

What goes into a perfect gift box?

Conceptualising, designing, and putting together boxes with thoughtful curation is a passion for some independent women entrepreneurs

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Figure 2 Champaca’s box comprises a set of books, a note, stationery from artists and a membership to its book club.

Figure 1 Based on a theme chosen by the team for the year, every month the subscribers receive a carefully-curated box



Figure 3 Sowmya's venture Little Hive Crafts has released three gifts boxes so far. All characters in the box are crocheted with cotton yarn and stuffed with upcycled filling or natural fibre.

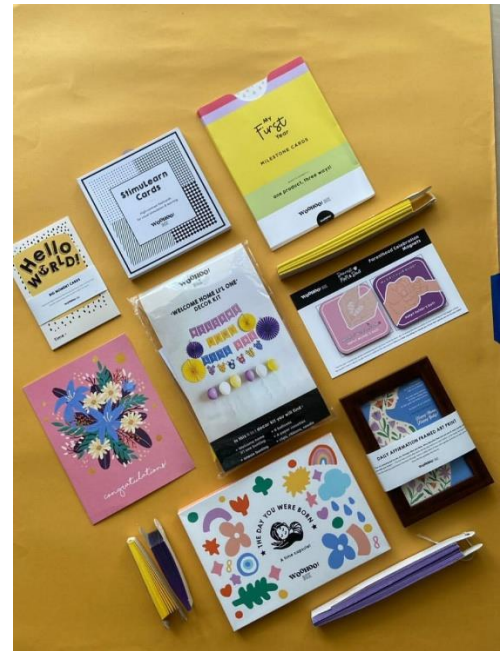


Figure 4 Sacheeta Kamath's Woohoo box is designed to help throw a small party at home.

What's the best part about opening a gift box? Some love the surprise element and enjoy peeling the wrapper with curiosity while others wonder about the thought process that went behind the package. What if a gift box has both?

Conceptualising, designing, and putting together boxes with thoughtful curation is a passion for some independent women entrepreneurs.

Radhika Timbadia, proprietor of Champaca Bookstore, a library and café in Bengaluru, launched their subscription boxes in 2020. The boxes were launched to expand their curation outside the bookstore and to the readers' homes.

Based on a theme chosen by the team for the year, every month the subscribers receive a carefully-curated box that comprises a set of books, a note, handpicked stationery from independent artists and a membership to the book club. The books explore different dimensions of the theme, whilst showcasing unheard stories, voices, and diversity.

"The biggest challenge is finding books that complement each other," says Nirica Srinivasan from Champaca. She recalls the time when the team put together a box on magical realism and while Gabriel Garcia Marquez was the first author that came to their mind, 'The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree' by Shokoofeh Azar, a lesser-known Iranian author and translated from Persian, was chosen. "We realised that the translator didn't want their name

to be mentioned in the book out of fear of persecution. This was an important story to be told,” she adds. Apart from the books, the team sources eco-friendly, handmade stationery from independent artists and at times creates their own artwork too, which are included in the box.

While the previous theme was travel, the ongoing theme is loneliness and connection. ‘Story in a Box’ was born out of Sowmya Sarathy’s love for children, crochet and her deep interest in early childhood development. A trained special educator based in Mumbai, Sowmya started the venture to collaborate with her older students in the autism spectrum.

She collaborates with Akshaya Nathan, a non-verbal writer and student from the spectrum from V-Excel Educational Trust, Chennai, to design the boxes. “I wanted the world to experience the magic of words that these non-verbal individuals bring with their writing, combined with the wonder of sustainably handcrafted toys,” she says.

The initiative is inspired by children and their out-of-the-box imagination. Each story is based on a season. “Winter, for instance, in its coldness and quiet, leads to one withdrawing and finding hope and magic so we tried to bring this element in our story. “In our Little Barry Beetle Beard, the wind plays an important character and Akshaya wanted a string of yarn added as a prop that one could whirl around. The intent is to empower people to believe that anything can become a prop to present a story,” adds Sowmya. Each box has a booklet that is written and illustrated with handmade characters from the story, suitable for ages 3 - 8 years. Sowmya’s venture Little Hive Crafts has released three gifts boxes so far — Two Little Mice, Little Barry Beetle Beard and The Magic Stones. The boxes are deliberately designed for open-ended storytelling and imaginative play.

All characters in the box are crocheted with 100% cotton yarn and stuffed with upcycled filling or natural fibre. All the elements are either handmade, upcycled or from a natural yarn, bringing different modes of tactile experience for the child, and encouraging wilful movement through puppet play.

Woohoo! is the sound of any party and Chennai-based Sacheeta Kamath has curated the perfect box for one. The brainchild of this former advertising professional and new mother, Woohoo box is essentially a “celebration box” or a theme-based box, designed to enable anyone looking to throw a small-scaled party at home. It includes a combination of thematic props and decor, theme-related games and gifts sourced from multiple vendors across India.

Sacheeta describes herself as a “happy 90s child who will never get over the simplicity and sweetness of birthday parties hosted at home where parents designed everything from the menu to decor.” Utility is the key idea behind the design of these boxes though Sacheeta’s design background helps in putting together aesthetically pleasing elements. ‘Hello World’ box is for parents-to-be and baby showers. It contains a personalised card, a banner to welcome the little one home, high contrast, milestone and big moment cards, magnets, art prints and a time capsule. These boxes use eco-friendly materials that are long-lasting such as cardboard, paper, fabric, and glass, the aim being to reduce the use of plastic. “Balloons are definitely something we hope to replace eventually with more eco-friendly alternatives,” she says.

Design challenges

Printing and managing the variables are challenging. Since the palette of every box is mindfully picked, and intricately illustrated by hand, the main challenge is to find a printer who would give the best quality in terms of colour, texture and faithful reproduction of details. Another big challenge is managing the variables, and sourcing vendors to manufacture items.

Wallet factor

These boxes are priced between Rs 1,499 and Rs 2,999 plus shipping.