



To give or not to gift? Photo: Olindana/Getty Images

Ask AD PRO

Do I Need to Get My Client a Holiday Gift?

Dealing with in-laws isn't the only stressful part of the holidays...

By AD PRO

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Dear AD PRO,

Should I give my clients a holiday present? If so, what?

—Not-So-Secret Santa

Dear NSS Santa,

'Tis the season...for festive [decorations](#), festive [cocktails](#), and decidedly un-festive stressing over whether or not to play Santa with your client list. What to possibly get the homeowner who already has everything (thanks to you)?

Manhattan interior designer [Tina Ramchandani](#), for one, embraces the challenge. "I'm a huge gifter," she says. "The holidays are a magical time and I enjoy sending clients something to show my appreciation for our year together." She usually goes for fresh flowers, a beautiful candle, or a great bottle of wine. "If it leads to future business, that's great, but my genuine purpose is to share something that I think someone will appreciate." Cristina Villalón of [Álvarez-Díaz & Villalón](#) likes to gift newer clients a [coffee-table book](#) (perhaps even the firm's own monograph, *Places of Purpose*, "which is a win-win, as it provides a reminder of the firm every time they see it," she says). For those she has a longer and more intimate relationship with, she'll send something more personal—framed original sketches of the client's home, for instance. "Design is all in the details," says Villalón, "so special gifts like this really speak to who you are and show that you care."

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Every year, [Boston](#) interior designer [Kathie Chrisicos](#) custom-creates on-brand [cards](#) to send to all clients and vendors (with handwritten messages, of course). [Gifts](#) go to an edited list that includes multiple-project clients, clients who have become friends, and clients and colleagues who have championed the company or created referrals. "But I make very sure that the holiday is a holiday they embrace, and I also make sure that where I send the gift is where they are spending their holidays," says Chrisicos. "If I have any doubts on those fronts, I make the gift a celebration of the New Year."

But not everyone gets into the gift-giving spirit—at least not at holiday time. [Fort Worth](#) interior designer [Shelby Whitfield](#) forgoes seasonal gifts in favor of end-of-project or "I-saw-this-perfect-piece-for-your-home-and-I-want-you-to-have-it" gifts, she says. "I've found those to be more authentic to my personality and therefore a much better fit for my business structure and clients."

Seattle interior designer [John Monte](#) takes a cue from the book *Gift-ology* and also gives year-round. "The holidays are the most cluttered time of year for gifting," he says. "It makes the chance of our gift or card standing out pretty small, and we want our gift-giving process to be just as significant as our relationships."

[Julie Assenberg](#), a designer in Salt Lake City, felt pressured to give clients holiday gifts for years—and, until last year she did. "I bought gifts, wrapped them, *and* had custom hangtags printed with my logo," she says. "In the end, I was too tired to deliver them—plus I saw a huge need in the community." This year, she's sending a holiday greeting asking clients for donations to a local homeless shelter instead. "My hope for 2020 is that more architects, designers, and those that can afford to hire us will begin giving back to those who truly need it," says Assenberg. "After all, we as a group believe in the concept of home more than any other."

—AD PRO