

ACCESSORIES

The hole truth about buttons

By MARY G. PEPITONE
Special to The Star

This winter it's time to button up. Humble, utilitarian buttons are popping up all over the home. They add interest, texture and color to accessories and are inexpensive — often free, even.

"A button is really a small piece of art," said Esther Rudnick, a buyer for Cy Rudnick's Crown Center Fabrics in Kansas City.

Buttons come in all colors, shapes and sizes. They can be smooth or have texture. Buttons have been made from almost every material, both natural and man-made, including pearl, glass, metal, stone, leather, ceramic, plastic and wood. Some have a shank on the back, others have holes in the center.

"No one can throw a button away," said Sloane Simmons, co-owner of Stuff in

Brookside. "They give a little spot of luster and can be used in unexpected ways."

Most people think to use buttons on fabric as a fashionable fastener for envelope pillows, duvet covers and drapes. Attaching buttons to non-fabric items such as lampshades, frames and furniture is also popular. There are buttons to complement many décor styles (Asian, Mexican or Italian, for example) as most countries make buttons that reflect their cultures, Rudnick says.

Rudnick's Fabrics has a basket filled with buttons that sell for less than a dime each. Trims with buttons start at \$2.98 per yard. One-of-a-kind, old, vintage buttons are popular and can sell for up to \$25 per item. If you shop garage sales or



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thrift stores, look for interesting buttons that can be salvaged from used clothing. And, of course, the buttons in the bottom of your sewing basket are free.

Artist Jane Hosey Stern of Olathe likes to incorporate vintage buttons into the furniture and wall hangings she creates. "Buttons can be really different, so the buttons you choose can reflect a personal style," said Hosey Stern. "A button doesn't need to be sparkly to create a 'wow' factor."

For Hosey Stern, a love of buttons goes back to her Grandma Faye's button tin. "As a child, I was fascinated by them," she said. "I would sort them, play with them and use them as currency." Hosey Stern has woven buttons around the legs of a telephone stand, and she creates interesting hangers for her artwork using buttons.

Buttons also can be part of stand-alone sculptures. At Stuff, vintage buttons are woven together using wire, creating a stem of "flowers." These button flowers cost \$2.50 per "stem" and create a beautiful, low-maintenance arrangement in a vase.

"Whether it's a single button on a pillow or a grouping of them on a piece of furniture," said Simmons, "a button can be the exact right finishing touch."

Mary G. Pepitone is a freelance writer in Leawood.

Resources

- *Collector's Encyclopedia of Buttons* by Sally Luscomb, (Schiffer Publishing, 2003, \$24.95)
- Cy Rudnick's Crown Center Fabrics, 2450 Grand Blvd., (816) 842-7808
- Stuff, 316 W. 63rd St., (816) 361-8222



Photos by JOHN MUTRUX/The Kansas City Star



Glass or ceramic buttons can be attached with wire to wrought-iron furniture. (\$200 for this seat with integrated table at Stuff)

Buttons can liven up a dull picture frame. (\$22-\$42 for empty frames at Stuff in Brookside)

History of buttons

The 18th century is the golden age for buttons. Workmanship and artistry mirror the fine fashions of King Louis XIV of France.

In the late 18th century, the Industrial Revolution ushers in mass-produced buttons. At the time they are worn only on men's clothing.

In the 1860s, black, clear and colored glass buttons become popular during the reign of Queen Victoria of England. Buttons are molded in forms using the same die-making process used for metal buttons. "Picture buttons" bearing scenes from popular plays, operas and books are worn by women and men alike.

In the early 20th century, silver buttons are popular during the art nouveau period.

In the 1940s and '50s whimsical styles in transparent glass or colorful Bakelite or Lucite are popular. Buttons shaped like fruits, animals or other objects are called "realistics."

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Source: *Buttons* by Nancy Fink and Maryalice Ditzler (Running Press, \$10)