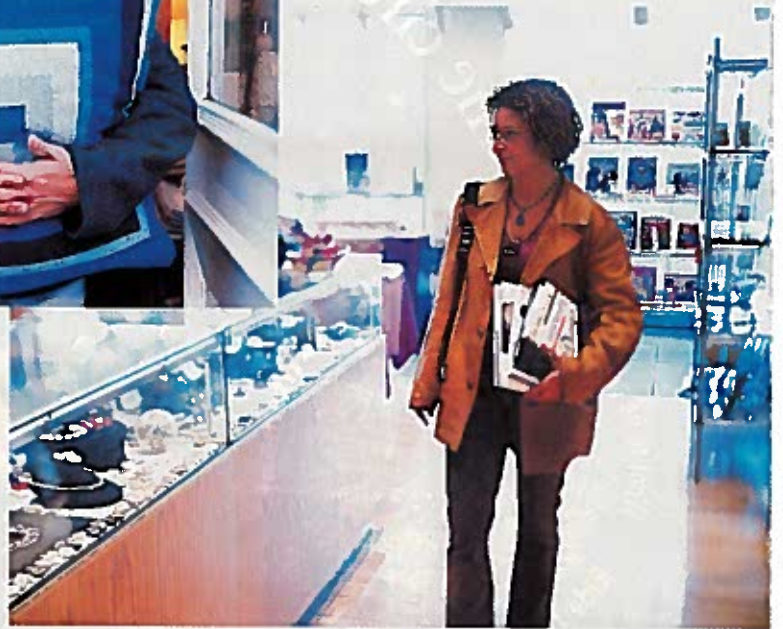
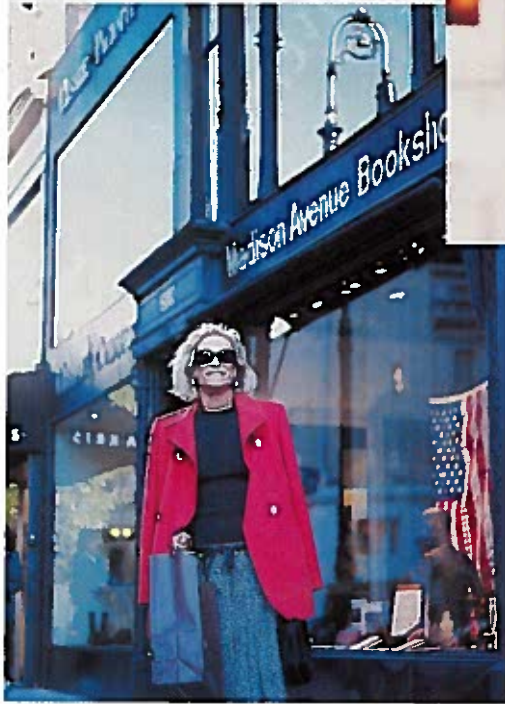




WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH . . . :
From left, Nan Kempner on Madison Avenue, Narciso Rodriguez at Jonathan Adler, and Sheila Bridges at the Studio Museum in Harlem.



treasure hunt

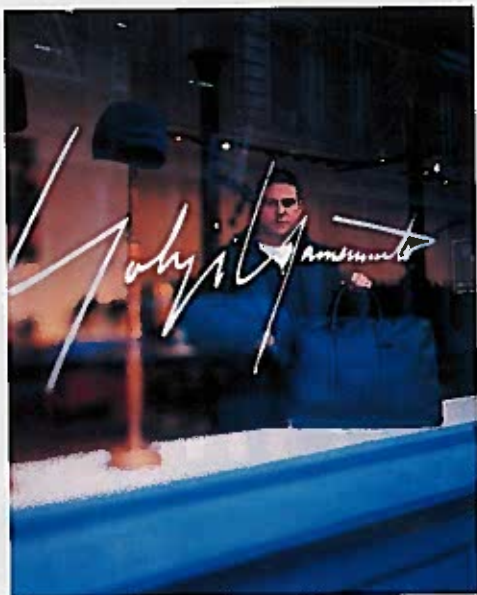
Three New York style-makers—social maven Nan Kempner, fashion designer Narciso Rodriguez, and interior decorator Sheila Bridges—take us along as they hit their favorite shops in search of holiday loot. **By Amy Laroocca**

THE UPPER EAST SIDE IS BUSTLING WITH THE KIND OF WELL-HEELED shoppers who take the city's mandate to buy very seriously. On this brisk November day, Nan Kempner—who is always at home pounding the pavement of upper Madison—kicks off her holiday shopping at the Madison Avenue Bookshop (833 Madison Avenue, at 69th street; 212-535-6130). She has to start early; there are more than 90 people on her Christmas list. Decked out in an Oscar de la Renta dress (this season, of course) and several giant cocktail rings, she parks herself by the new releases and starts browsing.

"*The Corrections?*" she asks, handling Jonathan Franzen's tome about a midwestern family and its troubles. She flips through the pages. "Oh, my dear. Everybody's got a problem. Who needs it?" Instead, Kempner will be giving her couture pals this year's new fashion titles, like Diana Vreeland's *Why Don't You . . . ?* (\$25), compiled by John Esten, and *Halston*, edited by Steven Bluttal (\$39.95). "Books," she declares in a voice raspy from years of passionate smoking, "are a wonderful present. Particularly for men, who are more difficult to shop for." She eyes a stack of her own book, *RSVP* (\$40). "Tommy Kempner"—Nan's husband—"sends out about 150 of my books as gifts," Kempner says, "with our Christmas letter."

Not everybody will get books: Her two daughters-in-law will get clothes. ("One year, all three girls got Fendi fur," Kempner says. All three? "Well, two. Not my daughter. She's a vegetarian. No leather! Just sneakers.") Kempner donates to God's Love We Deliver on her friends' behalf, and she orders from its catalogue (800-889-6515), which this year is filled with designer treats like a Burberry apron (\$75) and a Celine umbrella (\$90). "That's for the people who don't need more junk," she says. For her grandchildren, she knows what the ultimate gift is. "A dog. But then I'd really get into trouble."

For her husband, Nan heads up Madison to Taffin (by appointment only; 212-794-0308), the showroom for an exquisite line of jewelry designed by James de Givenchy, formerly of Verdura. She stops to admire a pair of sequined pants in the window at Carolina Herrera (954 Madison Avenue, at 75th street; 212-249-6552). "Beautiful!" she says, clutching her chest. "Might be good for the girls . . ." As she mounts the stairs to the Taffin showroom, she runs out of breath. "Can you send a litter?" she calls up toward the awaiting room of jewels. Once upstairs, she settles onto a couch. "He has the most wonderful cuff links," Kempner says of Givenchy.



There are pairs made from carved chalcedony and 18-karat gold (\$2,800), and small wooden ones that look like smooth macadamia nuts speckled with diamonds (\$4,500). Kempner decides on a gold pair, shaped like bridles (\$1,000). "I found some like that for my husband in London once," she notes, "but they were stolen."

That taken care of, she busies herself trying on a necklace of giant coral beads. "So I have to get a gift for my 102-year-old mother-in-law. And I can't get her another bed jacket." Problem solved: "I'll get these," she jokes, admiring herself in the mirror. "Then I'll inherit them."

EVEN ON A WEEKDAY MORNING SIX WEEKS BEFORE Christmas, SoHo looks poised for the season; shops are filled with lush displays of future gifts. Designer Narciso Rodriguez, whose office is just north of Houston, is glad that the holiday season is beginning: It's a good excuse for his weekly pilgrimage to Moss (146 Greene Street; 212-204-7100). "Gift shopping always winds up like this," he explains, gazing past his reflection in the window at the bluest Baccarat glass (\$250) on display. "One present for you, one present for me. One present for you, two for me!" By early November, though, Rodriguez had already finished a lot of his holiday shopping. He found a store called H Groome in Southampton (9 Main Street; 631-204-0491) with smokeless soy candles (\$12 to \$62) and blood-red lacquer salad tongs (\$60) that will wind up in the apartments of some fortunate friends.

So who's left? Close friends like Pierre Rougier, owner of PR Consulting, plus his boyfriend and his mother. "I make donations to the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation," he says, "but I always like to give a little something, too." There are the

Baccarat crystal glasses, of course, and there are rubberized stacking chairs by Komplot (\$372 each for black and gray, \$395 for red) and richly colored Studio Arte Cuoio leather key rings from Milan (\$15 to \$43). Rodriguez loves it all. "I wouldn't," he says, "give anything that I wouldn't personally love to get." There's a birch Woodline soaking tub by Agape (\$7,630). "If anyone wants to get me a present . . ." he says, pointing at the tub. "You see?" He laughs at himself. "Greedy, greedy, greedy!"

Rodriguez's next stop is at the Broome Street pottery store owned by his friend Jonathan Adler (465 Broome Street; 212-941-8950). "Everybody gets presents from Jonathan Adler," Rodriguez says, admiring pear-shaped Christmas ornaments (\$35) and an extremely sleek menorah (\$98). He also stops to take note of a giant ivory-colored urn with a funnel top (\$625) and groovy, seventies-style lamps (\$250 to \$695). "This one is amazing," he says of a small, cylindrical dark-charcoal vase. "My apartment is small, but I want to buy everything. So Christmas is a good excuse."

Rodriguez's last stop is the Grand Street Yohji Yamamoto store (104 Grand Street; 212-966-9066), where he zeroes in on a simple bright-red leather belt with a silver buckle (\$140) that he decides is "very Christmasy." But it's the sweaters, cut al-

most cartoonishly large, that he really loves. "Every year, my boyfriend gets a sweater," he says. This year, it's a charcoal-gray popcorn-stitch cardigan (\$1,200), oversized and cuddly. "But," he says with a sly smile, "it's a surprise."

THERE IS A FAMILY OF GIANT GERMAN TOURISTS walking silently across 125th Street as interior designer Sheila Bridges begins her Christmas shopping at the Studio Museum of Harlem gift shop (144 West 125th Street; 212-864-4500), a few blocks away from her home and across the street from the office she recently completed decorating for Bill Clinton. In the twelve years that Bridges has been a decorator, she has, naturally, become a habitué of home-design stores, which means she gets some good gift ideas while she's working. But she likes to shop closer to home.

This year, she'll get Studio Museum memberships for her parents to use when they visit from Philadelphia, but she's also loading up on books. "My brother gets Colson Whitehead's *John Henry Days* [\$24.95]," she says, "and for my mom, *Elder Grace: The Nobility of Aging* [\$40]," an anthology edited by Chester Higgins Jr. She grimaces. "I hope she doesn't take it the wrong way." There's a heavy coffee-table book called *The Jazz Pictures* (\$60), with photographs by Carol Friedman, for Dad. "We're big on books," she shrugs. "And I re-

'TIS BETTER TO GIVE: James de Givenchy shows Kempner his latest—giant coral beads for her mother-in-law.





IT'S A WRAP: Sheila Bridges prepares some packages.

ally only get presents for my family, a few close friends, and my dog. But that comes from Petco." There is also jewelry to be admired: cameos in ivory with the profiles in black, ringed in gold and silver (\$85), as well as colorful velvet patchwork handmade scarves by Two's Company (\$32).

Bridges's next stop is a little way down Lenox at 116th: the Malcolm Shabazz Harlem Market (102 West 116th Street; 212-987-8131). Vendors sell everything from traditional African arts, rugs, baskets, and fabrics to CDs and soap. "I'm a major bead person," Bridges says, gesturing to the turquoise around her neck, "so I like to get things for my girlfriends here. If you don't live in New York, you just can't find this stuff. Friends in Boston and Washington love it." She picks stacks of bright-blue bracelets from Mohammed World. "I al-

ways like to put a whole bunch together." The giant woven baskets from Fatou Touba M'backe look good on top of cabinets, can hold stacks of magazines, and are naturally colored, which makes them a safe bet for matching in other people's apartments. "Everyone has too many magazines," she says. "They'd also be good if you were a picnic person," Bridges says in a way that suggests that she—in spite of all the time she spends at her house in Hudson, where she rides horses and teaches snowboarding—is not.

She also takes a walk around the market's ten fabric stands. "It's good to make pillows and tablecloths from these," she says, checking out bolts of richly dyed cotton. "I guess," she admits, before heading home to wrap her finds (she uses old wallpaper instead of wrapping paper, to keep things unique), "what people really always want from me is something for their house!" ■