A Coffee Christmas

BY MARK PENDERGRAST

What do you give your favorite coffee lover for Christmas? You could always go for the "Christmas blend" offered by many roasters. Instead, let me suggest three more original options.

THE AEROPRESS: Alan Adler is best known as the inventor of the Aerobie, a Saturn's-ring-type flying disc that once held the world record (1,333 feet) for the farthest-thrown object without any velocity-aiding feature. But his greatest invention may be the AeroPress, a clever breather that makes a tasty espresso-like beverage. I bought mine from Amazon for about $30. It looks like a miniature French press but works more like a pressure piston. Put two scoops of finely ground coffee into the cylinder, perched atop your coffee mug. Fill up to the second line with 175°F water. Stir for 10 seconds. Then gently press the piston down. In about 30 seconds, the airtight rubber gasket moves the water through the grounds and a paper disc filter. Top off the mug with hot water for regular coffee, or hot milk for a latte.

It makes a fine, clean, aromatic cup of coffee, and you can brew up to four shots at a time and add hot water to fill a standard canister. For me, the coolest thing about the device is how it cleans up. You just unscrew the filter-holder and move the piston all the way down over your compost pot. A compressed hockey puck of coffee grounds pops out. Rinse off the bottom of the rubber gasket, and you're ready to brew again. This would be a perfect gift to try out for Christmas brunch.

MUSIC: I had a brilliant idea: Give a CD anthology of coffee songs. Only I couldn’t find one. So I made my own, and you could too. I went to Amazon and searched MP3 offerings for “coffee.” I listened to samples, then downloaded 30 and chose 20 to burn onto a CD, creating a marvelously eclectic, listenable mix. I started with Peggy Lee’s “Black Coffee,” the quintessential coffee-loves-misery blues. Then “The Coffee Song,” Frank Sinatra’s upbeat ode to the beans: “Way down among Brazilians, coffee beans grow by the billions, so they’ve got to find those extra cups to fill. They’ve got an awful lot of coffee in Brazil.”


My downloads came to $30 (for my complete playlist contact me at www.markpendergrast.com). An important legal caveat, however: My copyright lawyer advises that it’s OK to burn one CD of music you have purchased for the purpose of a gift, but not to make multiple copies.

BOOKS: There are all kinds of coffee books that would make suitable gifts, such as The Joy of Coffee, by Cozy Kummer; The Devil’s Cup, by Stewart Lee Allen; God in a Cup, by Michaelie Weissman; Coffee: A Guide to Buying, Brewing and Enjoying, by Kenneth Davis; or I Love Coffee! Over 100 Easy and Delicious Coffee Drinks, by Susan Zimmer. But here I highlight two books hot off the press.

COFFEE STORY: ETHIOPIA, by Majka Burhardt, photographs by Travis and Helmut Horn (Origin Point Press, 2010, hardcover, $49.95). This coffee-table book offers an intriguing look at the birthplace of coffee in all its beauty, complexity and mystery. Coffee maven, adventurer, climber and anthropologist Burhardt heard multiple, conflicting myths about coffee’s origins and traveled to the country to sample native coffee concoctions such as buha kelemu, a porridge of roasted coffee cherries mixed with butter and salt.