



TREND: WEDDING CARDS

Heady Invites

The wedding card's now a statement

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Shoing away all thoughts of Pandora, we examine the foot-high box that's just landed on Ravish Kapoor's table at his south Delhi office. Dark brown, with a carved wood-like texture, it looks severe. But that impression is dispelled as soon as it flips open to reveal a 3D tableau of dhoti-clad palanquin-bearers ferrying a bashful bride through a forest. And even before you have taken in the scene, out pop chocolates and paper inserts from its concealed panels and compartments. So, when Ravish, the creator of this price-on-request, custom-made wedding invitation (yes, that's what it is), says, "People tell me they want to remarry just so they can send out such invites," you can tell he is only half joking.





There was a time when the wedding card was just a card. An elegant, gold-rimmed paper card with a fold or two, and perhaps a discreet Ganesha in the corner. No longer. Wedding cards have morphed into customised boxes, bags, leather-finish mini-trunks, books, champagne bottles with invites on labels, gold-inscribed marble slabs, silver plates and more. When you receive one of these, you know at once that this is not just about announcing D-day and the route to the venue. What you are holding in your hands is a statement of your hosts' personality, lifestyle and splurge power.



"It has a psychological effect on the receiver, making you think, 'If the invite is so powerful, what will the wedding be like?'," enthuses Sandy Khurana, co-owner of The Entertainment Design Co, the big daddy of the fast-growing luxury cards business, with the Chatwals, the Mittals and the Bachchans as clients.

With exclusive cardmakers like him throwing their energies into whipping up intricate, elaborate confections, the clientele, too, has got used to demanding (and getting) nothing but the best. As a Mumbai-based businessman succinctly puts it, "When you're driving around in your BMW, flaunting Cartier shades and planning a Scandinavian honeymoon, you can't send out a substandard wedding card." Especially when your social circle is diligently raising that standard.



The rise and rise of the wedding invite is linked to the fortunes of the Great Indian Wedding. As it got bigger and fatter in the heady, post-liberalisation '90s, cards had, perforce, to reflect the expanding range of ceremonies involved in a wedding; and the theme-based fantasies that wedding planners were conjuring up for the well-heeled. "As Indians got upwardly mobile and international exposure became de rigeur, they wanted it to show in their invites too, with elaborate executions like scrolls, boxes with drawers full of sweetmeats and cards to match wedding themes like Rajasthan Royalty," says Lakshmi Rammohan of Dreamweaver Weddings. It's a short but colourful journey from that to pop-up cards which, reveals Lakshmi, are the new rage. "On each page, a different scene with the deity and his consorts pops up, to match the different rituals," she says, describing a recent card with a Radha-Krishna theme. All for a price, of course: around Rs 1,000 per card.

If you think that's a lot of money to spend on a single invite, hear out Candice Pereira, creative head of the Mumbai-based Marry Me Wedding Planners, who dealt with a businessman who spent a jaw-dropping Rs 20,000 a piece on a bespoke card for his son's wedding. "It was a card that opened up to reveal a three-dimensional wedding scene, all done in acrylic." Sandeep Agarwal of Jaipur's Wedding Card Shoppe has his favourite stories too, like the one about the silver trader who handed out engraved silver plates as cards.





"It's about keeping up with the Joneses," points out Lakshmi. But the irony is, at the same time, you have to be unique. "Exclusivity," the wedding planner confirms, "is the watchword." That's how you end up with Swarovski crystals and 24-carat gold plating on suede-lined Italian board, silk-lined wood or a sleek leather wrap, fitted with pull-out drawers or push-out trays, and generously loaded with Syrian baklava or Belgian chocolates; even, we kid you not, an occasional cellphone or a Lladro figurine. (Also, look carefully for security chips, swipe cards or entry passes without which you will get no further than the imported orchid-covered mandap gate.) And how about a specially designed family crest to feed your royal delusions? Or intertwined initials of the newlyweds, a la the Shilpa Shetty-Raj Kundra card, designed by Ravish.



For the hoi polloi, such celebrity cards are a constant inspiration. "We get requests for cards like Abhi-Ash's all the time," reveals Sandy. It's much the same at the non-fancy end of the card market, in Old Delhi's vibrant Chawri Bazaar. At New Age Cards, owner Sunil Sharma admits that more than half his patrons walk in with a high-end card they want replicated. A quick tour of the market, awash with box-cards embellished with laser-cut paper, gold foil and leather, confirms that rip-offs set the trend here.





However, if glitz is not your preferred style statement, the invite market has other options. You could settle for Playclan's Yaar Ki Shaadi range of humorous wedding cards (Rs 375 for a set of four), cushions, frames, mugs and T-shirts. Author and businesswoman Himani Dalmia approvingly cites a cousin's tongue-in-cheek wedding card that boasted a Mario Miranda drawing. Her own card was an elaborate traditional invite based on Shekhawati art, harking back to her family's Marwari roots. "Both cards reflected the personality of the family. We wanted to move away from wealth," says Himani. A scion of one of Delhi's well-known business families echoes her: "We get all our cards designed by the best players in the business, but they are never an expression of affluence or social standing." Except, you have to spend a fortune to ensure that.

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