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Gift Guide: Classic Candles

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Washington Life catches up with Annapolis candle-maker, **Mei Xu**, who gives an inside look on her company, Chesapeake Bay Candle.



Mei Xu, owner of Chesapeake Bay Candle, says trends are going back to basics focusing on creating sweet memories.

Washington Life: How did you get into this?

Mei Xu: When I was working in New York and commuting back to DC on the weekend in 1994, I had a lot of time to window shop at Bloomingdale's. I found a gap in home products that were not inspiring. My husband and I both quit our jobs and started a candle business using Campbell soup cans in the basement of our Annapolis home. We called it **Chesapeake Bay Candle** to pay tribute to the natural beauty around us.

WL: How did you choose your aromas?

MX: It is not really a science in the beginning but finding what we liked in food, plants and fine perfumes. We tried to pair notes that were not normally linked like honeydew with orange or cilantro with lime.

WL: Do you source local products?

MX: All of our fragrances are made in USA. What is inside each fragrance depends on the raw materials. We ask that our vendors use the most quality ingredients and that they blend well with our wax to make a candle that is top quality.

WL: What makes you unique?

MX: Being global minded. It starts with our design and trend work. We beat the crowds in the shops of Paris and London, and look for ingredients that are used in cooking in Tokyo or Santiago, Chile. We also employ so many talents from around the world and we are not afraid to think outside the box.

WL: What's the most surprising thing about your job?

MX: That you get to face just as many challenges and opportunities as a big, publicly traded company.

WL: What are the latest trends in candle industry?

MX: Going back to basics. No more fancy packaging or fantasy names in fragrances. Give me a single note fragrance. Take me back to a simpler time where things were good, and memories are sweet!

WL: What are other uses for candles that people don't know about

MX: I was a keynote speaker at Babson College last weekend, and an audience member talked to me afterwards to see if we can use candles to improve the lives of senior citizens. I have never thought about that but I think there could be something interesting there.

WL: Can guys like candles too?

MX: Absolutely. Some retailers have a huge population that buys candles for themselves or for the women in their lives. But we can do a better job making it easier to select a fragrance. Sometimes it can be daunting!

WL: Are they good first date gifts?

MX: I would think so. It says you are considerate. It also says you don't want to take it too fast. Most importantly, it says you are romantic. Now which woman can resist that!

WL: What's next for your brand?

MX: Finishing this factory and making it a facility that not only makes the best candles but stops the traffic on I-95 because everyone would want to see how amazing making candles is!

WL: What are you giving away as presents for the holidays this year?

MX: There are 40 very lucky friends and family that will receive a handmade silver tin filled with rice flower fragrance candles. The tins are made by disabled people in Cambodia that were injured by land mines. I wish we were helping them find a way to be independent. Aren't candles about hope?

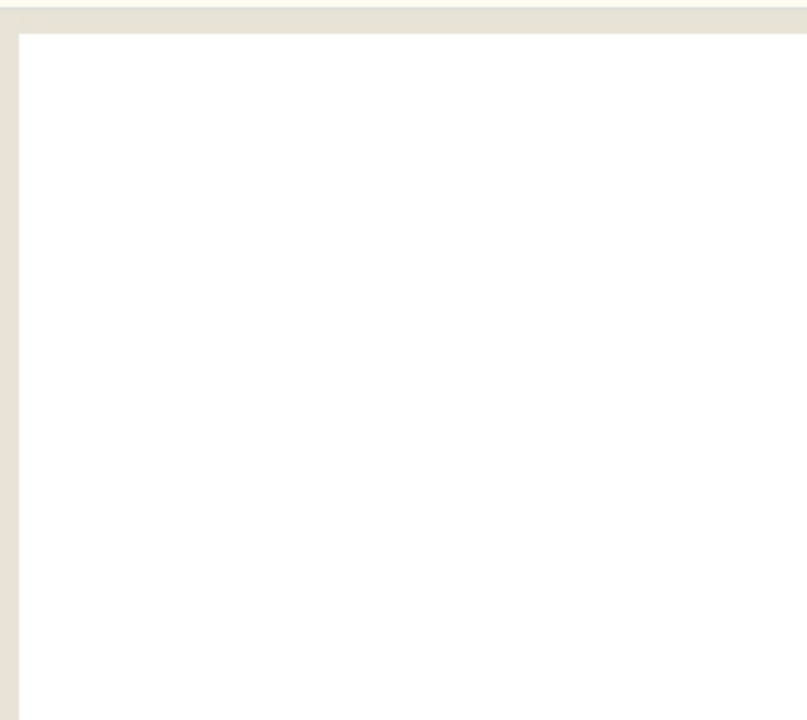

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