

# Perspective

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## THE ACCENT

A white satin ribbon, tied on at the counter, is the de rigueur accompaniment to the signature blue box. During the holidays, Tiffany uses a red ribbon instead.

## THE NAME

Tiffany & Co. boxes are embossed, in Baskerville Old Face, with Tiffany & Co.—but they really don't need to be. The blue pretty much says it all.



## THE COLOR

Pantone No. 1837 (coined for the year of Tiffany's founding) is also known as forget-me-not blue and robin's egg blue. It is the most protected color in branding.

## THE BOX

Pantone makes the blue-coated paper packaging for Tiffany. The store's flagship might be on New York's Fifth Avenue, but the boxes come from Carlstadt, N.J.

## BRAND NAME

# The Tiffany Blue Box

HOW AN ORDINARY PIECE OF FOLDED BLUE CARDBOARD BECAME THE WORLD'S MOST COVETED CONTAINER. BY ROBERT KLARA



**F**or the sake of you intellectual-property aficionados out there, the color is No. 1837 on the Pantone Matching System chart. It is not commercially available; since a 1998 filing with the federal government, the color is trademarked. The packaging on which the color appears is also trademarked, as is the white satin ribbon tied around said packaging. In all, it is very possibly the most recognizable and most desired retail container in history.

It's the Tiffany Blue Box—and yes, the term “Tiffany Blue Box” is trademarked, too.

Most brands would kill for the sort of instant recognition value of Tiffany & Co.'s robin's egg blue and that tiny box. As Bernd H. Schmitt wrote in his 1999 book *Experiential Marketing*, “It's happened more than once that someone has put a gift, bought elsewhere, into a Tiffany box in order to enhance its value.” As if there were any doubt, empty Tiffany boxes are sold on sites like Etsy and eBay—at least until Tiffany's attorneys find out.

But just how did a little turquoise-colored cardboard box become the cubic embodiment of our material dreams and desires?

It started in 1845, when Charles Lewis Tiffany put out a catalog for his “stationery and fancy goods” store at 259 Broadway in New York. The shop, opened with a \$1,000 loan, had been in business just eight years but had already made a name for itself by selling fine silver wrought in the new “American style,” a clean, natural look that scuttled the fussy ornateness of the Old World.

Some say Tiffany chose its signature blue to reflect the popularity of the turquoise jewelry then in vogue, but nobody is sure. What is certain is that the shade became instantly identified with Tiffany—and with the finest jewelry in the business.

When the company introduced its diamond engagement ring in 1886, the effect was complete. The Tiffany Blue Box became every bit as coveted as the ring, or whatever else might be nesting inside. In 1906, the *New York Sun* reported that Charles Lewis Tiffany “has one thing in stock that you cannot buy of him for as much money as you may offer; he will only give it to you. And that is one of his boxes.”

Of course, you have to buy a little something first. And so it has been for the century since. These days, Pantone produces Tiffany's proprietary blue No. 1837 that goes on those little boxes, of which Pantone Color Institute executive director Leatrice Eiseman said, “It evokes positive thoughts and reactions, and this, combined with the status that Tiffany has assigned to it, makes for perfect packaging.”

And perfect this package might just be.



**Fast Facts**

**1837** The year Tiffany & Young (the store's original name) opened  
**65** Number of U.S. stores  
**\$11,000** Starting price of a Tiffany engagement ring

**1961**

Paramount Pictures releases *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, based on the 1958 Truman Capote novel and starring a young Audrey Hepburn. For the first time ever, Tiffany opened on a Sunday to allow for filming. It also posted 40 armed guards on the floor to prevent any of its blue boxes from disappearing.

**1905**

“Diamond King” Charles Lewis Tiffany (at left, without hat) helps a customer at the Union Square store in New York. Tiffany was already hailed as America's leading purveyor of fine jewelry.

**1886**

Tiffany introduces the engagement ring with the signature six-prong setting (below, left). Love and marriage have been pricey ever since.

**2014**

The box has even inspired actual pieces of jewelry—like this \$250 enamel and sterling silver charm.

HEPBURN: EVERETT COLLECTION; STORE: THE JEWELERS' CIRCULAR; RING AND EGG: CARLTON DAVIS