

Southern Accents

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Calling Cards

Whether they are meant to convey congratulations, condolences, or “Call me,” personalized cards always imply thoughtfulness and attention to detail—the epitome of etiquette

I SEND MOUNTAINS OF E-MAIL and leave countless voice messages: “Thanks for dinner last night.” “Good luck with your interview tomorrow.” “Can Eleanor meet us for a play date on Tuesday?” All are genuine and heartfelt, lacking only the conviction of actually taking a pen to paper (not to mention paper with an engraved monogram neatly centered at the top). I’m even guilty of handing out generic business cards with scribbled information, such as my personal e-mail address or cell phone number, to new acquaintances (how terribly unchic). And, I must confess, I’ve more than once filled out the stock gift enclosure card conveniently situated by the register when making a last-minute purchase. But there is the all-too-rare occasion—usually an upcoming wedding or the birth of a child—when I indulge. I’ll sit down and write a meaningful message, enclose it in a handsomely wrapped package, and whisk it off to the receiver. How good it feels to behave properly.

Though calling cards are no longer a social necessity, they are making a

While silver or ceramic trays hold mail these days, in the past they often kept calling cards that friends left to indicate they had stopped by for a visit.

BY BEATY EVANS COLEMAN PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERICA GEORGE DINES

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An assortment of new and old calling cards reveals the variety available today as well as in the past. While some of today's cards adhere to traditional styles, others feature colors, sizes, scripts, or graphics that reflect the individual's personality.

comeback of sorts, mostly in the form of personal cards, used by women who don't want to use business cards in a social situation but want to provide information, such as cell phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Until World War I, the social set left their more formal calling cards in a silver butler's tray by the door when they made a personal visit but found the lady of the house not at home. The game was to run around town leaving the cards for everyone, whether for welcoming, congratulating, condoling, thanking, or saying farewell.

Aside from personal cards, calling cards have come to be used as gift enclosures and, of course, business cards. Though some argue that the calling card can also play the role of the gift enclosure in one's stationery repertoire,

“Such details might seem an unnecessary luxury, but even in a society spoiled with technological conveniences, there is a desire to get the important things on paper.”



Jackye Adams of Smythson, the famed maker of fine paper and leather products, considers them completely different: “A gift enclosure card is something you write a note on—the format of a calling card doesn't allow space for that,” she says. “Gift cards tend to be more feminine with tissue-lined envelopes.”

Such details might seem an unnecessary luxury, but even in a society spoiled with technological conveniences, there is a desire to get the important things on paper. My father recently came across my own childhood calling cards and those of my grandmother before she was married. I'm always humbled by the nature of things “back then,” when seemingly quirky formalities mattered not only for a girl in her early youth but also for a

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young woman coming into adulthood. I wondered how she had used her cards. Maybe she'd neatly tucked one into a special gift for a friend and sent another with a bouquet of flow-

ers to someone in need of cheer. I do know that from now on, I'll think twice before I find myself defaulting to the gift card on the counter. ♦

For details, see Sourcebook, page 221.

calling card etiquette

Consider the size. According to *The Amy Vanderbilt Complete Book of Etiquette*, a woman's card is squarer than a man's (2 $\frac{7}{8}$ by 2 inches if single; 3 $\frac{1}{8}$ by 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches if married), and a man's card is longer than a woman's (3 $\frac{3}{4}$ by 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches or 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 2 inches). However, by today's standards, larger, custom-size cards are completely appropriate. "I like calling cards to be an unusual shape, such as an oversize square or something with rounded edges," says New Orleans stationery designer Alexa Pulitzer.

Choose an appropriate script. Engraved black script on white or ecru paper is customary. "Your calling card makes a statement," says Jackye Adams of Smythson, who encourages clients to follow tradition by using a simple typeface.

Play the name game. Formal etiquette dictates that a couple use the husband's full name (Mr. and Mrs. William Thomas Smith). Titles, such as "The Reverend" or "Doctor," should be spelled out in full (save M.D., Ph.D., etc., for business cards). A married woman is typically "Mrs. William Thomas Smith" or can use her own name, "Mrs. Mary Davis Smith." Single women use their full names preceded by "Miss" or no title; a divorcée uses "Mrs." followed by her maiden name then her married name, or reverts to her maiden name with no title. It's considered appropriate for a woman to keep using her calling cards after her husband dies. When you send the card with a

gift, write a personal note and draw a line through the engraved name.

Use them often. "Who doesn't love pulling out something glamorous?" says Melissa Hill, owner of Weddings Etc in Birmingham. If your card has any information other than your name, it should not be used as a gift enclosure, which should include the name only, along with a brief handwritten message. "Most of my clients have a more formal calling card to enclose with gifts, and a more stylish card with phone numbers for everyday use," says Debbie Lewis, owner of La Paperie in Savannah.

Get creative. "We're letterpressing paper with ladybugs, pineapples, or any sort of small graphic that people feel connected to," says Paul Rubenstein, owner of The Written Word in Washington, D.C. Adding a green border or printing your name in orange is another way to get a customized look. Unusual shapes and sizes are also in demand and are acceptable for more casual cards.

Don't forget the children.

"People are more whimsical with their child's card," says Pulitzer.

"I'm seeing cornets as opposed to monkeys and rabbits.

Someone recently requested an octopus wearing a crown," she says. Hill prints cards that read, "Call my mom for a play date," followed by a phone number. If you opt for a more formal card, use it as a birth announcement. Attach the small card with the baby's name to your formal card with a colored ribbon.

