

# Design Secrets: Packaging

ROCKPORT



50 Real-Life Projects Uncovered  
Catharine Fishel



**Chase Design Group** has been working for **Kama Sutra**—not surprisingly, a **purveyor of sex products**—for eight years; although the company has been in existence **since 1965**.



“Registering the Kama Sutra name internationally was the smartest thing he ever did,” says agency executive creative director Margo Chase of her client, Joe Bolstad. “As a result, there are no other competitors in the market with that name. He has competitors in the sex aid market, but none have been able to cross over into the mainstream gift market as successfully.”

A great deal of that success is attributable to Chase and her designers, who have taken the products—through gorgeous packaging designs—from items that might be bought furtively at sex or head shops to a line of products that are beautiful enough to sell in all levels of gift and specialty stores. Even more significantly, they look artful enough to leave out on the counter or bedside table at home.



The client had two sets of packaging designs before the work Chase Design Group created. The original packaging was created in 1965. It used brown ribbed paper with a circular logo. These designs were rather dingy looking, but the line also contained a few special packages that used Indian-style illustrations, which Chase thought had potential.

In the 1980s the entire line of packaging was redesigned. All the new containers were matte black with red type and gray stone texture. Chase describes the look as “not very sexy.” Part of the redesigned suite included some phallic-looking bottles that—unfortunately—leaked. The client was not happy with the new look, so he let some of the original designs stay on the market. The result was a disjointed brand image.

⊕ Chase Design Group was inspired by the challenge to tie together, through packaging design, an almost 40-year-old brand of sex aid products. The new packaging for Kama Sutra was so lush and beautiful that it successfully maneuvered its way into more mainstream retail venues. Previously, it was only sold in sex and head shops.

To make the next step in expanding his line into larger gift and department stores, the client needed packaging that was more palatable to mainstream consumers. Originally, Chase recalls, Bolstad wanted to simply go back to and update the original brown packaging. Chase didn’t want to abandon the core of this idea, but felt that bringing in Indian art and more color would give his products more appeal and visual diversity.

This was the genesis of the green ribbed paper that is used throughout Chase’s redesign. “The paper is actually just the brown shipping paper they use in Europe. We scanned it and shifted the color to create a rich, jewel-toned green,” she explains. On top of the green, the designers added a gold metallic leaf overprint together with a new brand identity. It was important to maintain some elements from the original design, Chase adds, so that long-time customers wouldn’t feel as if they had been abandoned.



The team also explored Indian artwork, frescos, and textiles for inspiration. From these sources, rich, detailed artwork was developed for use on canisters and bottle bellybands. Two different looks were built from the green paper and floral illustrations: The core product line—which includes Oil of Love, Pleasure Balm, and Honey Dust—is wrapped in the green ribbed paper. Each flavor has a different bellyband design to distinguish it and tie it into the second look, which was used on the gift product line. This line is decorated with similarly colored illustrations based on the art of the original Kama Sutra.

“We felt that color was an important aspect that was missing in the old packaging. The Oil of Love is manufactured in various beautiful colors, but they were hidden inside brown or black tubes, which are necessary to keep the glass bottles from breaking. We decided to bring the color to the outside of the containers,” Chase says. She notes that the consistent green paper theme gave the client a single, ownable color on store shelves and helped him carve out an identifiable space. “But we wanted to break that up with floral patterns and illustrations to keep everything interesting, inviting, and friendly.”

The art served another, more subliminal purpose. Many people are uncomfortable buying sex products. “We hope that the beautiful art would help people feel like they were buying a gift or a piece of art rather than a sex aid. That’s one big reason for Kama Sutra’s success: It still does a huge amount of business in sex shops because its products are the only ones that look tasteful, and he has been able to break into the mainstream gift market for the same reason,” Chase says.

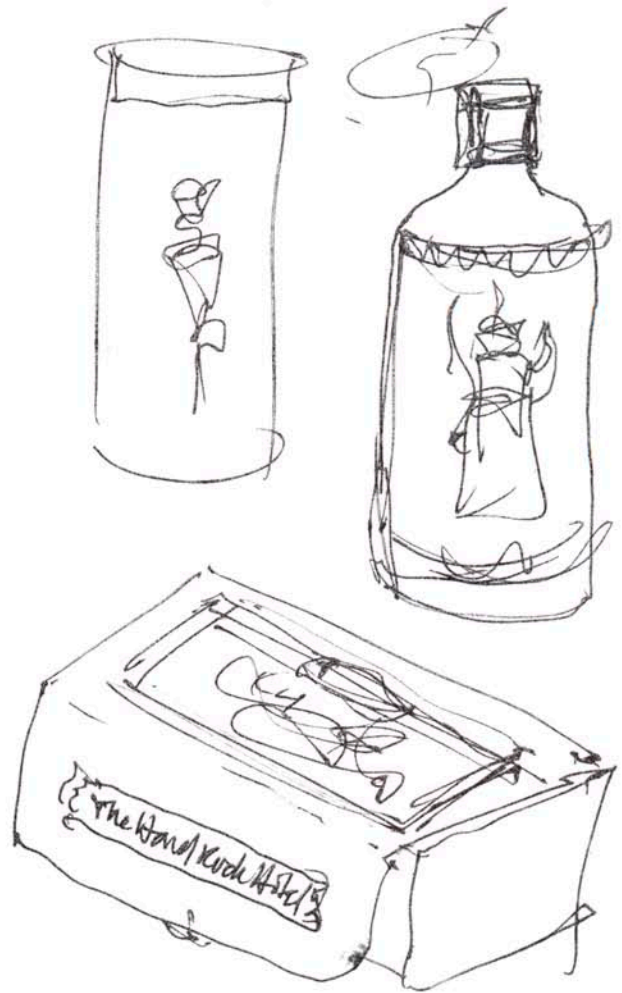
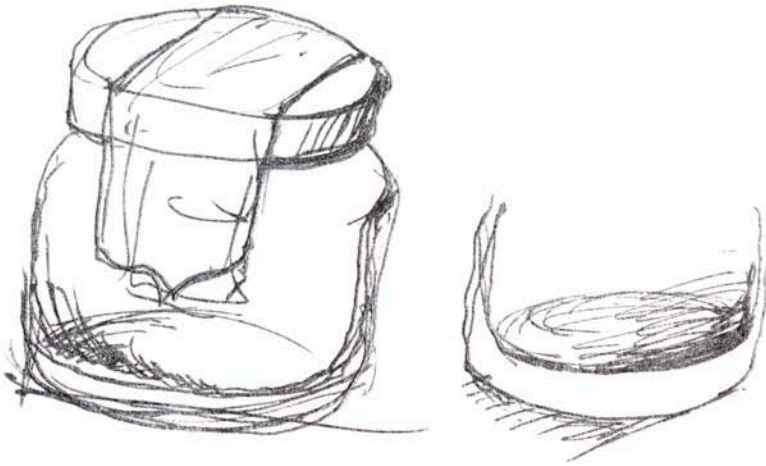
Today, the Kama Sutra product line is found in high-end gift stores all over the world, as well as at mainstream retailers. Its business has grown dramatically every year since Chase Design Group began its work; in 2002 alone, sales doubled.

Chase doesn’t claim that the new packaging is the only reason for such impressive improvement, but both she and the client like to think it has had a huge impact. She also credits client Joe Bolstad—the only client she has ever had who graduated from Art Center with a degree in design—with being incredibly receptive to their ideas.

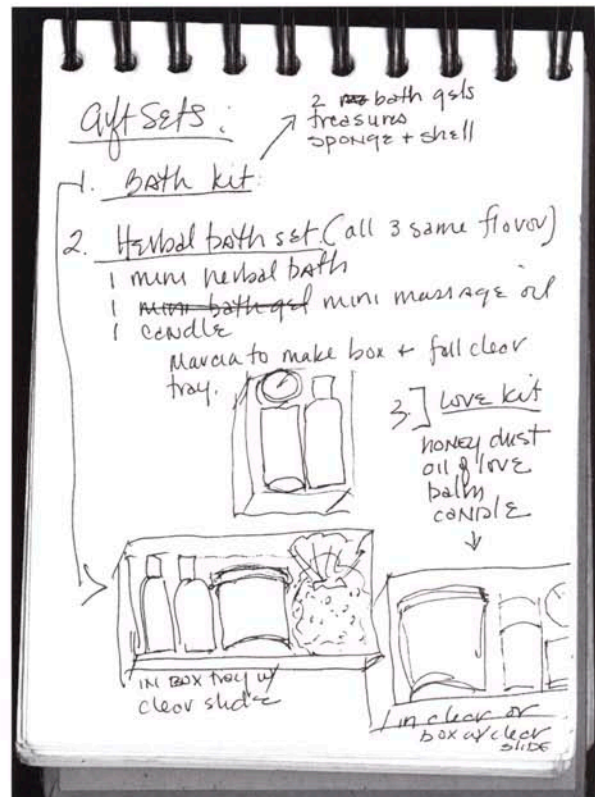
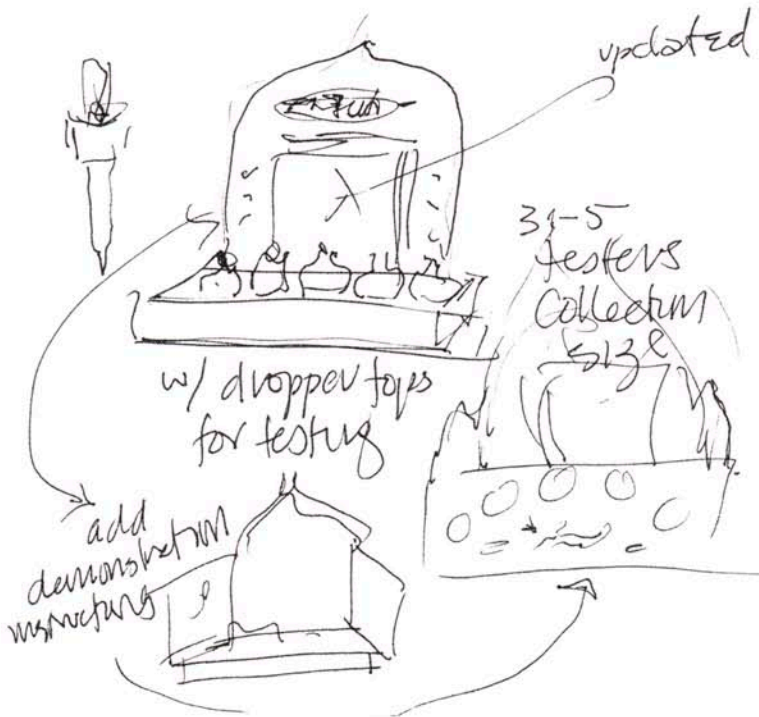
“We often make comps in several versions. He takes them away and sits with them until he’s sure which one is right. He’ll have thought everything through and offer great input, often making the designs even better than they were,” she says.



Rich fabrics from India were one of the visual resources that Margo Chase and her designers studied for guidance on color and illustration.



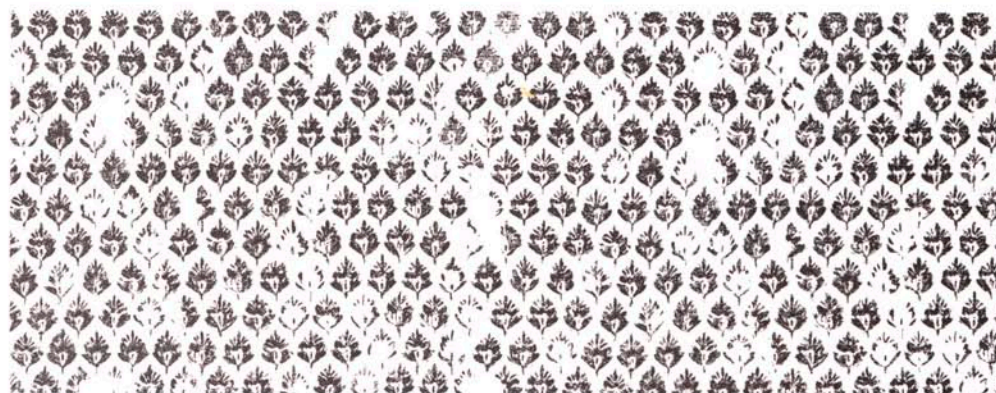
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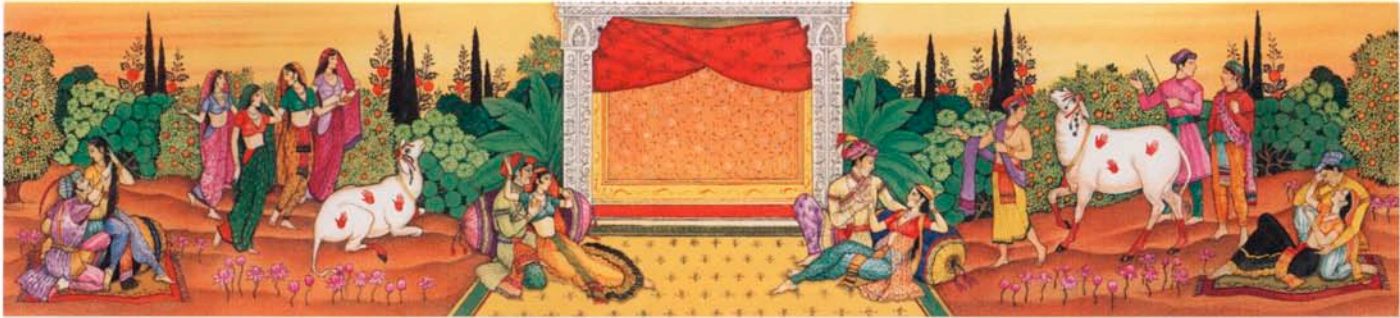


⊗ A range of sketches completed during early discussions with the client.



- ⊗ Kama Sutra's original packaging was wrapped in brown ribbed paper, and the client had expressed a desire to return to that look, following an unsuccessful redesign attempt by another design firm in the 1980s and years of a disjointed identity. Chase delivered his wish, with a lovely twist: She used a ribbed paper (actually, a brown shipping paper commonly used in Europe), electronically gave it a rich green color, and added a leaf pattern colored with gold leaf on top. An illustrated bellyband added color. This core design was one of two looks the designers created for their client.
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⊗ The second look created for the client is shown in the tins the designers created for the Kama Sutra gift product line. These carried more illustration and color. Shown here is the preliminary comp for the Tangerine Gift Tin; the approved art; the final wrap; and finally, photography of the finished product. The inspiration gained from studying Indian artwork, frescos, and textiles is evident.