

MELANIE SPENCER: INTERIOR DIALOGUE

Junior League brings feast for the eyes to each Christmas Affair

A lot of planning goes into the design of annual bazaar

By [Melanie Spencer](#)

AMERICAN STATESMAN STAFF

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Eighteen months ago, Austinites Kelly Goulding, Cathy Northcutt, Susie Meserole, Kathy Erben and Micah Vasicek began a decorating project for Christmas 2007. The plan they hatched back then now includes, but is certainly not limited to, thousands of ornaments, a trio of life-sized wise men (and their respective camels) and scores of fruit, dates and nuts.

This spectacular display — to the relief of the women's neighbors — is not for their lawns and living rooms, but rather, will fill the Palmer Events Center during the Junior League's 32nd annual A Christmas Affair, which runs today through Sunday.

The theme for this year is "The Gift of the Magi." The event, which includes five days of parties, a fashion show, book signings with Kinky Friedman, Kristin Armstrong and Marci Henna and a shopping bazaar including more than 200 merchants from all over the country, benefits 26 local nonprofit agencies.

Goulding and company make up the decorations committee, formed in mid-2006. Northcutt, the decorations chair, says that since January, the committee's volunteers have devoted about 20 hours per week to the event. Which makes sense, because I've attended A Christmas Affair the past two years and both times, I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the decor, and not just in the main room.

"Back in our 'nomad area,' we envision travelers in the night with colorful tents, bird cages and lanterns," Northcutt says. "It's going to be the main bar for the event. Townsley Designs is loaning us some ottomans and pillows."

The tea room, billed as an oasis for the traveling wise men, is also a must see. It will feature more tents and a sunset color palette of oranges, pinks, blues and purples.

Much of the look was inspired by the book "The First Christmas" by Jan Pienkowski (available at www.janpienkowski.com). The children's book features the King James Christmas story and silhouette illustrations. Similar silhouettes have been incorporated into the event decor.

Once in the exhibit hall, attendees can expect a feast for the eyes in the way of the sights and smells of a Moroccan bazaar. "There will be 24-foot arches with onion domes painted all different colors and life-sized camels and kings," says event chair Goulding. "Lots of jewel tones and gold. And the 25-foot-tree, we put over 3,000 ornaments on it. We have to decorate Palmer so people want to come back every year."

Goulding says the ornaments and many of the decorations used during the event will be sold Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the Junior League of Austin headquarters (5416 Parkcrest Drive, Suite 100, 467-8982). The proceeds from this sale will, of course, also go to the League's charities.

If you go, be sure to notice the specially commissioned banners hanging over the shopping aisles. The originals were painted by Hill Country artists Janey Rives and Candice McPherran.

Despite the whirlwind of planning, hard work, parties and shopping, the event volunteers never lose sight of their mission.

"Last year, we raised about \$800,000 through tickets (and) ornament and merchant sales," Goulding says. "I'm hoping to make more than that."

Another (newer) Austin tradition

This weekend you can get your art fix during the expansive East Austin Studio Tour (www.eastaustinstudiotour.com). From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, more than 200 East Austin artists (or 113 studios) will hold open houses. The event, which began in 2003, offers a glimpse at the tools and techniques that the artists use and a chance to chat with the creatives about their work.

One event I'm interested in is the Sol-Art installation (1141 Perry Road, www.sol-art.org). It's the free kick-off event for a new green development called SOL (Solutions Oriented Living), the brainchild of Chris Krager and his band of designers at KRDB Design-Build. The event features artists, filmmakers, writers, photographers and musicians who will present a large-scale installation, including photographs, paintings, interactive video and mixed-media pieces housed in four 8-foot-by-40-foot shipping containers and two 70-year-old homes on the property.

Get more information, including a map and list of studios, at www.eastaustinstudiotour.com. You can buy catalogs before the tour for \$5 at several locations around town, including Cafe Mundi (1704 E. Fifth St., 236-8634) and the E.A.S.T. headquarters at Big Medium Studios (5305 Bolm Road, Suite 12, 385-1670). Also, check out more in today's XL.

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A Christmas Affair

What: A shopping bazaar, plus other events

Where: Palmer Events Center

When: Noon to 5 p.m. today, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday

Cost: Single-day tickets to the bazaar are \$10; two-day tickets are \$18. Tickets available to other related

functions as well, including the Santa breakfast, mother-daughter fashion show and more.

Information: Call 467-8982 or visit www.jlaustin.org for an event schedule and detailed ticket information.

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