



Joseph Connolly

A monthly diary of sundry observations, brief encounters and anecdotes, local and less so, foodie and otherwise

Past makes us present tense

And so this is Christmas. All is calm, all is bright. Or is it...? Maybe you're still going simply crazy with this terrible fear that you have failed to buy that 'perfect' gift for a truly wonderful person ...?

Well according to all the women columnists, if you are a man you simply haven't a hope. You haven't a hope because you are hopeless – on this they are all agreed. You have spent the whole of December loafing on the sofa, leaving the women to take on all the Christmas chores *in addition to everything else that they have to see to daily* ...!

And it doesn't remotely matter, chaps, if you have even steeled yourself to actually read some of these screechingly insane features that the papers have been choked with for the past four weeks, every one of them entitled either 'Present and Correct' or else 'Christmas All Wrapped Up' ... because still, I'm afraid, you are doomed to getting it wrong.

Women have decided this. They are already rehearsing their 'gift face' in the mirror – a rictus of ersatz delight which they will unleash with gusto when they do not receive a Mulberry bag, which is all they ever seem to want. And although Chanel No5 clocks up 80 per cent of its annual sales in December, that is no good at all because it betokens a bovine lack of imagination and it's what you've done for the past 20 Christmases and she doesn't even like No5 because she's now into Tom Ford and Marc Jacobs and only an idiot wouldn't know that.

She does want, however, a Tiffany pendant in a little blue box or a watch by Cartier or Rolex ... but let's face it, she's not going to get any of those, is she? And



■ **Buying the right gift for the lady in your life can be a test of taste and resilience**

you're never going to buy a Patek Philippe because the adverts have dimmed into you that you never actually *own* it, so sod that for a game of soldiers.

So where to go for advice? Pippa Middleton says it is a good idea to shop early, but you didn't, did you? She also says it is a solid wheeze to wrap your present in Christmas paper: her perspicacity knows no bounds.

Dear Gwyneth Paltrow will urge you to log on to her website Goop and buy a roll of lavatory paper for £630 (no, I am not joking).

One man I know last year told me that he was at his wit's end so asked his wife what she wanted and she said a steam iron. So he got it. And nothing else. Didn't

wrap it, of course, because she knew what it was going to be. Steam irons a hefty bugger, and his concussion lasted until long after Easter.

Okay, here are a few tips, culled from recent breathless supplements:

■ La Prairie caviar in a Baccarat flask, exclusive to Harrods: £1,350 – but be warned: you don't eat it, you slap it on your face. Also exclusive to Harrods is a Burberry duffel coat for a mere two grand – and talking of that ubiquitous company, how about a bottle of My Burberry ...? A fragrance, they say, 'inspired by the iconic trench coat'. Terrific, no? Less than a hundred quid for odour of wet mac.

Maybe better to go for Armani's

Profumo, which at least might lend 'er indoors a cheeky whiff of Mandy Rice-Davies.

Or what about a Stella McCartney handbag lined in polyester from recycled plastic bottles, at £565?

No? Maybe John Lewis vouchers like last time, then – because is there a woman born who would not relish John Lewis vouchers?

Maybe men are useless at present buying because of an inherent resentment over the presents they themselves are inured to receiving: a scarf, a cocktail kit, a putting set, a scarf, a tankard, a beard kit, a scarf, an extendable garden hose, a tie and handkerchief set, a scarf, a pair of slippers and a bloody scarf.



Right time to be advent-urous?

And lo, this very morning – Christmas Eve – you will have opened the very last door on your advent calendar. What sort did you get? Traditional nativity scene? Santa? Or one of the increasing number that offer daily little presents? Not just chocolate now – this year there were examples with earrings, tiny samples of scent, weeny bottles of gin... and one with 24 differently flavoured Billy Boy condoms. O Come, All Ye Faithful ...

Because I write about food and drink, I am often asked – and particularly at this oh-so festive time of year – for a dependable cure for a hangover. There aren't any ... although there are two sure-fire ways to avoid one: you just don't drink ... or you just don't stop.



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■ **What's in a name? Johnny Cash, John Cleese and Jeremy Corbyn**

Something in common with Caesar, Cagney, Cash and Co

It's not a bad time of year to have the initials J.C. I share them with many eminent people – including Joseph Conrad, who according to Wikipedia is also some kind of a writer or other. Julius Caesar is a memorable one – and from then on they fairly trip off the tongue: James Cagney, Joan Crawford, Joan and Jackie Collins, Johnny Cash, Julie Christie, James Caan, Jimmy Carter, John Cleese, Jasper Conran, James Coburn, Jim Carter, Jeremy Clarkson ... on and on, really.

Lately, though, I have spotted 'J.C.' quite regularly in reference to somebody called ... Jeremy Corbyn. Jeremy Corbyn! Are my initials really to be usurped by Jeremy Corbyn?! Jesus Christ.

■ **Joseph Connolly's The A-Z of Eating Out is published by Thames & Hudson.**



Cards will hang by a thread

Every year I receive fewer and fewer actual Christmas cards, and far more email greetings – as well as those rather smug and pious declarations about donations to charity.

Those cards one does receive, however, still tend to rather aggressively take over surfaces and become unruly. So this year I decided to string 'em up: it's the only language they understand.

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