

BRIDAL BYTES

The new wedding registry portals aim to dramatically change the gifting scenario by giving couples the option of getting gifts they like

BY RADHIKA SEN

SO YOU'VE JUST HAD a fairytale wedding, the kind you always dreamt about. But when you open those attractively wrapped presents the next day, feeling pleased as punch do you instead just end up ever so slightly disappointed at the sheer volume of flower vases, clocks and crockery? Not to mention the number of repeat gift items that end up gathering dust in your closet or



The best-sellers on these portals are from the home section followed by exclusive experience packages for couples

are swiftly 'discarded'. After all, who wants another ceramic dinner set or the umpteenth photo frame?

To provide prospective couples a cool solution to their wedding gift woes, a clutch of wedding gift registry portals have cropped up in India. These websites aim to dramatically change the gifting scenario by bridging the gap between gifts received and gifts desired by couples at their wedding.

The concept of the wedding gift registry is popular abroad, but in India it's only just catching on. "Our market research shows that 90 per cent of non-cash gifts given at Indian weddings are useless. If the money had been well spent it would have given the newlyweds a great start to build a new life, which is the whole point of wedding gifts," notes Kanika Subbiah, founder and CEO of the *Wedding-wishlist.com*, a luxury gifting registry portal that was launched in February.

For Chennai-based Subbiah, it all began after a conversation with a newly married friend. "The idea was born after a friend shared her disappointing experience of receiving irrelevant gifts at her wedding," she recalls. Subbiah had lived in the US, and seen how wedding registries worked. She reckoned the benefits were "compelling".

For the uninitiated, a wedding registry is a service provided by a website or store that allows couples to indicate the gift items they want. "It's a simple three-step process. Register and create your wishlist out of the gifts listed on our site, share the URL with your friends and family via email, Facebook, Twitter, SMS or WhatsApp and then the guests can pick what they like," explains the entrepreneur.

Couples can personalise the page and keep track of their gifts, gift-givers and contributions made towards selected items through a real-time Gift Tracker feature. Once a listed item is purchased, a Wedding Wishlist planner dedicated to the couple will update them.

So how about a cycling expedition that takes you to Siena, Vinci, San Gimignano

COUPLES' CORNER

(FACING PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) Newly-wed couple Amit and Sriranjani created their gift registry on *Weddingwishlist.com* which had a range of items like a Mini Food Chopper to a Weekend Surfing getaway; Couples can also be treated to luxury holidays like a cycling expedition in picturesque European countries; (RIGHT AND BELOW RIGHT) FabAlong.com is an online wedding gift marketplace that stocks tableware such as this regal 47 Piece Dinner Set from Lazzaro and offers high-end wedding photographers like Candid Photography



and Pisa, or maybe a cool Prima Latte Coffee Maker, or that gorgeous Kantha embroidered Wooden Ottoman stool you have been eyeing for your living room?

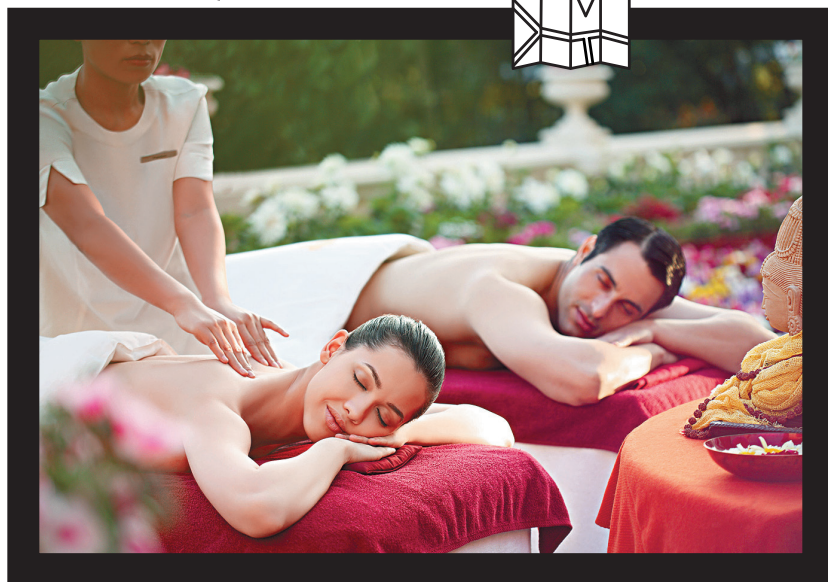
"Creating a registry is not just a great way for couples to choose what they like, even their friends and family will be glad to know that their gift will always be memorable. So it works both ways," says Sudha Maheshwari, founder and CEO of *Formyshaadi.com*, an online wedding gift registry that went live in February.

Maheshwari decided to quit her corporate career even though she was riding high to try her hand at creating a wedding gift registry portal which, she felt, was a largely untapped market in India. "I spent a year doing my market research and spoke to couples about the kind of gifts they would like to receive at their weddings. I discovered that to a large extent couples did informally express their wedding gift desires to close friends and family. *Formyshaadi.com* was created to provide an online market place for premium brands and experiences that couples can tap into," explains Maheshwari who runs her portal out of Gurgaon.





The wedding gift registries offer a highly personalised experience, right from keeping track of gifts bought to sending out 'Thank You' notes to guests



BRIDAL BLISS

(TOP) Couples looking to do up their homes can create a gift registry on Theyellowdoorstore.com that makes handcrafted furniture pieces like this Pink Embroidered Armchair; (ABOVE) Another niche pick for your home is this antique Gold Metal Console with brass etched sheet pasted on wood; (RIGHT) On wedding gift registry portal Formysaadi.com guests can gift couples a serene spa weekend at Ananda in the Himalayas

To offer an all-encompassing gifting experience to couples Formysaadi.com is divided under three broad categories — For Us which includes clothing and grooming products, For Our Home that covers furniture and décor from high-end brands, and thirdly For Our First Year where couples can choose from a range of dining, luxury holiday and wellness experiences.

"Our bestsellers are from the home section as most newly-wed couples set up their own houses or rooms," points out Maheshwari. A close second are the handcrafted experience packages, which include a spa retreat at Ananda in the Himalayas or a candle-lit dinner at

Indigo. At Weddingwishlist.com too it's the home products that are high on demand followed by couple's weekend getaway packages.

While these innovative start-ups might just be the next big thing in the gifting world, it does come with its set of challenges. "Gifting is a very big market in India, but the concept of wedding gift registries is met with apprehension as it might appear as though couples are demanding gifts," says Shilpa Khanna, COO of Theyellowdoorstore.com, a home décor and furniture portal launched in 2009 that has recently added a registry service to its website.

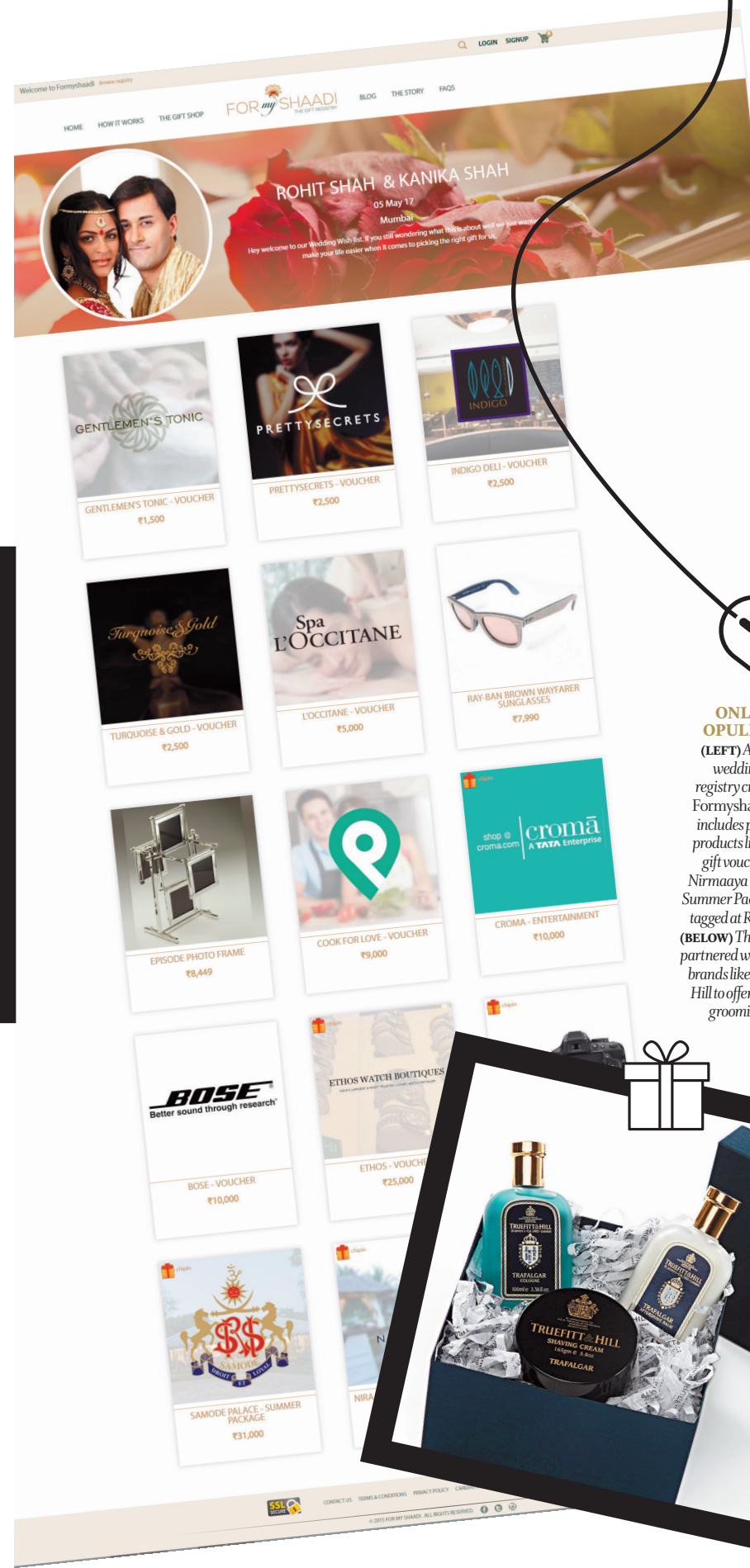
To work their way around these sticky situations, Yellow Door often steps in and

sends out the registries on behalf of couples who are slightly hesitant to do so. "We expect these inhibitions to go away quickly as today's generation is not shy about expressing their needs," feels Khanna.

For guests too, the flip side of a service like this is feeling obliged to purchase expensive gifts that might be way over their budget. Gift prices can go up to Rs 2 lakh to Rs 3 lakh for a luxury holiday or a pre-wedding photo shoot

To give guests the option of staying within their budget while also being able to buy the couple something they like, the websites allow a part payment system towards the total cost of a gift.

"Any item that's tagged over Rs 10,000



ONLINE OPULENCE

(LEFT) A sample wedding gift registry created on Formysaadi.com includes premium products like a Bose gift voucher and Nirmaaya - Kovalam Summer Package that's tagged at Rs 46,000; (BELOW) The portal has partnered with skincare brands like Truefitt & Hill to offer high-end grooming kits

can be categorised by the couple as a 'chip-in' gift to enable a group of people to jointly contribute towards buying it," says Maheshwari. Similarly, Weddingwishlist.com has a Group Gifting option where guests can make a partial payment towards a gift of any value. They can also invite others to join them in presenting an item chosen by the couple as a 'group gift'.

Of course, not all items in a couple's wishlist get picked up so there are leftovers. On wedding gift website FabAlong.com the remainder items are given away at a discounted price. "If there are leftover items in a gift registry and a couple wishes to buy them we offer these at a minimum discount of 10 per cent," says Shivani Mahajan, co-founder of FabAlong.com an online wedding gift market place that also features registries. The portal that was launched in January stocks everything from bridalwear, home essentials to wedding related vendors for photography, wedding planning and bridal make-up.

Budgets for high-end wishlists go into several lakhs. "Our gifts range from Rs 500 to Rs 2 lakh. But a big budget wishlist could go upto Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh," says Mahajan. Similarly on the Weddingwishlist.com and Formysaadi.com, high-end items are easily in the range of Rs 10 lakh or more.

In most cases all your wishlist gifts get sent to you in one-go after you choose a delivery date. These registries also make note of the contributors and respond with 'Thank You' messages to the guests.

With the wedding gift market doing brisk business, some gift registry websites like Theyellowdoorstore.com and Formysaadi.com are also looking to diversify into

creating other online gift registries for birthdays, anniversaries and baby showers. Although a couple's guest list is mostly limited to their close family and friends, portal owners are positive this will soon expand to include distant relatives and acquaintances.

Reckon this was the only missing piece in the puzzle to complete the big fat Indian wedding? Well, 'knot' anymore! **E**