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Rachy Cuna,
Penk Ching and
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Holiday Bakers
Creative Packaging Ideas
Step-by-Step Holiday Recipes
Using Butter, Margarine
and Shortening

*The
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Issue*

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By Marilen Fontanilla

We have all heard that old adage about not judging a book by its cover. But surely the person who coined that phrase never took into account the tempting holiday treats that come out every Yuletide season. Creative packaging catches the attention of every shopper and tempts a weak-willed soul to purchase just one more box, the deciding factor being the artful way it was wrapped with coordinating ribbons and accessories.

For those who are planning on baking up a storm this season but do not have an artistic bone in their body, the situation can become pressure-laden. How do we present our Christmas goodies? How can we make our products stand out from the crowd? What personal touches can we add?

Three packaging experts give three different perspectives on wrapping things up this holiday season.

That Personal Touch

Rachy Cuna has many titles under his belt, from the Philippines' Floral Architect to artist to interior designer, but the aptly-coined title of "gift-wrapping guru" is a part of his multi-faceted life that he relishes with equal zest. His talent for creating one-of-a-kind gift-wrapped parcels has enchanted his friends, relatives and others lucky enough to be in his circle. But even for those not fortunate enough to receive a Rachy-wrapped gift, Rachy gamely shares some of his trade secrets, displaying the same warmth and generosity that he bestows on his creations.

Rachy Cuna



The Shape of Things to Come

How to put holiday sparkle in your packaging

Coming up with novel packaging ideas may seem a bit intimidating, but when Rachy discusses his ideas, creating unique wraps does not seem that difficult after all. Using everything around him as inspiration, Rachy sources his materials from department stores, markets, textile stores and even hardware stores. No flimsy item is deemed unsuitable. In his gifted hands, heretofore unconventional packaging materials are given new life and result in enchantingly-wrapped holiday items.

Rachy admits that he leans towards displaying a Filipino touch in everything that he does. He presents a bottle of native vinegar draped in a cloth napkin and an abundance of ribbons. Another gift is wrapped in a native mat and frivolously touched off with ribbons and a hair accessory.



Rachy Cuna's whimsical holiday gifts
(Photos by Menchit Ongpin)



Rachy also likes to follow a simple theme, an Oriental motif perhaps, as seen in one box that he wraps in lime green paper and accents with chopsticks and a sequined hair scrunchie in the same shade. Or else, sweets are enclosed in a pretty dimsum steamer that is tied with a ribbon holding a jade ornament (the actual gift) and a sepia postcard from bygone years. Another idea involves a quaint Oriental brush holder which contains a simple offering of Japanese noodles.

Personalizing the gift also adds meaning to it in more ways than one. For example, he wraps pastries in personalized wrapping paper (printed with his name) and finished with cloth dipped in gold and a gold angel perched on top. Brownies are also given more personality when placed in a goblet that is wrapped in clear cellophane and with the recipient's name in colored stickers to brighten it up.

Just as the gift itself is invaluable, Rachy simply heightens one's sense of wonder when unwrapping it. And just as there are no limitations to the ideas he can come up with, so too does his personal touch shine through, that will be remembered long after the gift has been opened.

To Box or Not to Box?

If you're not sure if boxes will be the right fit for your baked goods, simply venture into the boxy wonderland of RM Box, where boxes come in every shape, size and color to fit its clients' every need. The staggering number of choices can overwhelm you, not to mention the complementary accessories such as laminated cake boards, stickers, ribbons, gift cards, baking cups and grease-resistant liners.

Not bad for a company that, in the 1980's, was envisioned by Robert and Mary Ong as a way to help start-up bakers with their packaging requirements. From that early start, RM Box has grown to maintain a steady clientele of small to medium-sized bakeshops and home-based specialty bakers.

When it comes to ideas for holiday boxes, Queenie Lim of RM Box explains that it is simply a matter of observing the Christmas landscape. Ideas are everywhere, from predominant colors to traditional symbols such as wreaths or candy canes. What it boils down to are new ways of presenting the old tradition of Christmas, either through colors or design.



The right design is very important. A popular design theme, according to Lim, is *Conservative Elegant* – a lush combination of rich opulent colors (like purple or burgundy) incorporated with silver or gold elements, as well as soft and graceful graphics. Another popular theme is a throwback to childhood memories of old-fashioned home-style bakeries, employing softer earthy colors and simpler motifs. The *Casual* look favored by today's younger market has a less structured design and a fresh style, using pastel or citrus colors and abstract swirls. RM Box's provincial clients prefer the *Festive* theme, with bright splashes of pink, green or red and an abundance of pictures or graphics adorning the entire box. The *Contemporary Elegant* look is a recent design theme favored by small specialty bakers and bakeshops, with its modern, clean and minimalist look using low contrast colors.

New design trends are emerging which are simply novel interpretations of classic looks. The reemergence of red makes it the new color of the year. But the bright fire engine red of yore is now seen in different shades. In fact, RM Box had to come up with a color palette to show their clients the many possible color combinations from the color spectrum. Unconventional combinations are also being given a second look, as blue and purple, or purple with green design motifs, radiate a surprisingly different look. Being open to possibilities is important. With that frame of mind, Lim sees no limits to the color and design combinations that RM Box and its clients can come up with.



Mother-and-daughter team Queenie Lim and Mary Ong



RM Box's Christmas box designs (Photos by Eddie Quizada)

Lim's advice for people shopping for boxes is to know their product first. This will dictate the size and storage limitations (refrigerated items require laminated boxes). Lim also advises to plan ahead of time, especially for the holidays. RM Box sells its holiday packaging and accessories as early as September. Customized boxes also need an extra month of production time. If you are planning to sell different products, like bars and cakes, it is possible to create a different box for each product but with a common design theme. Coordinating everything for a unified look is important and involves ribbons, gift cards and grease-proof liners. Start-ups can minimize inventory by using the same box for different items (i.e. pastries and *ensaymada* using the same box).

RM Box always prepares for the Christmas rush by producing an adequate supply of boxes and accessories for the crowds that visit the showroom. To help customers with ideas, RM Box even carry sample designs from the box to the ribbons and the gift tags. Personnel are always on hand to demonstrate how to tie up a box, should the customer so desire.

In the end, Lim adds, don't forget to have fun. After all, the holidays are a time for merrymaking. Your holiday treats should reflect that same spirit, whether you are baking, selling or choosing the packaging. To box or not to box? Hopefully, that is no longer a question.

Practical Ideas That Stand Out

Thinking outside the box? Looking for alternative ideas? Melissa Lim of Cakeworld/Kitchenworks can shed some light on this. Melissa's baked goods have always stood out, not simply for their taste but also for her unique yet practical packaging. She is a firm believer in making her products distinctive. Packaging sells the products within, and if it is not tempting and presentable, nobody will bother to look at it, let alone taste it.

Melissa Lim started her baking business as a hobby together with her daughter Aileen back in 1996. She discovered to her surprise that her baked goods were well-received. She opened Cakeworld in 1999. By that time, business had grown to include made-to-order pastries, cookies, children's cakes and wedding cakes. The family also started Kitchenworks, a baking and packaging supply shop.

Melissa confides that she has no idea how she comes up with her packaging concepts, but inspiration does strike throughout the day. She absorbs a lot of the things around her and uses these as a springboard for her ideas. But Lim makes sure her ideas are always practical. She cautions against making the packaging too expensive as this defeats the purpose of a price advantage. Good packaging can always offer cheaper alternatives.

Melissa shares her tried-and-tested tips on holiday packaging:

- Colors are very important and reflect the image you want to portray. Play around with colors, as this excites the eye and provides added incentive for opening gifts. Aside from red and green, Lim also veers towards other color combinations that can be just as festive, like orange, yellow and gold or pink and brown.
- Re-usable containers are a thoughtful way to add more meaning to the gift. Buckets, decorative boxes, printed paper bags ensure that the gift will still be remembered even after the goodies are long gone.
- A specific theme is also a great way to enhance the gift without detracting from the holiday look. Some ideas Lim shares are country-style cakes that she decorates with moss twigs, paper butterflies and matching handmade paper bags. Oriental fortune cookies can be enclosed in packages with small tassels or gold coins. A festive style can be achieved by accenting the package with materials such as colored tissue paper adorned with beads and ribbons.

- Sometimes, a container that is slightly larger than the contents can emphasize the value of the gift.
- Protecting the food items are of paramount importance. Always line containers with food-grade materials, such as foil, doily or plastic, before adding the contents. Remember to label non-edible items. Also, wrap bars or cookies individually before placing them in the container.

Is beauty in the eye of the beholder? Come Christmas time, it is hoped that beauty will be in every beholder's eye as they receive gifts and food items in every shape and color. So if you are planning on selling baked treats for Christmas or giving them away, don't stop with the baking of your product. Go the extra mile and spruce up the packaging, in whatever form it may be. It is a worthwhile investment of time and money both for yourself and the intended recipient of the holiday treat. ■



Festive holiday packaging from Melissa Lim
(Photos by Menchit Ongpin)