



The gift of time

Lifestyle coach **Brigitte von Boch**
on the dangers of too much haste when it comes
to buying presents, and the art
of making people happy with little surprises.

Children have more imagination than we do. Or at least they are less self-conscious when it comes to expressing their wishes. Ask a child what they would like as a gift, and they'll hand you a long list. Then, brimming with anticipation and excitement, they will wait to receive what they've asked for – and not just at Christmas time. But adults are different. They often can't think of a single thing they'd like. In some cases, businessmen even task their secretary with finding a suitable gift for their wife or partner. Or they pick up something at an airport boutique. But who needs another stylish pen? Or scarf number ten from that famous Parisian fashion house? And perfume is a gray area, too. A lot of effort goes into selecting a favorite scent, so when most women have made their choice, they stock up on it themselves to avoid running out.

Giving and receiving gifts seems to get more difficult with time – for both men and women. What would he or she really like? What do I want? We've already got everything we need. As managers of our own personalities, we're not used to surprises. We're always well prepared – it's part of modern life. But just because we stride through life with self confidence doesn't necessarily mean our emotional worlds are just as rosy. That's why my advice for the perfect gift is time – use your imagination to think of a way of spending it together. Of course, some material presents bring us joy time and again, too. An unusual accessory such as a handmade bag can be a very special, personal gift, giving someone a unique aura that can be enjoyed every day. Books can also make a lasting impression. And there are women who would be thrilled by an old, lovingly restored Beetle convertible in their driveway. But do we not derive the greatest pleasure from the things we don't have every day? Precious time shared with someone special is not something we forget in a hurry.



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A classic on any wish list are two plane tickets to here or there. And wherever you end up, it's fun to pick out souvenirs together that will remind you of the trip when you return home. But sometimes you don't even have to travel very far. I for one delight in an unexpected winter outing to a Bavarian lake for an afternoon of the regional version of curling. You only have to use your imagination and the ideas will start to flow: there's a host of exciting and creative ways to spend time with loved ones.

For example, why not book a surprise trip in a hot air balloon? It's something you've talked about but never done. And sharing the experience will be fun. I like the idea of taking off together. Giving gifts is a two-way process. And people who take it seriously are showing that they care about their relationships. The well-known adage "diamonds are a girl's best friend" seems outdated these days – now that both sexes live a fulfilled life and have opportunities for self-realization. But complete self-realization also has a downside: we're developing autistic characteristics, and we need to address them.

That's why I think presents are not just for holidays and certain days of the year.

Giving time is about connecting with people – and accepting the collateral damage this may involve.

We are unlikely to mention that the scarf was the wrong color or the tie too conservative for our taste. But when we take a trip together or share an adventure, certain conflicts are unavoidable. And these, in turn, can lead to new happiness. These are the ups and downs of life, and we all have to live with them.

The degree and duration of enjoyment felt by someone receiving a gift is directly proportional to the thought that goes into it and the time taken to select it. I find this a good rule of thumb. A surprise love letter can be the best present. I know that ambitious careers can rob relationships of precious time. Perhaps that's why I value those shared moments and experiences so much – and the children with their vivid imaginations. Giving and receiving gifts requires time.

Brigitte von Boch heads a unique lifestyle enterprise. The mother-of-four established her reputation as a creative thinker in the nineties when she opened a modern hotel in traditional country-house style in Saarland, Germany. She has since published several interior-design books with her son Oliver and launched a mail-order company for her own fashion, furniture and accessories ranges – which are now also sold in 16 dedicated stores. Her lifestyle magazine "Brigitte von Boch Living" is a great success.

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