

# Pretty Papers

By ELISA MALA

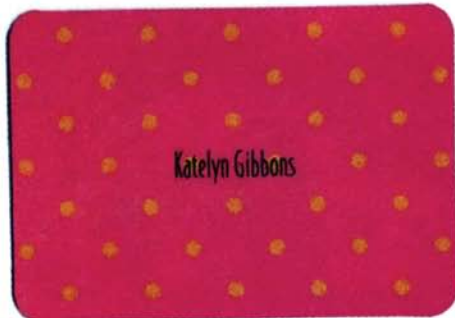
**T**he most important piece of paper this season isn't a shiny sheet of wrapping paper, a glittery holiday card, or even a jaw-dropping credit card bill: It's a thank-you note. "Proper etiquette will always require a thank-you note," the founder of the custom stationer Advantages, Fran Biderman-Gross, said.

Unlike the rules of decorum, options for stationery are plenty. Details like heavy stock, hand-lined envelopes, unusual patterns, and intricate printing techniques can give notes a personal flair.

The papers sold at the Mrs. John L. Strong boutique (699 Madison Ave., between 62nd and 63rd streets, fifth floor, 212-838-3775) are hand-made from start to finish. For a pack of 20 cards, prices range between \$85 and \$155. "You're getting a 19th-century card in the 21st century," a brand representative, Nicholas Nicholson, said.

New York-based papermakers Bubble Letters NYC (Bloomingdale's or bubblelettersnyc.com) and Advantages (advantages.net) allow do-it-yourselfers to design paper creations. Founded by Kacy Mayer, a former public school teacher, Bub-

*For a Noteworthy Thank-You*



ble Letters NYC also offers ready-to-order designs that can be personalized. A pack of 25 cards costs \$63. Advantages is a one-stop shop for both social and corporate stationery; prices are determined on a project-by-project basis.

Designer stationery doesn't necessarily mean designer prices. Many of Checkerboard's luxury note cards start at \$1. Available at Target stores and target.com, boxed sets from the brand will be available for a fraction of the price.

And when it gets down to writing the note: "If you spend a lot of money on stationery, you should use black ink," the author of "New Manners for New Times" and contributor to www.finestationery.com, Letitia Baldrige, said.

Before the pen touches the paper, be sure that there's enough holiday cheer to go around. "If you're not in a good mood, it's going to be hollow," Ms. Baldrige said.

That might mean it's time to take a look at the gift again. "Write about how it looked, how you used it, and how great it made you feel," Ms. Baldrige said. "You cannot be anything less than enthusiastic, unless you hate the person and want them out of your life!"



**PEN PALS A** card by Checkerboard (\$10/10 at checkernet.com), top; clockwise from above left, cards by Mrs. John L. Strong (\$115/20 at mrsstrong.com), Crane's (\$14/10 at katespaperie.com), and two by Bubble Letters NYC (\$63/25 at bubblelettersnyc.com).