



Mooncake madness

EVELYN HUSSAIN

This is the time of year where China goes mad for mooncakes. The mooncake is typically a round pastry the size of a fist. It's traditionally eaten by the Chinese as they celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival, which falls on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month. In 2019, this falls on Friday September 13th. These cakes are customarily shared and exchanged between friends and families, though it is common practice these days to gift them to close business associates and clients.

Conventionally, mooncakes have a thin crust covering a thick, rich filling made from lotus seed or red bean paste. Some may contain one or two salted duck egg yolks in the centre as well. However, as people became more affluent the demand for high-end or stylised mooncakes, along with their elaborately designed packaging, have increased.

Today, mooncakes come in a multitude of variations. A popular contemporary version is the "snow skin" mooncake. Their powdery, glutinous rice crust requires the pastry to be refrigerated. The snow skin came about from a desire for healthier versions of the mooncake, which is traditionally very high in sugar and oil content.

Similarly, as the Chinese become more health conscious and open to unconventional foods, it isn't uncommon to see mooncakes made from



1. Eco-friendly mooncake packaging from CHAR Bar & Grill

yoghurt, jelly, fruits, green tea, or even fat-free ice cream and chocolate. Some are even individually sealed in airtight plastic wrappers on the pretext of "hygiene concerns." This is a far cry from the original cakes eaten for hundreds of years.

Whilst a regular traditional mooncake may sell for ¥20 to ¥30 (£2 to £3), these modern versions could sell for exorbitant amounts, ranging from several hundred to over a thousand yuan. The outrageous prices are in no small part due to packaging, as mooncake gifting is a big and common practice in China. In fact, it is because of this that oftentimes the packaging is a far larger component in terms of price and even consideration than the mooncakes themselves.

However, that trend is set to change as the Chinese become more environmentally conscious. Many see the packaging as a monumental waste since most of it is thrown away at the end of the day. Many bakeries have already started to make the switch to ecologically friendly packaging that reduces or removes completely plastic wrapping and cardboard boxes. [CHAR Bar & Grill](#) for example, has stripped back all its bells and whistles and used simple, kraft paper boxes for its moon cakes this year. Paring down the materials used for packaging doesn't take away the deliciousness of the moon cakes.

5 simple steps to eco-friendlier packaging

1. Minimize the weight and volume of packaging materials.
2. Facilitate reuse of packaging materials.
3. Offer a take-back program.
4. Avoid using plastics.
5. Design for Disassembly. Design the packaging so it can be rapidly taken apart at the end of the product's life so that components can be reused and/or recycled.

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HEAD OF INNOVATION

Evelyn's experience with agency-side design and branding, as well as an MBA, means she can straddle the creative and commercials divide.

Her academic background in business operations within an Agile and Lean environment complements the practitioner in her, who has lead teams of designers, and project manage clients. She is the best person to lead rapid prototyping, co-creation workshops, whilst perusing design thinking methodology.