



The Holiday Survival Guide

December in Boston means crowded streets, crowded stores, gloomy weather, and even-more-irritating relatives. Don't let the bah-humbugs get the best of you. Our 12-part, 209-point playbook for getting through the most hectic time of year will keep you blissed out till New Year's (even in the face of a certain annoying Christmas ditty).

Photographs by TANIT SAKAKINI

Ten Elves for Hire

Headache Relief: Outsource Your Chores



1. Decorating the tree: Installers from Christmas Décor's eight Massachusetts locations keep the holidays bright with custom-designed combos of garland and lighting that they'll hang for you at the start of the season, take down at the end, and store in their own warehouse the rest of the year. Regular checkups help ensure all bulbs are lit, and stay that way. (christmasdecor.net)



2. Planning the party: If your talents run more toward party-going than party-throwing, call on Lyn Pellegrini. Her Art of the Party catering service provides china, silver, decorations—and meals from some of the city's top chefs, including Geoff Gardner of Sel de la Terre and Paul O'Connell of Chez Henri. Even a certain Ms. Stewart would be jealous. (617-859-7932, www.artofthepartycatering.com)

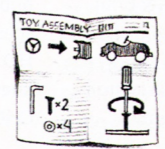


3. Buying the gifts: There's nothing as satisfying as coming home from a day of shopping laden with carefully chosen presents for your nearest and dearest. If only you could get that feeling without the actual

shopping (and the crowded stores, pushy people, and broken escalators). The Proper Shopper's Linda Workman does the hard part, buying from your suggestions and leaving you with all the warm-and-fuzzies and none of the bruises. (617-901-3382, propershopperboston.com)



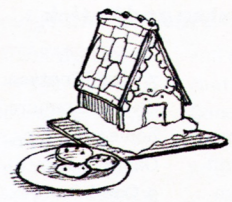
4. Wrapping the gifts: A textbook Christmas morning starts with stacks of flawlessly wrapped gifts—and ends with a mound of shredded paper. The pros at Beacon Hill's Rugg Road Paper Company will fold, tape, and beribbon any size box in bright stripes, bold solids, and festive designs from companies including Peculiar Pair Press and Snow & Graham, executing wrapping jobs so precious even the kids might pause to appreciate them. (105 Charles St., Boston, 617-742-0002, ruggroadpaper.com)



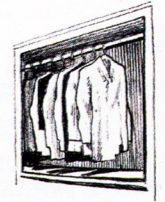
5. Assembling the toys: The last thing any Santa stand-in needs on Christmas Eve is a pile of tiny pieces, a set of vague instructions, and a bike that has to be assembled by morning. The staff at Hands of Time concierge service can take that chore off your plate: The impressive roster of services includes furniture and toy assembly. All you have to do is leave the finished product under the tree and help yourself to a few of those cookies left out for the man in red. (617-281-7606, lisashandsoftime.com)



6. Cooking the feast: Even on a slow day, coming home to a kitchen full of raw ingredients can be daunting. Chef Andrea Silver, who learned from Michael Schlow and Jacques Pépin before starting Brookline's Sweet and Savory, shows up, groceries in hand, to prepare as many as five meals for your family—leaving the freezer stocked with short ribs, crispy apricot pork chops, or anything else you select from her menu of classic American fare. (617-835-3874, sweetandsavorychef.com)



7. Baking the cookies: You could order up a tray of generic holiday cookies to put out while entertaining, but a much sweeter note would be the same homemade treats your nana used to make. Only in this case, they're made by someone else. Cuisine En Locale will whip up batches of your secret family recipe for an hourly rate. Nana never even needs to know. (617-285-0167, enlocale.com)

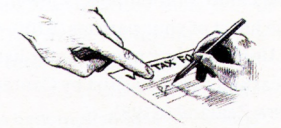


8. Organizing the closet (you know, for all that loot you're expecting): Planned to hide some presents in the closet,

only to find, under all the mess, some from last year that you thought you'd lost? It happened to us, too—before we met professional organizer Heidi Solomon of P.O.S.H. She turns crowded clothes-keepers into efficient storage systems, leaving plenty of room for concealing Santa's booty (as well as your own fashionable gifts to yourself). (617-277-7674, posh-boston.com)



9. Returning the duds: She means well, but Aunt Louise always winds up giving you gifts that are just slightly off the mark (except that hideous handpainted vase, which was way off the mark). Rather than let them languish in your junk drawer, have the couriers at City Schleppers return them for you. They'll wait in line to get a refund, or trade in for exactly what you wanted. (617-236-1199, tillingers.com)



10. Figuring out how to write it all off: Get a head start on a happy spring with some early-bird tax advice. Although most paperwork isn't yet available, an accountant who steps in now can help you organize receipts, make last-minute (deductible) donations, and otherwise set you up for a refund that will pay for all of next year's holiday assistance. (*Back Bay Accounting and Tax*, 617-578-0800, preptaxesonline.com) —B.C.

Illustrations, JOE MCKENDRY