and lively as well."

KENNETH JAY LANE: The pearls on the jewelry designer's package come "from my own faux-oyster beds"; they are wrapped around 22-karat-gold satin-finish paper. MARIO BUATTA: The decorator matched Scalamandré's Bengal Stripe cotton with a recycled ribbon and a singing Christmas tree. Underneath the tree are two stuffed-toy dogs from Gap and little wrapped surprises for children. "Even when you give someone a serious present," he says, "you should add something funny." TIFFANY DUBIN: The Sotheby's executive bought some retro black and gold-lamé wallpaper on eBay for her powder room and used what was left over on her gift box. Then she glued on some colorful rhinestones for extra sparkle.

SHANNON MCLEAN: Heavy Italian silk satin from the fashion designer's Spring 2000 line envelops her package, intended to evoke Mondrian—simple and elegant. It's crowned with a silk organza cabbage-rose pin that's a gift in itself. ALEXANDRA LIND: "My box is wrapped in a way that reflects my taste and sense of style," says the fashion designer, who wove silver silk satin and grosgrain ribbons and a single white silk ribbon, demonstrating her "passion for couture detail and finishing." LIZ O'BRIEN: A handmade silver breast by Richard Weissenberg (whose work is currently on view at her gallery) literally pops out of brown kraft paper. The breast "says 'Please touch,'" explains O'Brien. The card, a nod to Marcel Duchamp, is attached with twine from a Duane Reade drugstore.