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# The must-haves for Mardi Gras: Handmade throws from shoes to sunglasses, plungers and more

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1 of 22



Lillian Baker decorates Krewe of Carrollton signature shrimp boots at ARC of Greater New Orleans in Metairie, La., Tuesday, Feb. 5, 2019. Over 1,200 shrimps boots were decorated for the Mardi Gras krewe.

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Advocate Staff photo by SOPHIA GERMER

While beads, cups and toys are still the bulk of a parade rider's throws, it's the one-of-a-kind, hand-decorated, themed items that make Carnival aficionados swoon.

And it all started with a coconut.

The Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club, which rolls on Mardi Gras morning, has been handing out coconuts since 1910, according to its website. At first, the coconuts were plain, but somewhere along the way, Zulu members started to decorate them, and it became a coveted throw.

Preston Tate, 14, has been collecting Zulu coconuts since he was 5.

"I have been to every single Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans, and Zulu is the absolute best," he said. The most he has received in one parade is 20, with his collection now totaling 97 Zulu coconuts.

It wasn't until 2001, when the Krewe of Muses started parading and handed out its first glittered shoe, that crowds could enjoy another item to add to their shelves of Carnival mementos.

"We traced the very first shoe back to (Muses member) Nicola Wolf glittering four shoes in homage to the Zulu coconuts," said Virginia Saussy, the krewe's chair of theme and floats.

Founder Staci Rosenberg adds, “It grew organically from there, and the krewe didn’t have involvement for years.”

The krewe still doesn’t control the creative process but decided to limit riders to handing out 30 shoes in a parade.

Now, other krewes have caught up with their own bedecked, signature throws.

When the Krewe of Nyx was founded in 2012, they wanted to do something to complement the Muses shoe, with the purse making sense as a popular accessory for women. An instant hit, purses can be found on the Nyx Purse Tracker Facebook page, which encourages people to post their catches after the parade. Nyx’s sister krewe, Pandora, which started rolling in Metairie in 2016, chose a box, inspired by the mythological Pandora’s box as its specialty throw.

The Krewe of Iris, the largest parading krewe in Carnival, picked sunglasses, a practical choice for this daytime parade — who hasn’t forgotten their sunglasses? — and a fun item to adorn.

The krewe started handing them out in 2012 and members can decorate anywhere from 20 to 100 pairs of glasses.

In the Krewe of Alla, members started hand-decorating genies' lamps in 2016 in honor of the organization's logo. The Krewe of Excalibur hands out a handmade shield, and Choctow distributes wooden tomahawks.

Smaller marching groups like Krewe des Fleurs and the Ladies Godiva Riding Group are known for their signature throws as well. The Godivas, riding since 2007, hand out small, decorated horseshoes.

This year, the Fleurs are handing out small throws designed in the likeness of the 2019 theme flower, the bleeding heart. The top is a keepsake, while the pendant, which is embedded with seeds, can be planted; it's what they are calling #seedsasbeads.

All materials were carefully researched for safety, said Lauren Dean-Shapiro, the group's creative director and founder. "We are planting only eco-friendly, biodegradable or nontoxic materials," she said.

The Fleurs will march in the Cleopatra and Mid-City parades, as well as in the Femme Fatale parade, with those members handing out adorned compacts.

There are parading organizations that have combined signature throws with giving back to the community. The Krewe of Pygmalion and Krewe of Tucks have Magnolia Community Services work on their throws, while the Krewe of Carrollton goes to Arc of Greater New Orleans. Both organizations serve people with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Pygmalion “Pygs” — toy swine — have been adorned and handed out since 2018. The Krewe of Carrollton began handing out their signature mini shrimp boot in 2016, and in 2018 started having Arc clients decorate them, with about 1,200 completed this year.

Tucks has hired Magnolia clients year-round to decorate brushes and plungers, said krewe captain Lloyd Frischhertz — but the demand is so high that this year they are just having Arc decorate brushes. Riders will distribute about

10,000 of the glittery implements. Like the Carrollton shrimp boots, each brush has note from its creator attached.

And the Krewe of King Arthur, which has been tossing hand-decorated grails since 2017, has created possibly the most collectible throw of all. The “Grail of Grails” is a one-of-a-kind metal cup bestowed by a selected krewe member upon a person who makes them smile on the route, said Phil Fricano, founder and captain.

The 2019 version, a special commission by artists Alison Ford and Cliff Pitre, is made of silver-plated copper set with more than 150 Swarovski crystals, ornamented in Arthurian motifs.

“It will be only the third Grail of Grails we’ve given away, but it’s already the talk of the town,” said Fricano.

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