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An ADVENT
of ANGELS

Combining her love of sewing with a passion for vintage textiles and haberdashery, Chloe Cyphus creates a collection of heavenly decorations – each one destined to be the star of the Christmas tree

WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER | PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRENT DARBY



FROM TOP LEFT Cloth rabbits and mice made from antique textiles; an old monogrammed handkerchief makes the perfect finishing touch for one of Chloe's cushions; a finished angel

out a set of mother-of-pearl bookmarks, one shaped like an anchor and others in heart, cross and key shapes. "I collect anything like this – you never know when it may come in handy."

Every corner of Chloe's house holds clues to her craft; even her dressing table drawer is filled with reels of cotton, while the armoire in her bedroom is piled high with fabrics in pale pinks and buttery yellows and creams sourced from antiques markets at home and abroad. No piece is too small to be saved – for years she has kept one rectangle of faded rosebud print no bigger than a postage stamp. "I just haven't found the right place for it yet," she says, holding the scrap carefully between her fingers.

With no formal training, Chloe has developed her own way of doing things. "It probably means it takes a bit longer than it should," she says, "but I'm never happier than when I'm making something. I wish I'd come to this work sooner. It's my vocation."

When Chloe doesn't have a needle and thread in her hand, she is checking orders or attending fairs. But the run-up to Christmas sees a huge spike in demand and so, in between working on batches of angels, she is stuffing stacks of lavender bags, appliquéing cushion covers with monograms taken from old linen handkerchiefs, or making tiny dresses and dungarees trimmed with miniature mother-of-pearl buttons for her cloth rabbits. In fact, the only items she doesn't craft herself are the cashmere cardigans on her old-fashioned teddies; "a local lady makes them for me – I've never been good at knitting."

Chloe's time, skills and use of antique fabrics are reflected in the price of each piece; the angels cost from £125, while the rabbits are £28, so it's not surprising that her "toys" tend to be bought by adults as decorative pieces or as christening gifts rather than something for children to play with. "I love the fact that everything I make gives beautiful old fabrics a new lease of life," Chloe says. "Many of them are more than 100 years old and can be enjoyed for another century. So whether it's a lavender bag or an angel, I'm not just making a piece for this Christmas but something that can be passed down through the family like an heirloom for the next generation to enjoy." ❧

Chloe Vintage (01985 213077; chloeantiques.co.uk). CL readers can enjoy a 10 per cent discount on the Chloe Vintage range – call the number above and quote 'CL offer' by 31 December 2011.

CRAFTED for CHRISTMAS

HALINKA'S FAIRIES

(01273 727642; halinkasfairies.com)

Halinka Fraser began crafting fairies to fund her daughter Lottie's ballet scholarship by selling them at the school fête, but they sold out before she set up her stall. The characters – from The Nutcracker-inspired Sugar Plum Fairy to Santa's Skaters – are created in her Brighton studio from locally sourced vintage fabrics. *CL Christmas Fair London; stand P29a.*

JO HECKETT

(07930 492746; joheckett.com)

Created in a similar way to gingerbread men, Jo Heckett's ceramic decorations include angels, doves, stars, trees and snowflakes. Jo rolls out slabs of white porcelain, uses cookie cutters to produce the desired shape and then decorates them with vintage stamps and found objects such as jewellery before firing in a kiln. Her decorations can be personalised for a special gift.

ROSIE'S ARMOIRE

(07906 777371; rosiesarmoire.co.uk)

Helen Ashworth's passion for fabrics led her to transform old textiles found in the UK and France into beautiful home accessories. Winning the Editor's Choice award for her stand at the CL Fair in Scotland in 2009 prompted her to expand the business. Decorations include hand-sewn Advent fairies made using vintage linens. *CL Christmas Fair London; stand J2a.*