

by Julie Clay

Toys to Enjoy

You've heard it before: Toys are for kids, and kids at heart. We set out to investigate that theory and managed to discover playthings for all types and ages. Whether it's a trip down memory lane or the latest brain-teaser, these gadgets do more than just help you pass the time. Now, remember what your parents always told you: Play nice. And above all, share!

MEMORY LANE

Rediscover the simple days of playtime past with these finds at **Islander Trading Post**. Owner Bob Averill travels up and down the East Coast and through the Midwest in search of rare and collectible items. In his travels, he has assembled a wonderful assortment of vintage toys. Among the collection of "gently used" items, we found such classic games as Tiddley Winks, Chinese Checkers, and Bob-a-Loop barrel and rope game. A wooden rocking horse is sure to delight, as will an Ohio Art tin circus top and tin Monopoly lunchbox. A toy cash register and various vintage Barbie items, including a hatbox, can also be found among the treasures here. 1446 Periwinkle Way, Sanibel, 239/395-0888



PHOTOS BY KATHLEEN BLASE

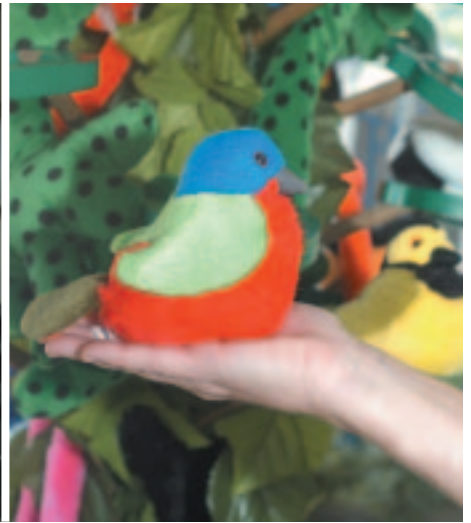


COLLECTIBLE CREATIONS

The Cheshire Cat offers a variety of unique finds for all kinds of kids. For those who never quite outgrew or have rediscovered a love for figurines and medieval times, the French company Papo presents its extensive assembly of creations. These collectible four-inch-tall figurines include knights, soldiers, and horsemen, all of which are configured either to stand on their own or sit upon horses and unicorns created for this line. The knights wield swords and shields, damsels are outfitted in beautiful dresses, and a king and queen reign over it all. Completing the scene are catapults and rearing horses. Set the stage with a castle made of quarter-inch-thick wood, complete

with two levels, lookout towers, and working drawbridge.

Vault into slightly more modern times with an assortment of Erector sets. These sets include metal pieces and connectors with which to build just about anything you could imagine. A motorized Ferris-wheel set comes in a metal box with handle for easy transportation to and from play dates. Many of the available sets include motors for various creations. Available sets at The Cheshire Cat include construction vehicles and the city set, which makes a rather large helicopter, motorcycle, and police car. Most make close to ten different models. *Bell Tower Shops, Unit 219, Ft. Myers, 239/482-8697(TOYS)*



PLAY AND LEARN

There's nothing like a toy that's not only fun to play with, but educational as well. An abundance of "toys that teach" can be found at **Tarpon Bay Explorers**, located at J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge's Tarpon Bay. The gift shop has a section of nature-themed educational toys, including realistic plush birds that, when squeezed, emit the authentic sound of the species they portray, provided by years of research at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Created by Wild Republic, this line of Audubon birds features ducks, bluebirds,

robins, cardinals, and red-winged blackbirds, to name just a few. For those with a budding green thumb, plant-experiment kits packaged in giant test tubes contain the essentials for growing simple plants—two flowerpots, dishes, and seeds. Young scientists will enjoy Environmental Box Kits. Part of the Simple Science Experiment Series, these miniature kits teach lessons on air pollution, global warming, acid rain, and soil quality. *900 Tarpon Bay Road, Sanibel, 239/472-9621, www.tarponbayexplorers.com*



PUZZLING SITUATIONS

According to the staff at the Sanibel-Captiva Islands Chamber of Commerce, visitors can't seem to get enough of the Sanibel-Captiva 1,000-piece puzzle. With a map of the islands in the middle, the outer edges list local landmarks and businesses in a Monopoly-style design. One of the best places to find this souvenir and other puzzling items is **Toys Ahoy**. Get past all the great kids' playthings and head to the back of the store for a solid challenge to one's brain and patience.

Both an art piece and puzzle, DaMert's Triazzle is as much fun to view as it is a challenge to solve. At first glance it seems easy enough, but the more you try, the harder it gets (so says the company, anyway). Triazzle comes in several different pictorial designs; Toys Ahoy stocks those with dragonfly and other nature designs.

Not challenging enough? Try the scrambled jigsaw puzzle

invented by Dugald Keith and manufactured by Blue Opal of Australia. Rearrange the pieces to put the seven frogs on top of the water lilies. A few hours or days later, you might change your mind. Also by Blue Opal is the magic jigsaw puzzle. Although a piece appears to be missing, the pieces actually form a complete puzzle.

Create your own puzzling masterpiece with either the CoinConstruction set or Super Magz 52. CoinConstruction is a 400-piece set of clips that uses pennies as connectors. Structures that challenge the imagination also become a unique way of keeping one's coin collection in order. Super Magz 52 is a set of colored metal bars and silver balls that are magnetically charged, offering the creative mind myriad ways in which to create structures and conversation pieces. *2075 Periwinkle Way, Periwinkle Place, Unit 28, Sanibel, 239/472-4800*