

# The South's Best Toy Stores

Crowded superstores can suck the holiday spirit right out of you, but these charming, family-owned spots make even us grown-ups feel like kids again

## ROOTIN' RIDGE TOYMAKERS AUSTIN, TX

Georgan and Paul Kyle have been carving wooden toys in their tiny shop since 1975. "We're on the second generation of customers, and now the children who grew up with us are bringing in their kids," says Georgan. Even though the toys are handcrafted, most prices fall around \$20. "We want to make toys kids can play with, not something that sits on a mantel," Georgan says. **HOT TOY:** Rootin' Ridge's hand-made holiday puzzles (\$25). With new puzzles created each year, many locals collect them. 1206 West 38th Street, Suite 1105; [rootinridge.com](http://rootinridge.com) or 512/453-2604



Paul and Georgan Kyle create hand-carved toys at Rootin' Ridge Toymakers in Austin.

Your Neighborhood Toy Store in Southern Living Magazine!

## THE OWL'S NEST TOY SHOP SOUTHLAKE, TX

Two years ago, this quaint toy store about 25 miles north of Fort Worth almost fell victim to the economic downturn, but its neighbors couldn't bear to see it close. So they fought to save the shop, which gives kids a \$2 token for the store when they get good report cards. One loyal shopper even put up her own money to keep the doors open. "She became our angel," says owner Sandy Challinor. Although you'll find a few name-brand toys on the shelves, The

Owl's Nest offers lesser-known labels and a variety of unique toys from around the world. **HOT TOY:** Angry Bird Plush Toys, which are based on the popular smartphone game (\$15.99 and up). 1220 Prospect Street; [owlsnesttoys.com](http://owlsnesttoys.com) or 817/251-0155

## O.P. TAYLOR'S BREVARD, NC

Anything goes at this 6,000-square-foot shop. "It's like

looking around Grandma's attic," says John Taylor, who opened the shop as a general store with a kids' play area in 1990. Now he also has locations in Asheville, North Carolina, and Greenville, South Carolina. **HOT TOY:** Nanoblock, building blocks even smaller than LEGOs (\$7.99 and up). From a kit, build a giraffe or the Eiffel Tower. 16 South Broad Street; [optaylors.com](http://optaylors.com) or 828/883-2309

## WONDER WORKS CHARLESTON, SC

This is a big store with an even bigger heart. In the shop's "Lowcountry" section you'll find artwork and toys made by local children, craftspeople, and adults with special needs. "If you're not smiling when you come in, you'll be smiling when you leave," says owner Christine Osborne. **HOT TOY:** Air Swimmers—remote-controlled, helium-filled nylon balloons shaped like great white sharks and clown fish (\$49.99). 975 Savannah Highway; [wonderworkscharleston.com](http://wonderworkscharleston.com) or 843/573-9300

## BEAN HEAD TOYS SANDY SPRINGS, GA

A tree house rises from the center of this store that's divided into sections with toys separated by ages. It's also a neighborhood gathering spot where parents stop for water and granola bars from owner Chris Lowe during Black Friday shopping sessions. **HOT TOY:** BRACEDLETS, bracelets made from colorful orthodontic braces bands (\$4.99). 220 Johnson Ferry Road NE; [beanheadtoysonline.com](http://beanheadtoysonline.com) or 404/851-2980

## Hey, Santa, Look What We Found!

Some guaranteed big hits. Call and order a few "Hot Toys" for the children on your list. (We did.)



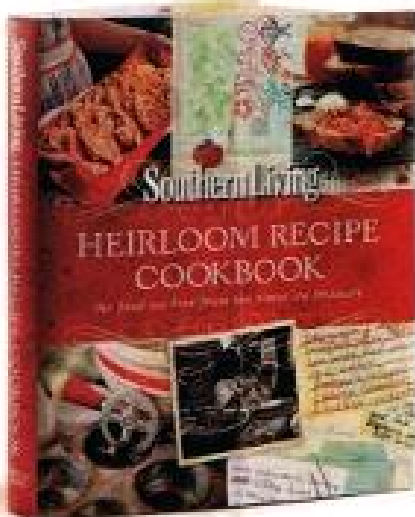
WONDER WORKS' AIR SWIMMER \$49.99; 843/573-9300



THE OWL'S NEST'S ANGRY BIRD PLUSH TOY \$15.99 and up; 817/251-0155



ROOTIN' RIDGE'S HOLIDAY PUZZLE \$25; 512/453-2604



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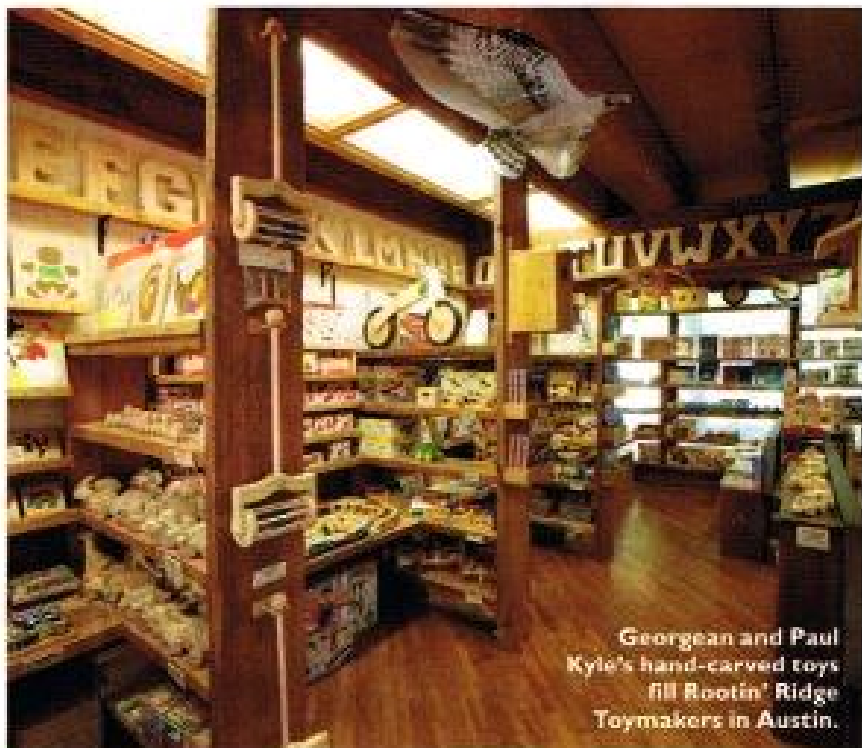
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## travel SHOPPING



Georgean and Paul  
Kyle's hand-carved toys  
fill Rootin' Ridge  
Toymakers in Austin.

### BEAN HEAD TOYS SANDY SPRINGS, GA

Chris Lowe describes her store, about 15 miles north of Atlanta, as a "visual smorgasbord." But it's actually quite organized and a lot of fun—an indoor tree house rises from the center of this store that's divided into a dozen sections with toys separated by age groups. It's also a neighborhood gathering spot where locals come together for free weekly story time and parents stop in for "survival packs" of water and granola bars that Chris offers during marathon Black Friday shopping sessions.

**HOT TOY:** BRACEDLETS, bracelets made from colorful orthodontic braces bands (\$4.99). 220 Johnson Ferry Road NE; [beanheadtoysonline.com](http://beanheadtoysonline.com) or 404/851-2980

### MAGIC BOX TOYS NEW ORLEANS, LA

If you break it, you don't have to buy it at this 3,000-square-foot treasure chest of toys. "We don't have any 'Do not touch' signs. We want kids and parents to be able to test the toys," says owner Betsy Ordemann. This store could be located only in New Orleans—

shoppers and employees dance and play to the beat of Louisiana music. And, because Betsy knows that finding a parking space on busy Magazine Street with all the shops and restaurants can be tough, she offers a curbside delivery service.

**HOT TOY:** LockerLookz accessories that were developed by two Texas moms. They're all the rage for decorating school lockers (\$7.99 and up). 550B Magazine Street; [magicboxneworleans.com](http://magicboxneworleans.com) or 504/899-0117

### THE GREEN ALLIGATOR JACKSONVILLE, FL

A former schoolteacher, Sandi White quit her day job in 2008 to open this eco-friendly, educational-driven toy store in Jacksonville's Avondale neighborhood. The star of the shop is the "Lee Middleton nursery," where adopted dolls get weighed and measured and little mummies learn how to hold their new, precious babies.

**HOT TOY:** Djeco art supplies that include everything from sand art to paint-by-number kits (\$18 and up). 3581 St. Johns Avenue; [thegreenalligator.com](http://thegreenalligator.com) or 904/389-3099