UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL NOVEMBER 4 AT 6am PT / 9am ET

Starbucks 2026 holiday cups: The story behind the ribbons, retro colors and first-ever holiday pup cup

Excerpt: See how Starbucks designers turned inspiration from a classic holiday movie into this year's holiday cups, coffee packaging and coffeehouse décor.



By Heidi Peiper/Starbucks Stories

It's here. That special time of year when Starbucks seems to transform overnight from green to red, with festive holiday cups, cheerful swags of garland and the friendly smile of a barista handing you your first Peppermint Mocha of the season.

Behind all that holiday magic are dozens of Starbucks partners (employees) around the world. Let's go behind the curtain to see how their creative talents brought this year's holiday designs to life.

When Starbucks introduced its first holiday cups in 1997, they were designed by just a handful of partners about two months before the cups arrived in the company's 1,400 coffeehouses. Today, the holiday cups are the culmination of nearly two years of work that show up in more than 40,000 locations around the world.

London D. led Starbucks creative work for this year's holiday, from the first sketches of cups and coffee packaging to the design of the menu boards and trim in coffeehouses. The Starbucks Creative Studio team always starts with trend research, trying to predict the customer's mindset 24 months out.

But having a sense of what might be coming is only the start.

"Any company can leverage a trend," London said. "But the question is, 'How do we make this unmistakably Starbucks?'" The Studio then created a series of mood boards that referenced trends of comfort and nostalgia to spark the imagination of the design team. Think cozy, nostalgic and a little over-the-top, like a home fully decked out for the holidays.

A holiday movie meets a mood board

"One of our early mood boards had a lot of motifs and wallpaper" she said. "We were thinking about the classic holiday decor that feels accessible with moments of handmade details."



A green vintage-style ribbon inspired by London's mood board became a consistent element across the holiday campaign — starting on the packaging and then moving on to the back of the to-go holiday cups and even coming to life in the real world of coffeehouses through the garland.

"It was very much inspired by real physical ribbons," London said.

The color palette also brought together the old and the new, pairing iconic Starbucks green, red and creamy white with retro-feeling shades like pale mint green, antique gold and deep cranberry.



"We were thinking about the holiday and using color to help push the vibe," she said. "We brought in this cream color that softens the palette while the gold adds a little bit of vibrant energy. And then the mint is a nice soft neutral to pair and balance."

Meet the Starbucks 2026 holiday cups

For the holiday cups, the team wanted to reflect the care and skill that goes into each Starbucks beverage.

"We were thinking about how we make this reflect Starbucks craft and being thoughtful about those little details — and tying it all up in a bow," she said.

Speaking of bows — you'll see cheerful bows threaded throughout holiday design elements. This season's to-go cups are adorned with them – which includes four hot-cup designs and a cold cup (plus an adorable holiday pup cup).

Holiday tree



A holiday tree decked with flecks of color and swirls of twine garland is the star of two designs against a backdrop of classic holiday red and snowy white.

Holiday bow



The holiday bow design uses graphic elements deconstructed from the holiday tree, dotted with bows, twine garland and twinkling stars.

Holiday cold cup



The holiday cold cup design includes an elegant swag of evergreen boughs and red bows. The festive motif is repeated on paper goods like pastry bags and handled shoppers.

Starbucks first holiday pup cup





Pup cups have long been a favorite Starbucks treat for four-legged customers. This year, they're getting a festive twist with Starbucks first-ever holiday pup cup. The adorable pooch featured on the 3.5-ounce cup is inspired by a real-life beagle named Junie. The cups will be available in company-operated coffeehouses for a very limited time while supplies last.

For all the latest news this holiday, visit Starbucks News and Stories.

###