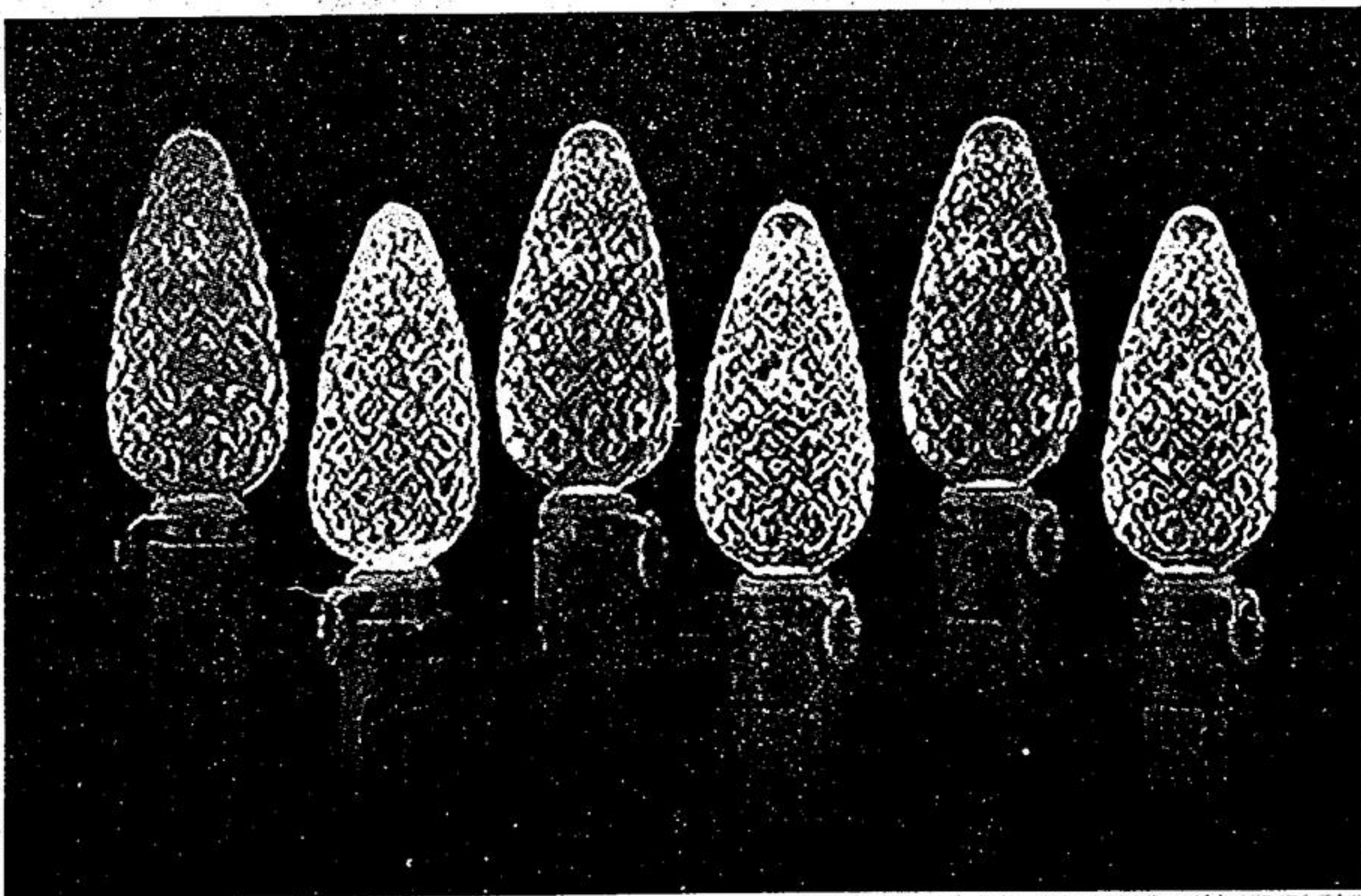




STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Violet is a trendy decorating colour as Diane Burton, Sylvia Burton and Eileen Apps found out while admiring this Christmas tree at the Richmond Hill Canadian Tire. Blue — in shades from electric to ice — is also hot, along with lime green, pink and purple. But traditional colours, such as red and gold, never go out of style. LED lights (below) are popular, partly because they're energy efficient.



Get the LED out

*New generation
of lights, snow globes
lead way in
decorating trends*

BY ROGER VARLEY
Staff Writer

How do you spell Christmas? Try L-E-D.

LED (light emitting diode) Christmas lights are all the rage this year, similar to the rush on icicle lights a few years ago.

And the newest thing in LED lights are those that change from red to green and red to blue.

"They are hot," confirmed Janet Yamazaki, a supervisor at a Richmond Hill Canadian Tire store. "Some stores are already running out."

Those who like them point out they use 90 per cent less energy than regular lights. But the lights also have their detractors, such as Nancy Gifford of Hansen's Christmas Stuff, a Markham-based decorations wholesaler.

"The colours aren't good," she said. "For example, the white lights are actually a blue-white."

Hansen's doesn't yet stock or sell LED lights, she said.

She also pointed to the cost of LEDs, adding prices will likely decrease in time.

A set of 70 LED mini-lights sells for about \$13 or more, compared to approximately \$11 for a string of 200 regular mini-lights.

And Mitch Levine of Illuminations, a Richmond Hill company that custom decorates home exteriors, said LED lights are wired in such a way they don't allow for strings to be shortened when necessary.

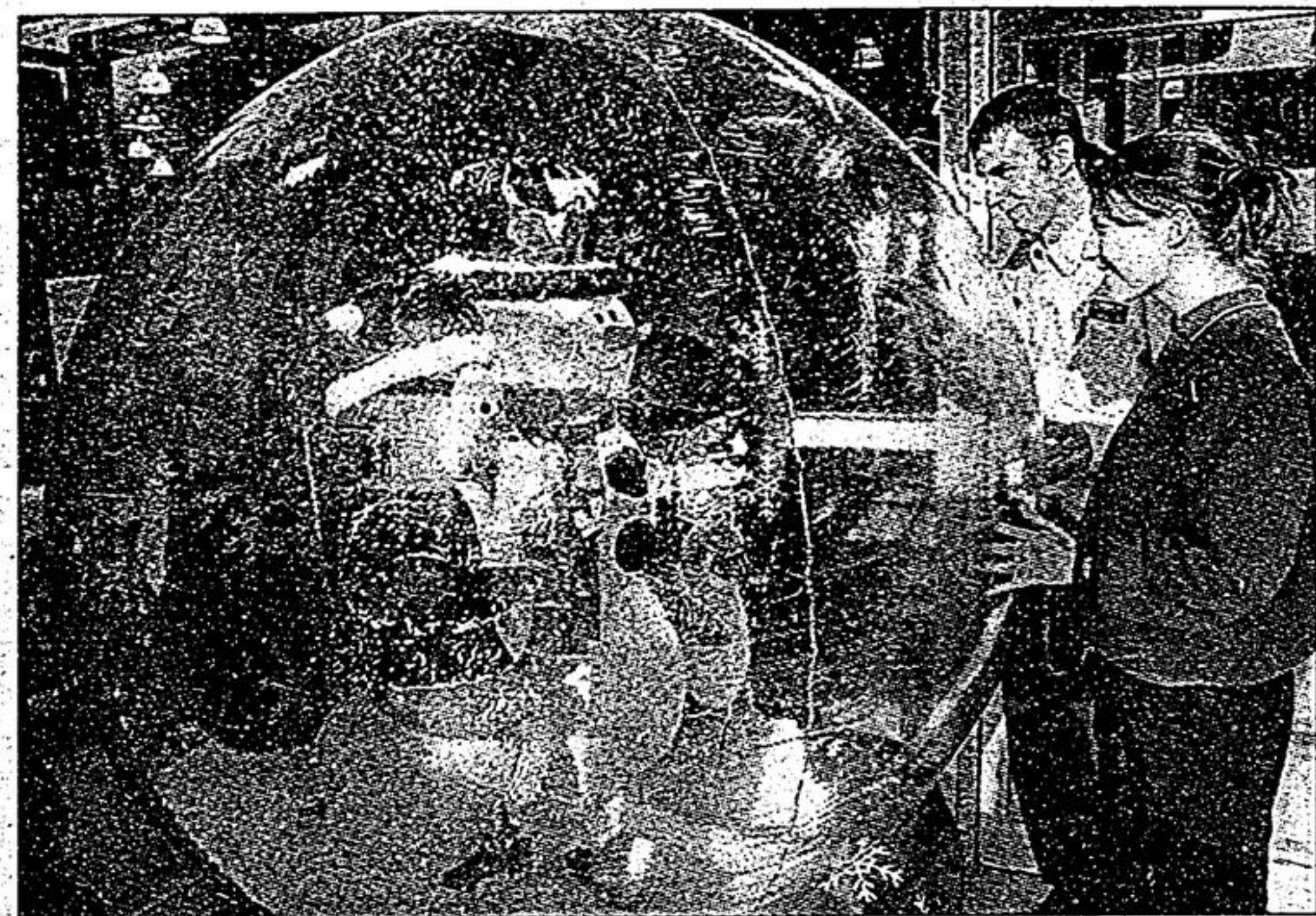
Artificial trees complete with built-in lights — especially LEDs — are gaining in popularity, as are similarly equipped garlands and wreaths, because of the ease with which they can be put up without the mess of a natural tree.

"But there are artificial trees and then there are artificial trees," Ms Gifford cautioned. "The best ones have lots of tips and lights."

For those who prefer a natural tree, there's a stand on the market that will save them a lot of time setting up. Once the tree is in the stand, the base can be swiveled and locked to make sure the tree is straight. And it comes with a reservoir for automatic watering.

Inflatable figures are big sellers, Ms Yamazaki said, with licenced products such as Homer Simpson and SpongeBob Squarepants proving more popular than snowmen or Santa Clauses. But the hottest items in that field are plug-in snow globes, which retail for around \$150.

Snow globes, as the name sug-



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Andrew Vance and Elizabeth Goldenberg are mesmerized by this snow globe on display at a Richmond Hill Canadian Tire store.

gests, are large, inflated, transparent balls containing figures such as snowmen and penguins that are showered with a constant flow of plastic pellets resembling snow.

"They go out as soon as we can get them," Ms Yamazaki said.

More and more people are decorating the outside of their homes "and inflatables are fun," Ms Gifford said.

If there is a major decorating trend this year, it appears to be in colour. Although traditional reds and greens remain as strong as ever, a variety of other colours are receiving attention.

*Trends and fads aside,
many of her customers
want old-fashioned,
rich, elegant items,
Ms Blackwell said.*

One of the centrepieces of the Canadian Tire store's Christmas section is a tree decorated in violet. But equally eye-catching are the range of blues, from electric to ice.

Colour trends for this year and next include lime greens, pinks and hot purples, as well as burgundy and gold, Ms Gifford said.

"Burgundy and golds are by far the most traditional and they sell the best," she said.

But she added there will be a market for new colours with so many homeowners now using beiges and neutral colours in their home decor.

Jackie Blackwell of the Snowman Factory in Woodbridge also

sees burgundy and gold as being among the most popular colours, but says browns, amber and copper are big in her store.

Perhaps that's because about 75 per cent of the decorations sold at the store are handcrafted at the Snowman Factory.

"I always try to be aware of what's going on, but I'm not dictated by it," she said of trends. "If they say a pink Christmas is hot, I'm not doing it."

Among popular items in her store this year are those featuring feathers, especially her fairy ornaments.

Pinning down trends is difficult, Ms Gifford said. It depends a lot on where one lives.

"Urban and funky are important in the GTA," she said. "On the west coast, it's more rustic. Canada is divided as to what sells where."

Trends and fads aside, many of her customers want old-fashioned, rich, elegant items, Ms Blackwell said.

"People want beautiful things that will last many Christmases," she said. "Our customers are willing to pay a little more. But lack of money doesn't mean lack of taste."

"I think Christmas is traditional," she added. "Every year, manufacturers come out with new stuff, but the traditional works."

But even with traditional, there's a catch. Made in Canada? Rarely.

"Most Christmas decorations come from China," Ms Gifford said.

As for those icicle lights, people are still buying them, Ms Yamazaki said.

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