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**Thank you,
Costco Connection team**

Something Wilder ★ Delectable desserts ★ Hearing Aid Centers

COSTCO Connection[®]

THE MAGAZINE FOR COSTCO MEMBERS

Great trips

Costco Travel continues
to expand and evolve, with
more services, destinations
and offerings [22](#)



FEBRUARY 2023



FOR YOUR HOME

Gertmenian rugs

ThermoFlask

Buyers' picks

COSTCO **Connection** *February*

February 2023

Volume 38

Number 2

COVER: © AMAZEINDESIGN, FLAVIUS PILIPONIS, GOMOLACH, MAXICAM, VIKTORIAREUT / STOCK.ADOBE.COM. CONTENTS: COURTESY GERTMENIAN RUGS

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© RUSTIC LOVE

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Home is where Costco is

Ah, travel. I love to travel. The thrill of seeing different sights, meeting new people and filling my day with a host of novel experiences is something I have always enjoyed. On the other hand, I also love it when my biggest adventure of the day is traveling with a cup of coffee from the kitchen to my favorite chair.

Are these two loves impossible to reconcile? I say no, and I think the content in this month's *Connection* shows that they can happily coexist.

For example, our cover story provides a wonderful overview of Costco Travel, a service that has been offered to Costco members for almost 25 years. As you might expect, introducing Costco's approach of "how do we provide the best value" to the travel experience was not without its challenges. Historically, this industry has not been known for its efforts to make things less expensive while also adding extras. But Costco Travel dug in and over the years has shown that our business model can be successful, providing some of the best value for cruises, vacation packages, hotels, rental cars and much more to our members.

For those times when travel means ambling to the den to watch the next episode of *The Voice*, Costco is there to make sure the environment and ambience are exactly what you need. The profile of Gertmenian, a longtime Costco supplier of rugs for inside and outside your house, and the kitchen picks from our housewares buyers and bedroom and living room picks from our domestics buyers showcase the myriad ways Costco provides value and quality for every room in your home.

Whether you are regularly driven by wanderlust or are someone who prefers to stay put, Costco has you covered. ■



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Sandy Torrey is Senior Vice President, Corporate Membership, Marketing and Publisher, *Costco Connection*.

Coming next month Costco members show off their unique collections.

Follow us on



ERIC HOOD /
STOCK.ADOBE.COM

A patient payout

I just finished reading [Suze Orman's "Patience pays off" in the January issue, and wholeheartedly agree with the advice to wait, if you are healthy, to start to collect your Social Security benefits.

I decided to wait until age 70 to begin taking my benefits. Perseverance can pay off ... and don't be afraid to question the Social Security Administration if you feel you should be entitled to a higher benefit based upon the 6% to 8% per year rule.

Dennis L. Murray

Hollywood, South Carolina

Hometown heroes

Thank you for highlighting Charleston Coffee Roasters of South Carolina in "Regional appeal" [December 2022]. I keep my pantry stocked full of these amazing coffee beans. I couldn't imagine starting my day off any other way!

Karen Bickley

Blythwood, South Carolina

Very vegan

I'm writing to thank you for including the article "Meatless memories" in your December 2022 publication. Every holiday season I cook for my extended family and I'm always looking for great vegan recipes. I'm definitely going to make the mushroom gravy and tahini cookies this year. They both look delicious!

Michele Webster, Stockton, California

All the difference

Every year, I look forward to reading about the charities in your [December

TELL US YOUR STORY!

Are you a member who used Costco for your wedding plans, wedding, reception or honeymoon? We want to hear from you for possible inclusion in an upcoming feature. Please send an email to connection@costco.com that briefly shares your story and includes high-resolution images. Please put "Costco Wedding" in the subject line.

Member Connection], and I wish them the luck we had when you wrote about us at Animal-Kind International [AKI]. Over the years, we retained relationships; gained a committed group of supporters who only heard about us thanks to [you]; and still—eight years later—get notes from people who tell me they are donating because they read about AKI in [the *Connection*]. That says a lot about the trust people have in Costco and what it means to be a member.

Karen Menczer

Jemez Springs, New Mexico

Correction

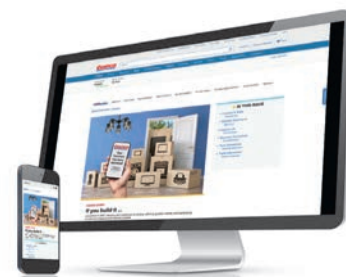
The correct name of the national organization identified in "The joys of toys" [Member Connection, January 2023] is the USA Toy Library Association (usatla.org).

Quick & Easy
THE COSTCO WAY



Wonderful Seedless Lemon Rosemary Cake

Lemon lovers will luxuriate in the flavor of this dessert. View this recipe and others at Costco.com. Search: *Quick & Easy* and click "Desserts."



Advertising and products

All advertisements will indicate whether a product is available in a Costco warehouse, at Costco.com or both. Products are scheduled to be available at the time of publication unless otherwise noted. Items may not be available in all locations and selection can vary. Costco.com carries many of the products available at the warehouses and much more. Prices may vary in AK, HI, PR and at Costco.com. Applicable tax laws may require sales tax on pre-discounted prices. These taxes are in addition to product price.

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Access the magazine online each month at Costco.com (search "*Costco Connection*").

Talk to us

Do you have a comment about something you read in the *Connection*? Please send a note, including your full name, phone number and address, to:

EMAIL

connection@costco.com

MAIL

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Seattle, WA 98124-1088

PRIVACY, PLEASE

Change Your Password Day

Yes, they occasionally drive us nuts, but passwords play a crucial role in our digital lives. Change Your Password Day falls on February 1. Observe it by changing your passwords regularly, using two-factor authentication and taking advantage of password-managing apps.



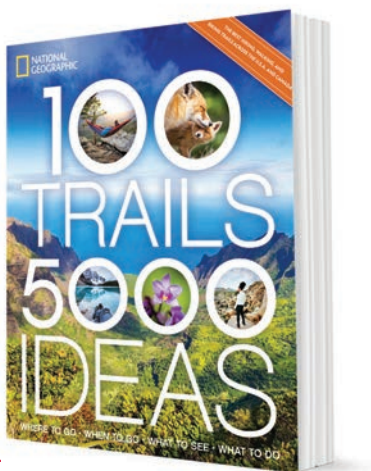
© START / STOCK.ADOBE.COM



THE GIFT OF SPARKLE

Valentine's Day gift idea

Looking for the perfect present this Valentine's Day? Look no further than this heart-shaped diamond 14-karat white gold band. Featuring 70 near-colorless round brilliant diamonds, collectively weighing 0.96 carat, this halo band provides just the right amount of sparkle for your sweetheart this season and beyond. Available in sizes 5 to 8. Various item numbers. Costco.com only.



HIT THE TRAIL

Small book, big adventures

Do you love going on amazing hikes, seeing wildlife, picnicking in beautiful places or camping? *100 Trails, 5000 Ideas* by editor, writer and photographer Joe Yogerst offers something for everyone, from beginners to advanced trekkers seeking multi-week adventures. Available in mid-February. Item 1059726. Warehouses only.

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GLOBAL MOVIE DAY

Lights, camera, action!

Global Movie Day falls on February 11 this year. Visit Costco.com to purchase streaming subscriptions or movie theater e-gift cards for tickets and concessions, or enjoy your favorite films on one of the many televisions available in Costco warehouses and at Costco.com.



★ FLORAL FACTS

Last year Costco sold enough floral stems to wrap all the way around the planet.



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2022 ECONOMIC CENSUS

A request from the U.S. Census Bureau

Every five years, the United States Census Bureau surveys millions of businesses across every industry to measure the U.S. economy. Economic Census results shape economic indicators, policies and business decisions at all levels—yet many employers don't respond.

The Census Bureau has a request if your company gets an Economic Census form: Please reply by March 15. To learn more, go to census.gov/econ.

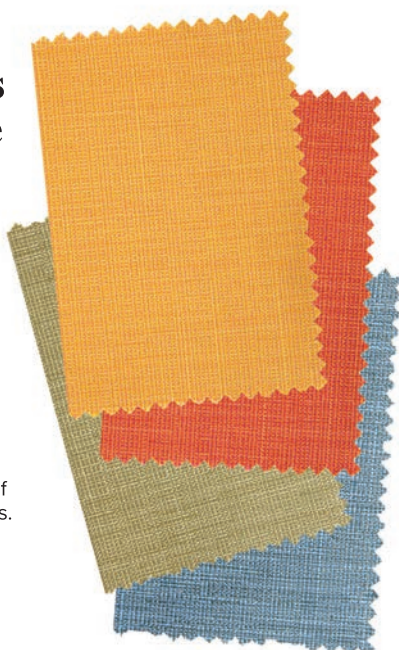


U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

FEEL IT FIRST

Sample swatches available

Before buying furniture or flooring at Costco.com, get a feel for the fabric or material and see how it looks in your home. Contact information for sample swatches can be found in the "Product Details" section of many online items.



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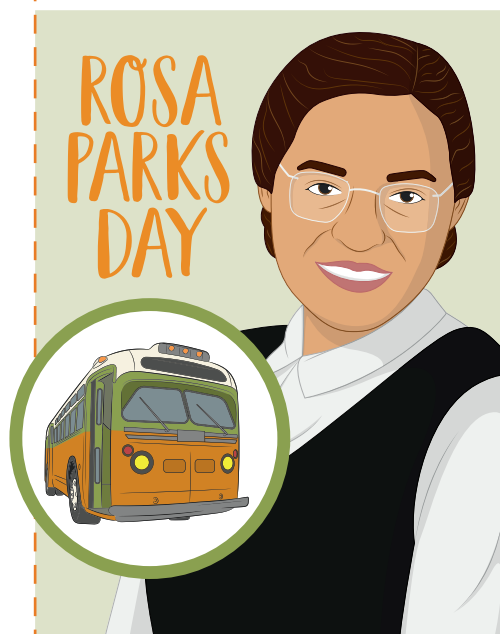
A DAY TO REMEMBER

Enough is enough

February 4 is Rosa Parks Day, an observance to honor the civil rights activist who was born on that day in 1913. Rosa Parks Day promotes equal opportunities, civil rights and fairness across communities in the U.S.

In 1955, Parks was traveling in a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus when the bus driver asked her to vacate her seat for a white man. She refused and was arrested and fined.

Her actions led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which lasted from December 5, 1955, to December 20, 1956, during which time African Americans refused to ride city buses in Montgomery; according to History.com, the mass protest is regarded as the first large-scale U.S. demonstration against segregation. The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately ordered the city of Montgomery to integrate its bus system.



© NAVIN FORDE / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

In 1955, Sony introduced its transistor radio in Japan. It debuted in Canada in 1956—the first time a Sony product was sold internationally.

TECH CONNECTION

Growing green

A look at the steps Sony has taken, and is taking in the future, to be an earth-friendly operation

by MARC SALTZMAN

Sony Electronics has created everything from audio products and cameras to televisions and laptops. It released the first portable music player (Walkman) and CD player, co-developed the DVD format and is behind one of the biggest brands in video games: PlayStation.

You may already know all this, but what you might not be aware of is Sony's commitment to operating sustainably. Balancing economic growth and caring for the environment is no simple task—especially when manufacturing electronics.

According to a list of core values on its website, Sony has committed to “deliver *kando* [satisfaction, excitement] and *anshin* [reliability, safety] to people and societies around the world through the pursuit of technology and new challenges.”

Here's a short summary of Sony's sustainability efforts:

Recycled content. Sony developed a new recycled plastic for its components, in an effort to reduce the use of virgin plastics for products and packaging. This includes a special flame-retardant plastic resin developed by Sony in 2014 called SORPLAS, which features up to 99% recycled content and is used in some BRAVIA TV models, sound bars, wireless speakers and various cameras.



© JFL PHOTOGRAPHY / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Less packaging. A reduction in packaging size improves shipping efficiencies and requires less plastics and other materials. Small product packaging at Sony, including headphones and smartphones, is now plastic-free, except for labels and adhesives. Sony is meeting its Green Management 2025 targets, which include the total elimination of plastic from the packaging of newly designed small products. Some items also feature environmentally conscious packaging, created with an original blend material made from bamboo, sugarcane fibers and post-consumer recycled paper.

A better future. Along with a commitment to 100% renewable electricity in its operations by 2030, Sony has announced an ambitious carbon neutrality goal by 2040, throughout the entire process of designing, testing, manufacturing, packaging and shipping products. The goal was originally set up for 2050, but Sony announced last year that it would work to accelerate its commitment by an entire decade.

In honor of Sony Electronics' commitment to sustainable materials management and responsible electronics recycling, the company has been recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a distinguished Gold Tier Award winner in the EPA's annual Sustainable Materials Management Electronics Challenge. ■

SEVAG SAGHERIAN



Marc Saltzman

is a tech journalist and host of the *Tech It Out* podcast. He answers selected questions in this column and regrets that all questions can't be answered individually.

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Please include “Tech Connection” in the subject line.

COSTCO CONNECTION

You'll find a variety of Sony products in Costco warehouses and at Costco.com.



COVER
STORY

Destination: The world

Costco Travel offers members an array of travel experiences, from cruises, gorgeous vacation packages and all-inclusive resorts to theme parks and car rentals. And just as in the warehouse, prices are crystal clear from the get-go.

by **Wendy Irvine**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

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A trip to Costco is arguably a destination unto itself, but did you know that Costco has also been curating incredible travel deals for members in the U.S. since 2000?

Here's how it works. Costco Travel buyers negotiate bulk buys in four areas—vacation packages, cruises, hotels and rental cars—resulting in an extraordinary collection of travel experiences.

“Costco Wholesale has built a high level of trust with members throughout the world, and we at Costco Travel want to safeguard that trust,” says Kathy Robinson, vice president and general manager, Costco Travel. “We stand behind all the products we sell and eliminate the extra costs, so members pay only what they’re quoted and there aren’t hidden fees.”

Bring your trip to life

Costco Travel offers two exceptional ways to put your travel vision into action.

Option one. Costco Travel boasts over 500 friendly and very knowledgeable travel reps who are raring to answer your call and your every question; call 1-866-921-7925.

“The buyers and their teams form the bedrock of Costco Travel. Specializing in their particular destination, the buyers negotiate extraordinary vacation packages and then layer each in add-ons and amenities,” says Robinson. (See “Dial up the fun,” on page 25.)

Option two. If you're a DIY person, log on to CostcoTravel.com and create your dream getaway.

“Members can build their own vacations, get a stand-alone hotel, take an all-inclusive or guided vacation, a cruise and so many things in between,” says Robinson.



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COURTESY OF MARGARITAVILLE BEACH RESORT, NASSAU

Margaritaville Beach
Resort in Nassau



© MONTANA MIRAMAR / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Traditional
dancing
in Mexico



The Iao Valley
in Maui, Hawaii



Car rentals are
available through
Costco Travel.

Vacation packages to love

Who'd love an effortless trip? A lot of you. Let Costco Travel do the heavy lifting while you kick back and relax. The hardest part is choosing where to go.

The Caribbean. "We offer vacation packages on nine islands, including the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and St. Lucia," says Erin Huffman, Caribbean buyer. "Costco Travel's goal is to bring exceptional value to our members. The Caribbean collection now includes even more value with these new resorts: The Ritz-Carlton, Turks and Caicos; Margaritaville Beach Resort Nassau in the Bahamas; and Hampton by Hilton Grand Cayman."

Costa Rica and Latin America. "We're continually working to expand what we offer," says Richard Murphy, buyer for Mexico and Costa Rica. "This year we've added 10 new properties in Mexico, from family-friendly, adults-only and traditional resorts to all-inclusive resorts, including our newest five-star boutique, La Casa de la Playa in Riviera Maya."

Costa Rica and its 28 magnificent national parks deliver mind-blowing thrill rides like zip lining over a lush forest canopy, inner tubing through ancient caves and trekking around a volcano, to name just a few.

Europe. "Costco Travel offers pre-bundled packages to European cities and countries, like London: Your Way, Paris: Your Way and Best of Italy: Your Way," says Kanoë Daly, the Costco Travel Europe buyer.

Dial up the fun

Like its parent company, Costco Wholesale, Costco Travel takes infusing high value into every vacation package very seriously.

"It's about choosing the right items," says Casey Livingston, Costco Travel buyer. "For example, we won't have thousands of hotels to choose from. We always bring it back to the Costco model: We narrow the herd and make sure that we're picking the best of the best for our members."

"While each vacation package is different, value add-ons range: They can be a Costco Shop Card to use in the Costco warehouse or online, a couple's massage, a daily buffet breakfast, a waived resort fee, a lei greeting, discounts on spas, resort credits and a whole lot more." —WJ



CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

“Costco Travel is excited to offer members more variety for their travel accommodation needs.”

— CASEY LIVINGSTON ★
Costco Travel buyer

Multiply your savings

After a trip, Costco Executive members receive 2% of their overall trip costs (up to \$1,000) in a Costco Shop Card to use at a warehouse or at Costco.com. (Savings are applied after the trip and exclude taxes, tips and third-party activities like reef snorkeling.)

But here's the thing: The 2% Reward only applies to Costco Executive membership (\$120 per year). Do the math; it might make sense to bump your membership up to the Executive level.

And the deal gets even sweeter. Executive members who book travel with a Costco Anywhere Visa Card earn a whopping total of 3% cash back on their travels. That adds up to 3% cash back with a Costco Anywhere Visa Card, plus 2% Executive reward (limit and conditions apply). Bon voyage!—WI

Members can choose from a variety of European vacation packages that include add-ons, such as a bottle of wine in your room, daily breakfast or a room upgrade, among many more.

Hawaii. “Costco Travel makes the booking process simple,” says Jolene Schuerman, a Costco Travel buyer for Hawaii, “and you will always receive that exceptional Costco value.”

Schuerman has created a beautiful selection of vacation packages for Oahu, Maui, Kauai and Hawaii (the Big Island), all at varying price points.

“I tell everyone to get out and explore what each island has to offer,” says Schuerman. “Each has its own personality and offers different experiences. Explore the beautiful surroundings, meet the locals and learn about the local culture—these are the things you’ll remember long after you’ve returned home.”

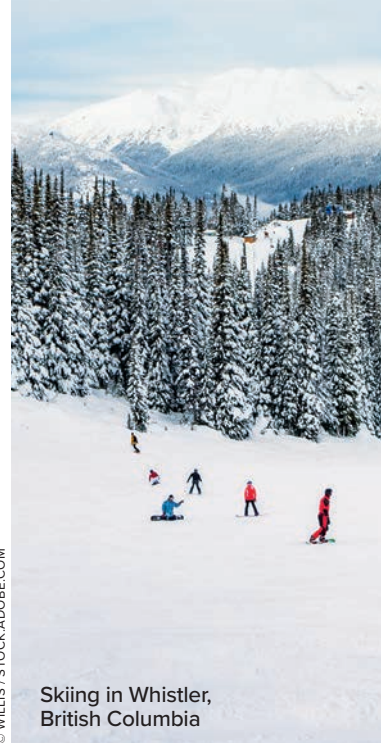
Theme parks and sensational cities. If you’re considering visiting one of the biggies, such as Walt Disney World (Florida) and Universal Orlando Resort (think: Harry Potter), let Costco Travel manage the details.

“One of the benefits of using Costco Travel,” says Michelle Rupp, buyer for theme parks and domestic regions (Florida and New York City), “is that we take out the guesswork for the members; our packages include the hotels, tickets and optional rental cars.”

Cruises

Cruising is back! “The ships returned to the water in June 2021 and are back to 100% capacity for all of the lines offered in our program, which includes one river and 10 ocean cruise lines,” says Jody Zegers, cruise buyer. “The beauty of cruising is that you can sail almost anywhere, like the South Pacific [Bora Bora], Canary Islands, Greek islands and the Norwegian fjords. You can even sail to Iceland and Ireland on a Celebrity cruise.”

Zegers continues, “One to two weeks after the cruise has completed, members receive a Costco Shop Card—a percentage of your cruise price—to use at a Costco warehouse or at Costco.com.” (See “Multiply your savings.”)



© WILLIS / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Skiing in Whistler,
British Columbia



© DISNEY

Walt Disney
World Resort,
Orlando, Florida



PRINCESS CRUISES

Crown Princess in
Ocho Rios, Jamaica



Hotel-only program

Casey Livingston is the Costco Travel buyer for stand-alone hotels worldwide, a program introduced at Costco Travel several years ago for members who don't need to book an entire package. "If our members are looking for shorter, targeted trips, such as a family visit, a specific sporting event, a romantic weekend getaway or a quick holiday escape," says Livingston, "our hotel-only program puts more than 3,000 hotels worldwide at members' fingertips when their travel needs require accommodations only."

No-surprises rental cars

Not only will you find exclusive member rates on car rentals at CostcoTravel.com, but Costco Travel does the price comparisons for you and waives the additional-driver fee.

"Costco Travel's pricing includes one additional driver at no extra charge, which is an automatic savings of \$12 to \$15 a day," says Christina Lattanzio, Costco car rental buyer. "We also don't have cancellation fees, so, given today's world, members get great flexibility. Our goal is pricing transparency, so that there are no surprises." Plus, she adds, "you can now reserve a one-way rental in a package or pick up and/or drop off your car in a different city from your hotel destination."

So, grab your bags and your passport—Costco Travel is waiting to take you away! ■

Wendy Irvine is a travel writer based in Florida.

Good to know

Glenda and Bill Gunn, Costco members in Moraga, California, retired young and set their sights on seeing the world. Over the years, they'd visited Maui 37 times, trekked in 24 countries and sailed on 10 cruises. The couple maintained that travel insurance wasn't necessary because they were young(ish) and healthy(ish).

Bill can't explain what happened next. "For one particular cruise I bought travel insurance," he says. "We were in Europe, and, just hours before we boarded the ship, 9/11 hit. The ship changed its itinerary, and our travel insurance kicked in."

Their insurance paid for four nights in a hotel and meals for each day, and reimbursed the Gunns the equivalent of \$4,000.

Even if you've never felt the need for travel insurance, given today's many surprises, you might want to give it serious thought. Travel insurance purchased from Zurich through Costco Travel can include coverage for trip cancellation or interruption, baggage loss or delay, medical emergency and more.—WI



Weaving through history

The Gertmenian company's story is a "rugs to riches" tale of family success

by ROSIE WOLF WILLIAMS

Like the rugs they sell, Gertmenian and Sons has a rich tradition.



Like the rugs they sell, Gertmenian and Sons has a rich tradition. Gostantine "G.A." Gertmenian emigrated from Turkey to New York in 1896, and opened a modest dry goods store that sold used rugs as part of the inventory. After a move in 1915 to Pasadena, California, the focus turned to importing handmade rugs. By 1925, G.A.'s brother, Constantin, and son, Harold, had joined the business.

Carpet rides

When the company first started out, the Gertmenians were purchasing rugs from local estate sales and reselling them to the European market, but then moved toward purchasing newly manufactured rugs. "My grandfather [Harold] and great-uncle [Constantin] took a ship from New York to Bombay, bought rugs, then stopped in Turkey and bought rugs there," says Peter Gertmenian, great-grandson of

G.A. and current president of Gertmenian. "That was the beginning of making contacts [and] creating relationships with manufacturers in those countries, and bringing rugs into the United States."

In the '80s, Gertmenian Rugs sold a pallet of handmade rugs to Costco. The rugs sold out in one weekend. That connection to Costco was an important stepping stone, says Gertmenian. "That helped us get a more national presence. We began to sell products to an array of national retailers." By 1992, the company was focusing exclusively on high-quality rugs that were more affordable.

Connecting threads

Until 2010, all of the products they imported were handmade. "Handmade rugs had qualities about them that were superior in terms of durability, color and performance to what was happening in machine-made rugs," says Gertmenian. But the evolution of loom and yarn technology in the early 2000s improved the quality



COURTESY OF GERTMENIAN

Left: One of Gertmenian's outdoor rugs (Item 1669887; available in March).

Above: Peter Gertmenian is part of the fifth generation in the family business.

and designs of machine-made rugs, prompting another look.

"With weaving and yarn technology, machine-made rugs started to look more appealing," Gertmenian continues. "Turkey had become a weaving center for machine-made rugs, so I traveled there to meet with the mills. They were growing quickly, and we found several collections that we thought were viable. That was the next step for our company in going from hand-made rugs with limited distribution to machine-made rugs with significant national distribution."

Family values

Today, Gertmenian designs and develops rugs in the United States, with offices in China, Arkansas and New York City, and a home office in Los Angeles. Their manufacturing resources are in Turkey, India, Belgium and China.

Throughout, Gertmenian's focus has been on forward motion—honoring the intricate histories of rugs and rug-makers, meeting the needs of the present and innovating for the future.

"We've always taken a long-term view, and we try not to react to peaks and valleys," says Gertmenian. "One unique thing about our company is the tenure of our employees. About 30% have been with us for 15-plus years. When I started in the business, we had seven people. Now we have about 175 people, but we still operate as a family business." ■

Rosie Wolf Williams (alwaysrosie.com) is a freelance writer in Vermont.

COMPANY INFO

Name

Gertmenian

President

Peter Gertmenian

Employees

175

Headquarters

Los Angeles

Items carried at Costco

From runners to extra-large room-size rugs plus outdoor rugs. Warehouses/Costco.com (search "Gertmenian"). Various item numbers.

Quote about Costco

"Gertmenian has always had a very good relationship with Costco, because we have similar business philosophies of delivering value with no frills to our customers."

—Peter Gertmenian

Rugs for outdoors

Some of Gertmenian's growth can be found in outdoor rug collections, due to the advent of machine-made rugs with advanced yarns that can

withstand weather and sunlight. "People want to move their living spaces outdoors, and a rug is a nice component of that," says Peter Gertmenian. "There has also been viability in making yarn

out of recycled materials, from recycled water bottles to textile remnants. We are at the very beginning of that, and are just now introducing collections based on 100% recycled fibers."—RWW



Sustainable sipping

Takeya USA strives to create a better bottle for a better future

by KATIE COLEMAN



ThermoFlask stainless steel straw bottles and tumblers were designed with on-the-go adventure, travel and the outdoors in mind.

Like so many companies, Takeya USA started out as a question. On a particularly hot summer day back in 2007, two friends and entrepreneurs, John Lown and Hiroshi Taketani, mused about how they could never find a water bottle to fit their needs. Bottles were either difficult to drink from and keep clean, didn't keep water cool enough or often leaked. That's when the pair, along with their friend Ken Tran, challenged one another with a simple question: "Can we make a better bottle?" The answer, the friends found—or rather, founded—was Takeya USA.

Family legacy

The business builds upon a 65-year legacy of Japanese innovation and design from its parent company, Takeya. Founded by Taketani's father in 1961, the company is known worldwide for its expertise and high-quality standards and practices in plastics manufacturing. "In fact, for

decades, Takeya Japan has made the plastic parts and components for companies like Nintendo," explains Lisa Nagamoto, Takeya USA's director of product marketing. "So, with Lown and Taketani's 30 years of manufacturing experience at other companies like Snapware, it was a natural fit to bring Takeya USA into the fold."

That first year, Takeya USA started creating tea makers, glass bottles and pitchers, and by 2015 stainless steel ThermoFlask bottles were added to the product lineup.

Building a better bottle

While reusable water bottles aren't a new trend, Tran, Takeya USA's president and CEO, says the company sets itself—and its ThermoFlask brand—apart from the pack in other ways. "Over the years we've evolved the ThermoFlask bottle for a better user experience," he says. "We've made incremental and thoughtful changes that consumers might not even notice at first. For instance, you can now fit four fingers in the ergonomic loop handle



of our 40-ounce steel bottles, which makes it easier to hold, pick up and carry. We're proud of our double-coated powder coating on the outside of our bottles, which gives them durability, resistance to peeling in the dishwasher and the vibrant colors that we're known for."

Tran says another thing that sets their bottle apart is its interchangeable and leak-proof lid, which allows people to grab any ThermoFlask bottle and any ThermoFlask lid and have it fit: "Being able to grab a lid and have it fit onto every single one of your bottles is a huge, yet overlooked, advantage in convenience and storage."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAKEYA USA

Nagamoto adds that other improvements include things like bumpers for their 32-ounce tumblers that allow a quiet sit-down and prevent dings when the bottle is dropped.

Sustainable stewardship

"Reusable bottles are one way to make a meaningful contribution to reducing one's carbon footprint, and we've found that [Costco] members really care about replacing single-use plastics with reusable bottles," says George Gelfer, executive vice president of consumer sales and business development at Takeya USA.

In fact, company data shows it's helped prevent billions of single-use plastics from littering the planet based on bottle sales alone.

Tran says, "Offering a great product that helps Costco members and our world is not only a positive and honorable business model, but it gives us the confidence that we're truly capable of contributing something real and tangible for the health of our planet." ■



COMPANY INFO

Name

Takeya USA

Founders

John Lown, Hiroshi Taketani and Ken Tran

Employees 100-plus

Headquarters

Costa Mesa, California

Items carried at Costco

ThermoFlask 32-Ounce Stainless Steel Straw Tumbler 2-Pack (Item 1630838); ThermoFlask 40-Ounce Stainless Steel Straw Bottle with Spout Lid 2-Pack (Item 1630837). Warehouses/ Costco.com.

Quote about Costco

"We feel Takeya USA and Costco both strive to offer unparalleled excellence, amazing value and the best possible consumer experience."

—Ken Tran,
president and CEO

Color coordinated

While a great deal of attention goes into the engineering and creation of ThermoFlask bottles, just as much focus is placed on

their appearance. "We work with global expert trend forecasters to make sure we choose the right colors each season," says Lisa Nagamoto, Takeya USA's director of product marketing.

"Using their data science, we're able to see what trends to stay on top of. We then bring color choices to Costco buyers and work with them on finding the right ones for members."—KC



Buyers' picks

Product selections from Costco's Housewares buying team



Efrain Mata

Sunny Kathlean

Kara Hawker

Tramontina Stainless Steel Mixing Bowls, Set of 3

This three-piece mixing bowl set includes 3-quart, 5-quart and 8-quart bowls made of durable stainless steel with a satin brushed exterior. The set features a deep bowl design and silicone bases that help minimize mess—and the bowls nest for compact storage. The mirror polished interior includes capacity markers in both quarts and liters to make measuring a breeze. Item 1637389. Warehouses only.—*Efrain Mata*



Mikasa Brynley Satin 20-Piece Forged Flatware Set

Crafted from stainless steel, each piece of flatware is heat-treated for sturdiness complemented by a smooth satin finish. Perfect for everyday dining or casual entertaining, the set offers service for four and includes salad forks, dinner forks, dinner knives, dinner spoons and teaspoons. Dishwasher-safe. Item 1630831. Warehouses/Costco.com.—*Sunny Kathlean*

Signature 6-piece Stoneware Bowl Set

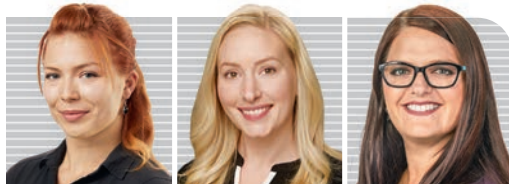
This dishwasher- and microwave-safe stoneware bowl set from Signature Housewares is stylish and practical. The durable, chip-resistant bowls come with BPA-free plastic lids featuring silicone seals and vents. Simply pull up on the top lid's silicone rim tab to allow ventilation in the microwave, or close the tab to allow for refrigeration and a tight silicone seal. The bowls measure 5.3 inches x 5.3 inches x 2.87 inches. Item 1630829. Warehouses/Costco.com.—*Kara Hawker*





Buyers' picks

Product selections from Costco's Domestic buying team



Macallan Craig

Stacey Morrison

Desirae
Montgomery

Kirkland Signature 680-Thread-Count 6-Piece Sheet Set

Get ready for a great night's sleep with this 100% cotton sheet set from Kirkland Signature™. Along with its 680 thread count and soft-to-the-touch USA-grown Pima cotton, each set features patented technology for wrinkle-resistance and to keep fitted sheets in place, and an orientation label that takes the guesswork out of making your bed. Various item numbers, colors and sizes. Warehouses/Costco.com.—Macallan Craig



Plush Step Area Rug

With its color shading and ultra-soft feel, this 7.8-foot x 10-foot rug is extremely durable yet feels luxurious under your feet. Featuring a weaving system that creates high and low textures with plush polyester yarns, this rug is easy to care for and will bring warmth and comfort to any room in your home. Various colors and patterns. Item 1669886. Warehouses only.—Stacey Morrison

Purely Indulgent Towels

This ultra-absorbent, soft and lofty towel set is made of 100% Hygro cotton, a patented spinning technology that enhances absorbency and softness after each wash. The towels are also Made in Green certified, meaning products have been sustainably sourced. Various colors. Various item numbers. Warehouses/Costco.com.—Desirae Montgomery



Getting in rhythm

Managing the heart disorder known as atrial fibrillation

by ANDREA DOWNING PECK



COSTCO CONNECTION

Medications and other tools for healthy living can be found in Costco warehouses and at Costco.com.

An estimated 2.7 million Americans live with atrial fibrillation (A-fib), as the medical community continues to look for ways to help patients manage the heart rhythm disorder.

“Atrial fibrillation is the most common sustained heart rhythm disorder that we see in clinical practice,” says cardiologist Anne Gillis, professor of medicine at the University of Calgary and past president of the Heart Rhythm Society. “Most individuals who experience it note the heart is going faster than expected for the level of activity they’re engaged in. A-fib can also be associated with other symptoms like chest discomfort, feeling light-headed or shortness of breath.”

A-fib can lead to blood clots in the upper chambers of the heart, boosting the risk of stroke fivefold. A-fib is also linked to a higher chance of developing dementia. Untreated, it can be deadly.

Who A-fib affects

A-fib is most common in those 65 and older, but a person’s risk of developing this heart-rhythm disorder increases when other medical conditions are present:

- High blood pressure
- Sleep apnea
- Obesity
- Heart failure
- Diabetes
- Overactive thyroid
- Pericarditis
- Coronary artery disease

Triggers

“Alcohol definitely is a trigger for atrial fibrillation,” says Minneapolis cardiologist Dr. Robert Hauser. “We have a term called ‘holiday heart,’ where people overindulge during the holidays and show up with atrial fibrillation in the emergency room.”



“There’s been a lot of research and interest in prevention when it comes to coronary disease—blockages of the blood vessels—but it’s only recently that we’ve come to recognize that these lifestyle factors and prevention strategies also may be relevant to heart rhythm disturbances, especially atrial fibrillation,” explains Dr. Gregory Marcus, professor of atrial fibrillation research at the University of California, San Francisco.

At the 2021 American Heart Association’s annual Scientific Sessions, Marcus presented results from a randomized trial on triggers for patients with intermittent A-fib, defined by

temporary episodes that start suddenly but quickly resolve without medical assistance, usually within 24 hours. Caffeine, long considered a potential A-fib trigger, didn’t appear to increase episodes, but alcohol did.

“Drinking more than one drink a day is clearly a risk factor for atrial fibrillation,” says Marcus.

Smoking, reduced sleep, physical inactivity, dehydration and stress are other lifestyle factors that may be triggers for A-fib, but more research is needed to validate those assumptions.

“If you do identify a trigger, then you address it,” Gillis says. “But often there’s not one trigger. It’s the combination of other comorbidities that increases the risk for atrial fibrillation.”

Gillis notes the prevalence of A-fib is predicted to at least double over the next four decades, but there are ways to alter that outcome. “There’s an epidemic of obesity, sedentary activity and Type 2 diabetes, so we need to get the population more active, less overweight, and [to] aggressively treat hypertension and diabetes and identify sleep apnea,” she says. “Those are things that we know can reduce the burden of atrial fibrillation.” ■

Andrea Downing Peck is a freelance writer based in Bainbridge Island, Washington.



LEFT: © FIZKES; ABOVE: © DIVASTOKIV / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Atrial fibrillation and stroke risk

Assessing stroke risk in patients is an important part of managing A-fib.

To predict stroke risk and determine potential therapies, physicians often calculate a patient’s score on the CHA₂DS₂-VASc, an abbreviation reflecting each factor in the assessment tool, looking at age (65 or older), gender and a medical history (such as congestive heart failure, hypertension, prior strokes, vascular disease or diabetes). “It’s important to educate the general public to be aware of the condition and if they have symptoms to see their doctor, diagnose the problem and above all prevent stroke,” says Dr. Anne Gillis, professor of medicine at the University of Calgary.—ADP

Treatment types

Medication or surgery is sometimes necessary, especially for those with persistent A-fib lasting longer than seven days.

Common treatment options include medications to control heart rate and heart rhythm, and anticoagulants, as well as catheter ablation, a procedure designed to

permanently restore the heart’s proper electrical currents. An implant called the Watchman is an alternative to blood thinners for some patients.—ADP

Romance recipe

Celebrate this Valentine's Day with succulent, sensuous seafood

by FIONA SIMS



© ALFA27 / STOCK DOBE.COM



Fiona Sims

is a cookbook author and writer based in London, England.

COSTCO CONNECTION

You'll find seafood items in your local Costco warehouse. Groceries are available for delivery through Costco Grocery at Costco.com.

© JULIAN WINSLOW PHOTOGRAPHY



Valentine's Day dinner is best played out at home. Prepare a meal with a minimum of fuss, the right bottle by your side and some mood-setting music, and it's a lovers' paradise. That leaves the question of what to eat.

Much has been written about the aphrodisiac qualities of certain seafood. Remember famed 18th-century Italian lover Casanova and his 50-a-day oyster habit? Even the word "aphrodisiac," with its link to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and fertility—who rose from the sea—suggests there might be some truth in it.

That said, oysters, along with mussels, clams and other mollusks, have been found to contain a high amount of zinc, a mineral that may boost testosterone; shrimp are high in iodine, which is essential to our thyroid and may help to maintain energy levels; while salmon is packed with omega-3s, which may help to maintain the body's libido-affecting hormone production. Because the concept of food as an aphrodisiac has survived through the millennia, I say we continue to run with it.

The best methods for cooking seafood are usually the simplest, whether stuffing a whole fish and roasting it, poaching it or pan-frying it. Great accompaniments to seafood include lime, coriander, ginger and extra-virgin olive oil to finish the dish.

When it comes to shellfish, the fun is in the presentation. Think mussels on the half shell with an herby breadcrumb crust (you could cheat with bottled pesto); scallops cooked simply in a hot sea salt-scattered pan (it stops them from sticking) for one minute on each side, then dressed in a lemony butter; or easy teriyaki salmon with noodles.

To drink? Pair the wine with the sauce or dressing, rather than the seafood. So, for lobster mayo, think chablis; for lobster thermidor, go with fatter-textured, oakier chardonnays. Say you're serving prawns with pasta: If it has a tomato-based sauce, think pink with a Provence rosé; if it's creamy, try an Italian white with a bit of weight, such as Gavi. Want Champagne throughout the entire meal? Try a dry non-vintage for clean flavors, such as a mixed seafood platter, or a richer vintage Champagne for seafood with punchier sauces. Cupid would approve. ■



Scallops with Citrus Ginger Sauce

1½ lbs sea scallops
Sea salt, to taste
2 Tbsp avocado oil
1 orange, zested and juiced
1 lemon, juiced
1 Tbsp fresh ginger, grated
2 Tbsp butter or ghee
Fresh thyme, for garnish



Pat scallops dry with a paper towel, then sprinkle them with sea salt.

Heat oil in a sauté pan over medium-high heat. When the oil is nearly smoking, place scallops in the pan. Sear scallops approximately 1½ to 2 minutes on each side until almost opaque throughout. Remove scallops to a plate.

Reduce the heat to medium and add the orange and lemon juice, orange zest, ginger and butter to the pan. Whisk the sauce in the pan until it's simmering, then return the scallops to the pan and spoon the sauce over the scallops.

Plate the scallops, drizzle more sauce on top and garnish with thyme. Makes 4 servings.

Recipe and photo courtesy of Lisa Bryan (downshiftology.com)

The Best Lobster Tails Recipe

⅓ cup butter	¼ tsp Old Bay seasoning
2 garlic cloves, minced	Juice of 1 lemon
2 Tbsp fresh parsley, chopped	4 lobster tails, cut in half lengthwise
1 Tbsp fresh dill, chopped	Salt and pepper, to taste

Place butter in a small saucepan over low heat. Once it's mostly melted, add garlic, parsley, dill, Old Bay seasoning and lemon juice. Cook 1 to 2 minutes, stirring frequently.

Season the lobster tails with salt and pepper.

Place a skillet over high heat. Brush each lobster tail with the flavored butter. Place the lobster tails, meat side down, in the skillet; cook for 1 to 2 minutes. Flip the lobster tails over and baste them with the butter continuously. Cook for another 2 minutes. Flip them once more and cook for another minute or until the internal temperature reads 135 F to 140 F. Makes 4 servings.

Recipe and photo courtesy Ana Marti (anitadelights.recipes.com)



SCALLOP ILLUSTRATION: MEGAN LEES



Sweet spreads

Save room for these tempting dessert boards and tables

by LAURA BODE

COSTCO CONNECTION

You'll find various ingredients for dessert spreads in warehouses. Groceries are available for delivery through Costco Grocery at Costco.com.

Meat and cheese boards and grazing tables are perfect for a variety of appetites when hosting a get-together or party, but don't forget dessert. Themed dessert boards and tables lined with a variety of sweets will have guests as excited as children on their birthdays.

Dessert boards and tables

A dessert board is designed with the same concept as a charcuterie board but is focused on sweets. The desserts

can be homemade or store-bought, individually wrapped servings or a cake that's ready to slice. You can find a rainbow of options. "A dessert board is the perfect dessert for those who don't want to bake or make anything from scratch," says Eden Passante, a Costco member and blogger at Sugarandcharm.com.

A dessert table, or dessert buffet, also known as a Viennese table, is perfect for a large crowd. If you wish, place a table runner of fabric or kraft



LEFT: © AFRICA STUDIO; ABOVE ART: NATALIA PYZHOVA; RIGHT PHOTO: MARY S / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

or wrapping paper down the table's center. Select a centerpiece, such as a colorful flower arrangement or a layered cake, and build out your table from there, either lining up your treats in rows or alternating dessert dishes with loose or packaged desserts, advises designer and stylist Kim Stoegbauer. Mirroring serving vessels on each side of the display will create symmetry.

Decorations, such as balloons, fresh or fondant flowers, and paper tags to note flavors and dessert names, will help add visual interest.

Themes

If you're stumped for a theme, look online for inspiration (see "Ideas for themes"). The platters and serving ware



Themed dessert boards and tables lined with a variety of sweets will have guests as excited as children on their birthdays.

decisions should come easily once you've decided on your theme. For example, if you select a woodland theme, you might want to stick with wooden bowls, boards and cutlery.

Look around your house—you might already have the perfect vessel. Consider the event's feel: Using a wooden tray gives the event a rustic feel, while a marble board adds elegance, Passante says.

What to serve

Passante suggests planning 5 ounces of dessert for each guest. With that in mind, chocolate-dipped crackers, cake pops, cupcakes, macarons, mints, caramel or chocolate-drizzled popcorn, fresh or dehydrated fruit, chocolate-covered nuts, mini cakes or doughnuts are all welcome choices.

Add wrapped chocolates and candies that fit your color and theme, and jars of melted caramel, chocolate or hazelnut spread for dipping, and you have a good group of ingredients to make a tasty board or dessert table. Edible-image cookies can personalize the event and be a sweet takeaway, particularly for special events like weddings and baby showers.

If you love sweets but don't want leftovers, provide themed to-go bags that guests can fill up before they wave goodbye. Because dessert boards and tables can be so much fun, you might even consider serving dessert first. ■

Laura Bode (laurabodedesigns.com) is a freelance writer and sweets connoisseur based in Camas, Washington.



IDEAS FOR THEMES

Here are some sweet ideas to get you started:

Valentine's Day. Fresh strawberries dipped in melted chocolate chips.

Spring. Pastel mints, macarons and buttery crackers. Jelly beans and lemon bars add fun flavors and colors.

Kirkland Signature. Serve Kirkland Signature™ chocolate-covered raisins or almonds and bakery treats.

Children's parties. Select your child's favorite sweet and/or sour candies, gummies, candy bars, or dried and fresh fruits.—LB



© JAG_CZ / STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Beloved blends

Why red blends are loved worldwide

by TARRAH CASTERLINE



JAMES TERWEY

Tarrah Casterline is a Costco wine, beer and liquor buyer in the Texas region.



COSTCO CONNECTION

A variety of red blend wines can be found in select Costco warehouses.

Much like a little black dress, red blend wines never fall out of style. A favorite of wine drinkers because they offer balance, depth and a little intrigue, red blends are most often made up of two or more black and red grape varieties. This mixture of grape combinations allows winemakers to showcase their art and their love for the grapes. From red blends featuring fruit-forward merlots to those starring full-bodied cabernet sauvignons, there's sure to be one to suit your taste.

How do you pick your favorite blends? Try as many as you can, because while wine-makers from different parts of the world may use the same grape combinations, the results will be different due to the climate, the soil the grapes are grown in and how the wines are blended.

Red blend flavor profiles can be extremely bold or subtle. For example, blends heavy with cabernet grapes will be savory and full of body, with a hint of spice. Blends with a higher percentage of merlot may be silky and smooth.

The types of grapes used in blends vary by region. A Rioja wine, from its namesake region in Spain, will commonly be composed of tempranillo, graciano and garnacha grapes, which have a smooth, fruity flavor. Red Bordeaux wine from Bordeaux, France, may have a mixture of merlot, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and petit verdot varietals, and will be more medium-bodied. Most red blends from the U.S. are plush and fruit-forward.

This is just a small sample of the extensive options afforded by red blends. Sample a multitude of brands and styles to find the ones you truly love. ■

Heart holiday

If you plan to uncork a bottle of red wine this Valentine's Day, you'll be keeping up with the holiday's heart theme. According to the

Mayo Clinic, if consumed in moderation (one glass for women, two for men), red wine can be considered heart healthy. It contains antioxidants that may increase levels of "good"

cholesterol and protect against cholesterol buildup. This in turn may help prevent coronary artery disease, the condition that leads to heart attacks. —Katie Coleman



Alex Kanenwisher
Buyer, Books

Because February is a month known for romance, I have a suggestion for a romp of a read: *Something Wilder* by the writing duo known as Christina Lauren.

Lily Wilder is ready to lead a group on a treasure hunt, when a man she used to love walks back into her life. Let the adventure, laughs and healing begin.

This book is a lot of fun to read. It's full of twists, turns and the kind of surprises I don't often encounter in a romance novel.

Something Wilder (Item 1719636) will be available in early February in most Costco warehouses.



© COSTCO PHOTO STUDIO



It takes two

Duo's modern romance set in the West features cowboys, clues and reconnection

by MICHELE WOJCIECHOWSKI



Christina Hobbs (left)
and Lauren Billings

BRYSTAN STUDIOS

Often, first loves remain tucked away in people's memories. But sometimes they reconnect, and the results can be explosive. That's the premise of *Something Wilder*, the latest romance novel by Christina Lauren, the powerhouse writing team of Christina Hobbs and Lauren Billings.

"[The book] is our love letter to the movies of our childhood, like *Romancing the Stone*, *Indiana Jones* and *Goonies*," says Billings. "It's the story of two long-lost loves who are thrown together on what they think is a fake treasure hunt, and when everything goes sort of horribly and hilariously wrong, they think there might be real treasure out there. They have to figure out if they're going to go for it. I like to think of it as an action-packed romantic comedy."

Finding friends in fandom

Although they have written dozens of books together, Billings and Hobbs don't live in the same state: Billings lives in California and Hobbs is in Utah. The two met while writing fan fiction online in 2009.

"I'd never written for fun before, and it wasn't until I discovered fan fiction that I realized I had anything to say," says Hobbs.

After reading each other's stories online for about a month, they wrote a short story together. That's when the magic began. "We were so naive. We said, 'Let's write a book now,' thinking that was the logical next step," explains Billings.

That first book is the only unpublished one they've co-written, but it did land them their agent. By May 2023, they will have written 30 books together, with 29 published and 18 hitting the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Their process

While they usually write two novels a year, when they started out, Hobbs and Billings wanted to have a backlist of books. So they wrote and published six books in one year—while raising families and working full time at other jobs: Hobbs in a junior high counseling office and Billings, who has a Ph.D. in neuroscience, at a pharmaceutical company doing research on retinal degeneration.

Hobbs usually visits California for a few days when they're fleshing out a story. "It's a mix of hanging out, spending time together as friends and then talking about the book," Billings says. Once they know who their characters are and what the general plot is, they create an outline. Then, they split up the book, with each of them writing every other chapter. And they edit a lot.

Something Wilder came from Billings' desire not to write a story taking place indoors after COVID lockdowns. "We had been tinkering with a treasure-hunting story for a while," she says. "The Wilder Ranch is based on a dude ranch that my family and I used to go to every summer."

For Hobbs, one of the best parts of being half of Christina Lauren is getting to read Billings' words first. "Sometimes, I'll read a sentence she's written, and honestly have to step away for a minute because she'll phrase something in a way that absolutely blows my mind. It's been like that since day one," she says.

Billings feels the same: "We just really click. We have complementary personalities—I'm intense, and she's laid-back. She's absolutely my best friend." ■

Michele Wojciechowski is a national award-winning freelance writer based in Baltimore.



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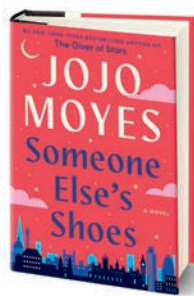


Stacy Wells
Assistant Buyer, Books

"I enjoyed writing someone who turns everything outwards instead of worrying that it's all her own fault."

—JOJO MOYES

Hot on the heels



Someone Else's Shoes (Item 1697155) will be available in early February in most Costco warehouses.

In Jojo Moyes' *Someone Else's Shoes*, Nisha Cantor lives the life of the seriously wealthy, until her husband asks for a divorce and cuts her off. While she's scrambling to get by, down-on-her-luck Sam Kemp accidentally takes Nisha's gym bag. The Christian Louboutin heels inside result in a jolt of life-changing confidence.

Costco Connection What inspired this particular story?

Jojo Moyes This novel actually came from a very short story I wrote more than a decade ago about a downtrodden woman who picks up someone else's gym bag and changes her life. I found myself wondering what happened to the woman who lost her gym bag—and suddenly I knew I had a whole new story.

CC Do you have a favorite between Nisha and Sam? If so, who and why?

JM I know she behaves terribly, but I think it's Nisha. She's like the [rebel] version of myself that I could never be. I enjoyed writing someone who turns everything outwards instead of worrying that it's all her own fault in some way.

CC What else would you like to say?

JM I wrote this book because, like everyone, I have had such a tough few years, and I found I wanted to read or watch stories that made me laugh, or feel uplifted, and be removed from normal life for a while. I hope [readers] enjoy it!

Also at Costco.com

Join Little Blue Truck as he goes from a muddy country road to the big city. Whether he's taking his friends on a bedtime ride, visiting the farm to meet the

sweet newborn baby animals, going to a costume party or spreading cheer by delivering Christmas trees, Blue just wants to help others. With bright colors, truck sounds and animal noises, each of the six books in

this set is a nod to the power of friendship and the rewards of teamwork.

For ages 3 to 5, *Little Blue Truck's Friendly Adventures* (Item 1614222) is available now at Costco.com.—AK





© COSTCO PHOTO STUDIO

Keep your ears open

Costco's Hearing Aid Centers want to help people stay connected easily and affordably

by LAURA BODE



COSTCO PHOTO STUDIO

Laura Bode fills this month's consumer reporter slot with this behind-the-scenes look at a Costco program. Email questions about this article to connection@costco.com.



According to an article issued by the U.S. Census Bureau last spring, 11.5 million Americans, or 3.5% of the entire population, have some sort of hearing impairment, ranging from difficulty having conversations in noisy environments to total hearing loss.

So, it comes as no surprise that the huge impact Costco's Hearing Aid Center has already had on millions of Costco members and their families over the past 30 years will only continue to grow.

"Our ability to hear connects us to family, friends and community," says Soris Parajon-Pena, Costco hearing aid buyer. "Our goal is to find the most leading-edge technology at affordable

prices to help our members enjoy the best communication possible for their day-to-day activities."

Decades of experience

Since its inception in 1989, Costco's Hearing Aid Centers are now in more than 754 Costco warehouses in 13 countries around the world.

"Our licensed staff works to determine if a member can be helped by the use of hearing aids, through free on-site hearing tests," explains Parajon-Pena, who has two decades of experience in the industry. "Our dispensing team discusses any hearing loss with the member and finds out what their individual lifestyle

“Our ability to hear connects us to family, friends and community.”

—SORIS PARAJON-PENA ★
Hearing Aid Center buyer



requirements are so that a ‘best features on the right product’ match can be made with the member’s needs in mind.”

Costco is the largest hearing aid retailer in North America, according to Paul DiCola, assistant general merchandise manager for all Costco hearing aid centers; he adds that, as the result of exceptional customer service, pricing and hearing aid device features, “Costco has recently been noted as the best hearing aid retailer.”

Focused on quality, pricing, support

“The hearing aids we offer are manufactured by the top global manufacturers,” says DiCola, “and Costco has worked very hard to reduce prices by working with our suppliers. This ensures members have the most technologically advanced features and options available, coupled with Costco’s focus on value and product support, and we also include a 3-year warranty at no additional cost.

“Our hearing aids provide members with all the benefits necessary to fit mild to severe hearing loss, helping members save up to 70% over our competition.”

Support from start to finish

A successful fitting begins with an initial consultation. Costco offers members a free hearing assessment to determine if they can be helped by a hearing aid. The assessment includes six pure-tone and speech tests. If you need hearing aids, your dispenser (who doesn’t work on commission) will help you select the right product for your situation. Then, when your hearing aids arrive, he or she will conduct real ear measurement testing and adjust the programming as needed. “It’s not enough for us to just go with what the manufacturer says someone should do best with, because everyone’s ear canals are different shapes and react differently,” says Parajon-Pena (see “Hearing aid help”).

Costco offers free follow-up appointments, free cleanings and checkups, free warranty periods, and free loss and damage coverage with no deductible. “Our goal is to reduce all barriers that make a hearing solution challenging, and allow members to shop with confidence,” says DiCola.

To find out more about Costco Hearing Aid Centers, visit [Costco.com](https://www.costco.com) and type “hearing aid” in the search bar. ■

HEARING AND HEALTH

Untreated hearing loss can lead to other problems, including dementia. Research has shown that persons with moderate hearing loss face triple the risk of developing dementia. With severe hearing loss, the risk is even higher.

Letting hearing loss go untreated can also reduce the effectiveness of the hearing aids you eventually get. When the nerves that process sound are idle, they can atrophy, making it harder for the brain to interpret the sounds it’s receiving, a condition known as auditory deprivation.

Regular hearing tests can catch problems early on. If you’re over 60, work in a noisy environment or have frequent exposure to loud noises, experts recommend that you have your hearing checked annually.—LB

Hearing aid help

Where allowed by law, most hearing aids purchased within the last three years can now be adjusted from

home through a video call. Schedule your appointment as you normally would, but instead of going to the Hearing Aid Center, access your video call from your

smart device at the time of your appointment. Your dispenser will talk with you and, if needed, make adjustments to your hearing aids over the call.—LB



**Puerto Vallarta:
Hilton Vallarta Riviera—
All-Inclusive Resort**

Situated on a scenic stretch of coastline outside Puerto Vallarta's Zona Romantica, this all-inclusive resort features 444 guest rooms and suites with ocean views, seven restaurants offering regional and international cuisine, five bars and lounges, two infinity pools, a kids club and the revitalizing eforea Spa. Costco Travel's package includes a Costco Shop Card. To learn more, visit [CostcoTravel.com](https://www.CostcoTravel.com).

Pebble Beach Men's Polo

This lightweight polo features moisture-wicking fabric, a three-button placket and a classic fit. Colors: blue, white, gray, black. Sizes: S–XXL. Item 1551887. Selection varies by location.

[Warehouses/Costco.com](https://www.Warehouses/Costco.com).



The latest Costco finds

Sekkisei Herbal Gel

This ultra-nourishing, anti-inflammatory gel can hydrate and smooth skin, boosting radiance and enhancing suppleness. **Costconext.com only.**



**Suncast 6' x 4'
Vertical Shed**

The double-door entry allows you to access up to 106 cubic feet of storage space, and the doors can be padlocked for added security. Constructed of multi-wall resin panels. Item 1694814. **Warehouses/ Costco.com.**



Eddie Bauer Men's Crew Neck Sweatshirt

This fleece-lined crew neck pullover features classic styling and is perfect on its own or as a layering piece under a flannel shirt, coat or vest. Colors: black, green, blue. Sizes: S-XXL. Item 1534145. Selection varies by location. **Warehouses/Costco.com.**



Lauretta 6-Piece Leather Power Reclining Sectional with Power Headrests
Features three CloudZero™ reclining mechanisms that elevate knees and feet 4" higher than standard recliners. It can be customized to suit your room, as the armless pieces can be moved to lengthen or shorten either side of the sectional. Also features two power outlets and four USB ports. Item 1404948. **Warehouse only.**



TurboTax Software

From simple to complex taxes, filing your taxes is easy with TurboTax. TurboTax includes one \$10 in-product credit toward in-product add-ons: State E-File Fees, Additional State or Audit Defense. Limit one credit per license code. Limitations apply. Item numbers vary. **Warehouses/Costco.com.**



Findley 7-Piece Dining Set

This sleek dining set works well for both formal and casual dining. Features include a hand-applied brown finish, rubber wood solids with Mindi veneers, amply cushioned seats covered with 100% polyester beige fabric and an 18" removable self-storing leaf. Item 1645940. **Warehouses/Costco.com.**

FOR SCHEDULES & DESCRIPTIONS

Go to [Costco.com](https://www.costco.com) and search “Special Events.” Or, download the Costco mobile app from the Apple or Google Play app store, open the app, click “Savings” and find “Special Events” to view the online items and events schedules.



HexClad Gourmet Cookware

HexClad’s patented cookware technology uses a triple layer of magnetic stainless steel, aluminum and another layer of magnetic stainless steel, followed by a unique laser etching process, for an amazing cooking experience.



ZLINE Kitchen and Bath

Experience ZLINE Attainable Luxury® with this line of meticulously designed, distinctive, professional-quality appliances. Enjoy a luxurious experience for a fraction of the cost. **Online only January 30–February 26 at [Costco.com](https://www.costco.com).**

A limited-time showcase of exciting products



Customizable Bullfrog Spas

Relieve your pain, soak away stress and reconnect with loved ones. Thanks to the patented JetPak Therapy System™ you can personalize Bullfrog Spas® to fit your specific needs. Enjoy relaxing while saving energy and money with this state-of-the-art hot tub.



Infinity PR PRO Endurance Percussion Massager

Infinity designs and builds premium-quality, high-performing products for a healthier lifestyle. The PR PRO Endurance Percussion Massager helps address muscle aches, pain, tension and soreness.

WAREHOUSE HOURS

Monday–Friday 10 a.m.–8:30 p.m.
Saturday 9:30 a.m.–6 p.m.
Sunday 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
Pharmacy closed Sunday
**Costco.com 24 hours a day,
7 days a week**



MEMBER INFO

Who
Michelle Connors

Hometown
Vienna, Virginia

Occupation
Founder and executive director of Rustic Love

Website Rusticlove.org

Member quote
“Our heart signs have become a symbol of proactive caring and concern for others, and we’re delighted to know that some of our hearts have reached the West Coast and a few European countries.”

—Michelle Connors

Clockwise from top:
Rustic Love hearts on full display; volunteers creating signs; Rustic Love founder and executive director Michelle Connors shows off a fundraising collaboration with Caboose Brewing Company.

A story with a lot of heart

The slogan goes “Virginia is for lovers,” but Vienna, Virginia, a Washington, D.C., suburb, is the area covered in hearts. This small town is home to Rustic Love, a non-profit that helps organizations that aid the community’s food insecure.

Founded by Michelle Connors and her family, Rustic Love started as a backyard fundraiser during the pandemic. “We promote philanthropy in children and families

by creating volunteer opportunities to build wooden heart signs,” she says. “We then offer them to individuals or organizations for donations.”

Almost three years and more than 5,000 heart yard signs dotting the community later, local businesses joined the efforts by creating jewelry, pottery, beer, wine and other heart-related products to raise money for the nonprofit.

“Our goal and mission is to help ease food insecurity,” Connors says. “To date, we’ve raised more than \$350,000, and it’s all from the financial support within our community.” —Katie Coleman