

How to credit crunch your Christmas

THIS is the season of goodwill, credit crunch or no credit crunch. An economic downturn is no excuse for making no-present pacts with your nearest and dearest: that's just stingy. What the crunch does call for is imaginative thinking: heavens,

MAKE IT FABULOUS

Take time with the wrapping. I hoard catalogues from art dealers — Bonham's, Christie's and Chris Beetles, the cartoon gallery — and use the picture reproductions on the outside of what I'm giving. Or else plain gold paper with plain red or green or navy satin ribbon — street markets can be good for that sort of thing. For children you can stick



David Cameron visits Woolies for bargain presents but all it takes is a

little imagination. Charity shops are only as good as their neighbourhood, which means that shops in Kensington and Chelsea, Belgravia or Knightsbridge can yield rich pickings.

GIVE SOMETHING USEFUL

After a decade of over-consumption, useful presents can be really welcome. Claus Porto, the Portuguese soap-maker, has some



Cash-strapped Conservative: the Tory leader samples the wonder of Woolies

for under a tenner, in interesting Art Deco wrapping. And what about handkerchiefs? They're more environmentally friendly than tissues. Aim for funky or pretty ones: we're not talking boring-retro here.

PROMISES CAN BE WORTH A LOT

These can go an awfully long way to making an inexpensive present seem more special. One friend offered me half-a-dozen babysitting nights on dates of my choice. It was particularly thoughtful as for her time is far more precious than money I took her up on it, too. Children could offer a few sessions of car-washing or similar.

MAKE YOUR OWN GIFTS

If you can't make your own jam, you can buy some nice home-made stuff from charity fêtes or the like. If you're a good cook then home-made chocolates (there's an excellent River Café recipe) are simple and, with good ingredients, can be delicious. Ditto home-made macaroons: you

might not be able to afford the from Ladurée, which are here they are not hard to make.

THINK ABOUT QUANTITY

Style-writer Rita Konig mair that sometimes, to make thir good, you simply have to hav them. So, one pair of socks, r how nice, isn't going to rattl anyone's cage but half a doz well wrapped, have the wow! Italian stationery shop, Cam Marzio Design, on Piccadilly St James's Street, sells five v coloured little notebooks wr ribbon for a fiver, which has impact than just one.

KEEP A PRESENT DRAWER

This involves buying ahead, you find things that you thir make good presents when y holiday, say, or in a lovely to! has things you can never fin normally. Consider that a tj year.

BUZZ WORD

Sheconomics *noun*

Definition: The study of supply and demand as it relates to women — for example, why women binge-shop and feel guilty afterwards, or why buying those new shoes might seem more important than eating.

Example: "There are seven laws of sheconomics, which include looking debt in the face and taking emotional control of spending."

Etymology: Coined by Karen Pine and Simonne Gnossen, authors of the book *Sheconomics*, published in January

TALK OF THE TOWN

Can you write a novel in a café?

FIRST unemployed single mother JK Rowling penned *Harry Potter* in an Edinburgh café. Now author Marina Fiorato is being courted by Hollywood after making £1 million from *The Glassblower* of Murano, composed in the cafés of north London, where she escaped with her baby from her cramped one-bed flat in Swiss Cottage.

How do they manage it? I find it hard to write a single line. There's far too much people-watching to do. Plus you have to have the nerve to sit over a single cup of coffee for four hours.

London is full of writers' cafés with earnest-looking Salman Rushdie-types jotting down Very Important

Thoughts in a notebook. Every so often they sigh out loud with satisfaction. I just want to hit them.

Where is the ideal place in which to spin my thoughts? Now the late lamented Piccadilly Café has gone, friends recommend the Poetry Café in Covent Garden or the Literary Café in Tufnell Park. But I find the faux-bohemian ambience too distracting.

What I want is a no-frills greasy spoon or sandwich shop — with an unphotogenic clientele so you don't find yourself consumed by lustful thoughts between paragraphs. Which is why — I shudder to admit it — I'm sticking to Subway. **LIZ HOGGARD**

RISING STAR...

ANDREW MARR

To some, he might seem an unlikely sex symbol. Not so to Dame Helen Mirren, who in a recent magazine interview revealed a passion for Andrew Marr, most specifically for ears: "I just wanted to graze his like some fabulous, wonderful animal." She's only fan. Facebook lists a 61 members called "Andrew is a god (with crazy bat ears)". Each to their own, as they

