

HOW TO SPECIFY CUSTOM TOTE BAGS

Your 4-step help guide to custom tote bag styles, processes, closures and pockets.



PROGRESS

PACKAGING > PARTNERS

STEP 1

CHOOSE A TOTE BAG STYLE

Custom tote bags have become the ubiquitous ‘must-have’ promotional item for brands the world over. Their ability to cut-through across the fashion, beauty and lifestyle sectors in particular has seen them become as popular as more traditional branded merchandise – making them a perfect platform to promote your brand name or message in style.

Creating the right impression with a custom tote bag for your brand is important, and Progress have years of experience producing branded tote bags for design-led, creative brands of all kinds. When planning and designing your custom tote bags you’ll firstly need to decide on the style of bag you need, based on how it’s going to be used.

Personalised tote bags are great promotional products suitable for almost any type of brand. In larger sizes such as a personalised shopper bag with a more generous internal capacity, they can be used for carrying bigger or more items, whereas a slimmer, standard tote bag is great for promoting your brand at an event. However your tote bag is going to be used, the demands put upon its performance should be considered carefully at the early stages to ensure it is engineered perfectly for its purpose.



Base gusset style tote bag
with long handles for
J. Adams & Co.

GETTING STARTED

Before looking more closely at the design details, you’ll need to make measurements to define the ideal size of bespoke tote bags you need and also asses the importance of its eco-friendly credentials, as this will relate to the material you specify for manufacturing (there’s more info about this in Step 2). Progress can make every aspect of your tote bag customised to your requirements by altering the shape, the handle lengths or the number of handles added etc.

STANDARD TOTE

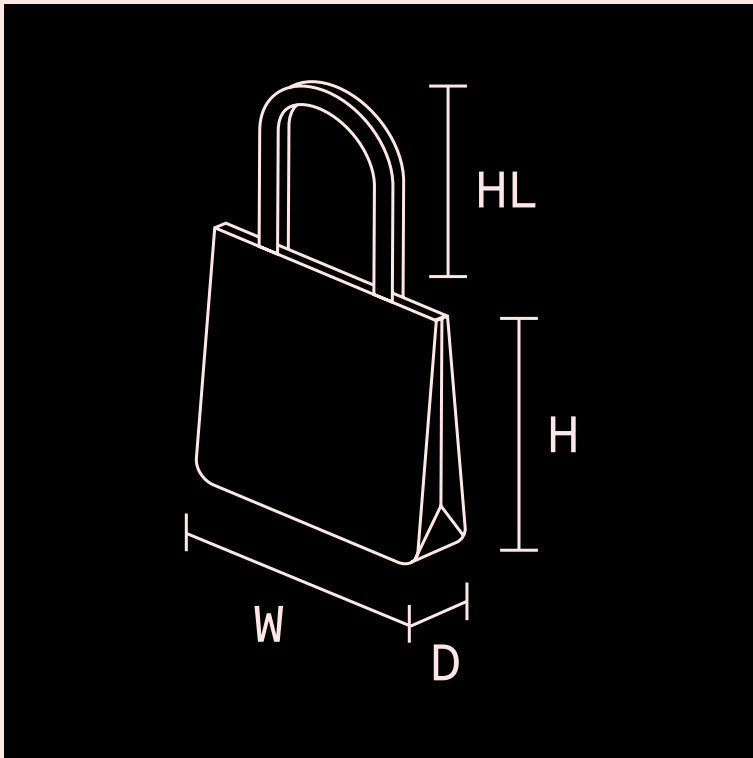
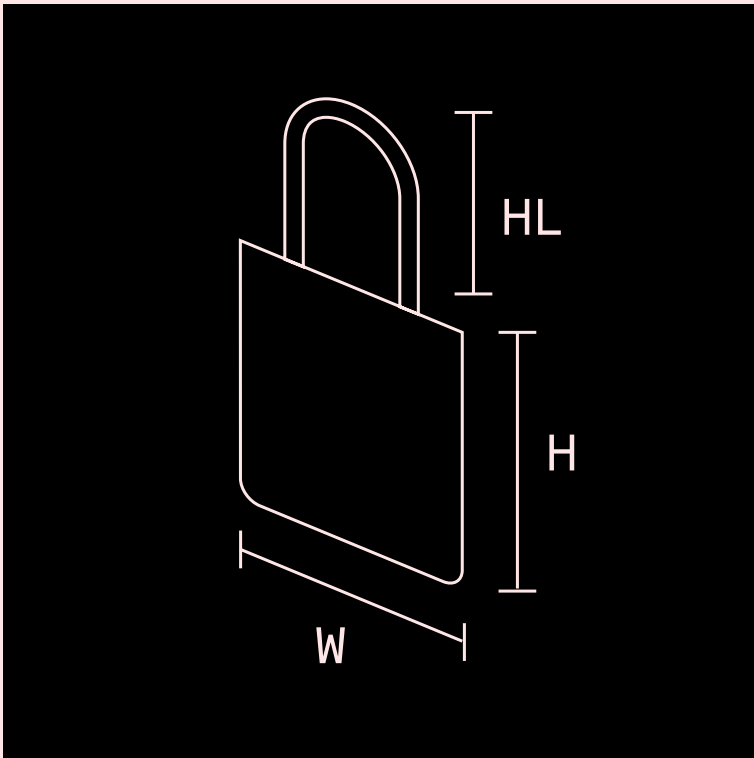
As the name suggests, this format of custom tote bag is the most straightforward and economical style. Manufactured from a single piece of material, this flatter style is folded at the base of the bag and has stitched seams down both sides to create the shape. Standard totes are the style to choose for carrying fewer or flatter items. Progress can manufacture standard custom tote bags in a variety of fabrics and materials with custom length handles and a variety of add-on options for pockets, press-studs and labelling should you require.

Tote bags are measured using Width (W) x Height (H) x Handle Length (HL). When specifying the dimensions for your custom tote bag it’s important to be clear about the measurements. It’s worth carefully considering what might be put inside to ensure that there’s enough room. If required, we can assist with this to help avoiding any unnecessary material wastage in manufacturing.

BASE GUSSET TOTE

This format of custom tote bag gives a more generous capacity to the body of the bag. Manufactured from three pieces of material, this style has a larger bottom and has stitched-up seams on both side as well as around the base to create the shape. Base gusset totes are best for bags that need to cater for a medium amount of contents or more bulky items.

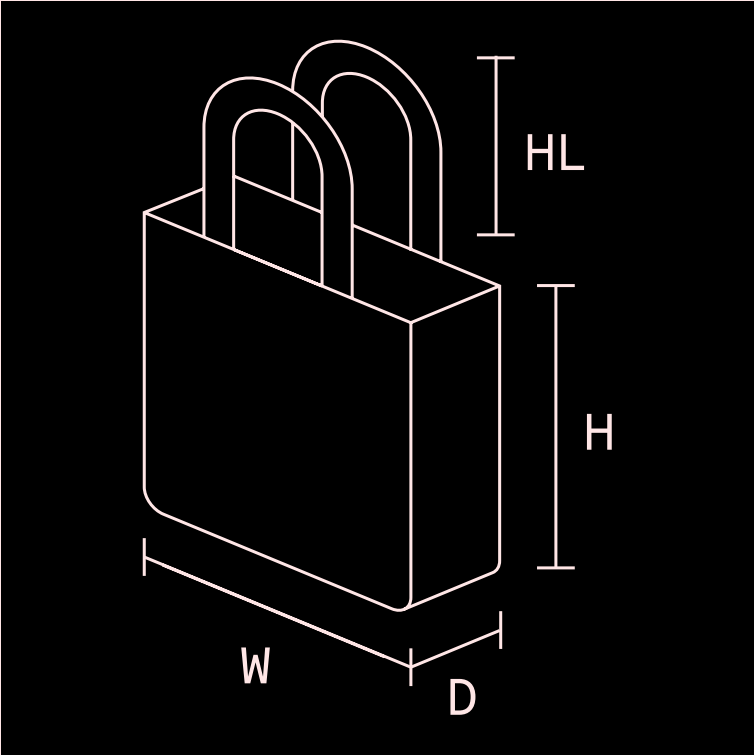
Tote bags are measured using Width (W) x Height (H) x Depth (D) x Handle Length (HL). When specifying the dimensions for your custom tote bag it’s important to be clear about the measurements. It’s worth carefully considering what might be put inside to ensure that there’s enough room. If required, we can assist with this to help avoiding any unnecessary material wastage in manufacturing.



FULL GUSSET TOTE

This format of custom tote bag gives a maximum capacity to the body of the bag. Manufactured from four pieces of material, this style has a full bottom and has stitched-up seams on both side as well as around the base to create the shape. Base gusset totes are best for bags that need to cater for large amount of contents or very bulky items.

Tote bags are measured using Width (W) x Height (H) x Depth (D) x Handle Length (HL). When specifying the dimensions for your custom tote bag it's important to be clear about the measurements. It's worth carefully considering what might be put inside to ensure that there's enough room. If required, we can assist with this to help avoiding any unnecessary material wastage in manufacturing.



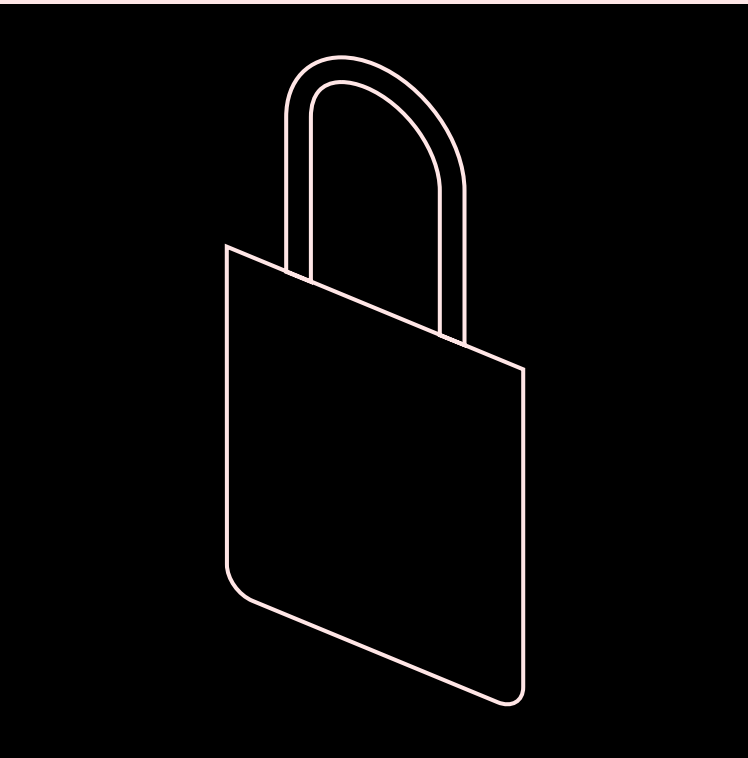
Double handle tote bag
(long and short together)
with full gusset capacity
for Brawn.

TOTE BAG HANDLES

Progress manufacture branded tote bag handles in a variety of materials, lengths and widths. You can even mix and match material colours to create a design that truly expresses the uniqueness of your brand. Handles are such an integral but versatile element of a tote bag and they offer the opportunity to be completely customised to your brand. We produce short handle tote bags, long handle tote bags, or double handle tote bags (long and short together) – just let us know your preference when sharing your spec / requirements with us.

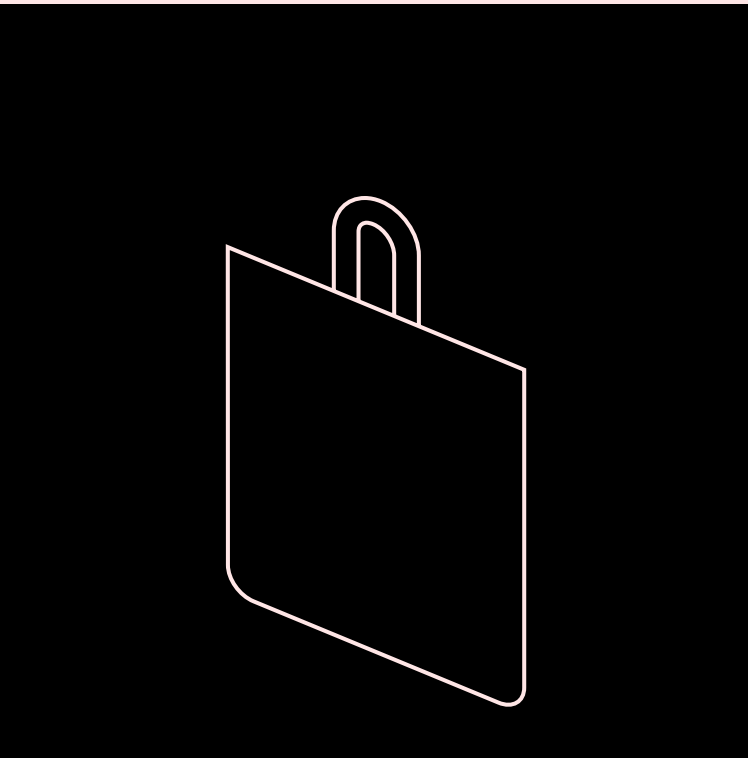
LONG HANDLE

Long handles are designed for shoulder carry, usually 50-90 cm. Great for carrying heavier items or for everyday use. Ideal for reusable canvas totes and custom branded totes that combine practicality and style.



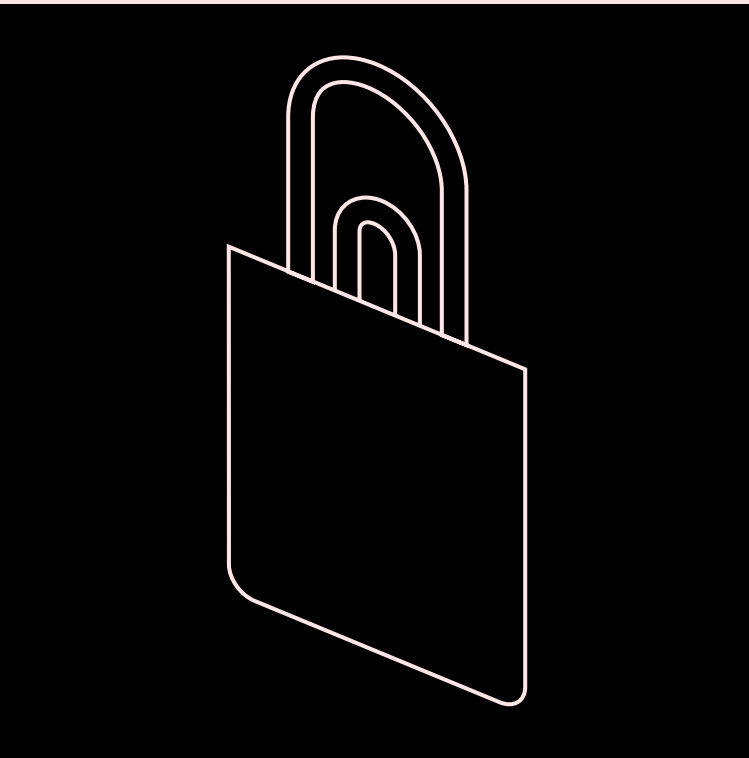
SHORT HANDLE

Ideal for hand-held canvas tote bags, short handles are typically 20-40 cm end-to-end. Perfect for lightweight items, promotional giveaways, or custom printed totes. Comfortable for short-term carrying while maintaining a clean, stylish look.



DOUBLE HANDLED

Double handles combine short and long handles for versatile canvas tote use. Users can carry by hand or over the shoulder, making them perfect for premium custom totes and everyday functional bags.





Reversible standard style
tote bag for Design Miami.



Double handle tote bag
(long and short together)
with full gusset capacity
for Natalino.

STEP 2

SPECIFY A MATERIAL

Our most popular custom tote bag material is cotton canvas which comes in a range of stock colours and weights depending on the durability required. A cotton lining can also be added to give a more luxury look and feel to your tote bag in a complimenting colour, which can be either be plain or printed in your branding style.

Cotton twill, linen and washable kraft are alternative materials options, but should only be considered if suited to the style of your brand. For more creative / unique alternatives, we can use two different materials to give each side of the bag a contrasting aesthetic. We have a large range of stock colours but can also custom colour match to your brand on minimum order quantities of 1,000.



Custom denim tote bag with
screen printed branding for
Commission.

CANVAS

Custom canvas tote bags are a classic style and one of the most popular we make at Progress due to the versatility of options and durability of the material. We can make cotton canvas tote bags in a variety of weights including 8oz, 12oz and 16oz. This fabric is also organic, making it a great eco-friendly option. Minimum order quantities start at 100 units.

DENIM

Custom denim tote bags are a more creative option. We can make bespoke denim tote bags in a variety of sizes and styles, fully customised to your requirements. Minimum order quantities start at 100 units.

TYVEK

Custom Tyvek tote bags are a more unique option. Tyvek® is a 100% synthetic material made from high-density spunbound polyethylene fibers. It is lightweight, durable and breathable, yet resistant to water, abrasion, bacterial penetration and ageing. We can make bespoke Tyvek tote bags in a variety of sizes, fully customised to your requirements. Minimum order quantities start at 500 units.

POLYCOTTON

Polycotton is a blend of both cotton and polyester, making it both a natural and synthetic fabric that provides a smooth surface particularly suited to full colour photographic printing. We can even full colour print match handles for your polycotton tote bags that will seamlessly coordinate with the rest of your bag. Minimum order quantities start at 500 units.

POLYESTER

Custom polyester tote bags are a more versatile option if you are looking to create a more ‘luggage’ orientated product as it can be easily customised to include features such as piped edges, pockets and more secure closures such as zips and press-studs. We can make bespoke polyester tote bags in a variety of sizes, fully customised to your requirements. Minimum order quantities start at 100 units.

NYLON

Custom nylon tote bags are a more versatile option if you are looking to create a more ‘luggage’ orientated feel as it can be easily customised to include piped edges, pockets and more secure closures such as zips and press-studs. We can make bespoke polyester tote bags in a variety of sizes and styles, fully customised to your requirements. Minimum order quantities start at 100 units.





Custom tote bag made using
16oz black organic cotton
canvas for Rough Trade.



Custom Tyvek tote bag
with standard handles for
The Number 4.

STEP 3

SELECT A PRINT / BRANDING PROCESS

When thinking about the design of your custom custom tote bags, one of the most challenging aspects can be deciding on the best printing process to use. Selecting the most appropriate print process largely depends upon your visual branding / design – whether linear, photographic, full colour or single colour in style.



Custom woven tag sewn into
the top seam of a bespoke
tote bag for Brawn.

TOTE BAG PRINTING

Progress have over 25 years experience producing bespoke tote bags of all types. Here we share two of the most popular printing methods suitable for tote bag printing.

SILKSCREEN PRINT

Silkscreen printing, otherwise known as screen printing, is a process that achieves reproduction of precise flat colours by pushing ink with a rubber squeegee through a screen made of fine mesh material to create a visual design on the material surface. This process is most suited to flat colour designs to be printed in one or two colours (specified to your requirements).

Screen printing is best suited to high visual impact designs. Printing inks used for this process particularly suit tote bag fabrics as the inks sit on the surface of the material, allowing colours like opaque white to appear visually stronger and more defined. Inks can be colour matched to your design with either metallic or fluorescent options available. Custom screen printed tote bag quantities start at 250 units.

DIGITAL PRINT

Digital printing offers a number of valuable opportunities for custom tote bags, as the process doesn't involve complex set-ups. Digital print is based on a four colour printing process, enabling photographic image reproduction to be achieved as well as large areas of flat, solid colour. Another key benefit is that quantities start at 250 upwards, making it perfect for formats such as reusable personalised shopper bags or promotional tote bags for an event, which is great for start-up brands looking for a custom design on a low number of units.

EMBROIDERY

Custom embroidered tote bags are made by machine sewing your design with a needle and thread directly onto material. Embroidery is a popular technique which is used widely on across other promotional merchandise formats such as caps and clothing due to the tactile and durable finish that the method delivers. Progress can produce custom embroidered tote bags by stitching your design directly onto the bag or by embroidering onto a woven tag or label which can then be stitched onto your bag in virtually any position.



TOTE BAG BRANDING

To work alongside the design of your custom tote bag, an additional way to add a touch of style is to incorporate your name / identity as a label / tag on the bag. Here we share two of the most popular custom tote bag label styles.

Custom stitched debossed label on faux leather for Henry Poole.



WOVEN TAGS / LABELS

The majority of custom sew in tags are made using polyester or cotton threads that are weaved together to match your logo design or name message. Embroidered fabric labels / tags can be coloured to match your branding and be sewn into your custom tote bag either on the inside or outside, in a position of your choice.



DEBOSSSED TAGS / LABELS

Custom debossed tags are a popular production technique that creates a dimensional depth to your branding design. We can produce custom debossed labels in either leather or synthetic materials but they work best to accentuate your design on a smooth surface.





Metallic silver ink screen
printed onto a custom
coloured bespoke tote bag
for ÅBEN.



Full colour digital print
onto 12oz polycotton canvas
for Design Miami.

STEP 4

ADD A CLOSURE / POCKET

Progress can customise your bespoke tote bag with zips, press studs and pockets to enhance the usability of your bag.

Custom tote bag closures such as zips and press studs add function to your bag, while pockets are popular for holding additional items and can be customised to any size you require.



Custom tote bag zip
closure on an internal
pocket for ÅBEN.

PRESS STUDS

Custom press studs, or snap fasteners as they are also called, are small pieces of metal or plastic used to either fasten your custom tote bag closed or to secure a pocket. Press studs are formed using two round components – one of which is pushed into the other to hold the fastening secure. The outer face of the press stud can be customised with your name or logo and the stud can be coloured to match your brand.

ZIPS

Zips are made using two flexible strips of metal or plastic with interlocking projections and are closed or opened by pulling a slide across them to unite the strip together securely. Zips make popular custom tote bag closures and can be coloured to suit the style of your design / brand.

RIVETS

Rivets are formed by uniting two metal components, one with a head and one a shank, which are pressed together to permanently secure two pieces of fabric or material together. Rivets come in a variety of popular metallic colours such as brass, copper and silver, and work well if used as a feature on your custom tote bag – for example, by securing the handles to the outer of the bag as a design detail.

POCKETS

Pockets are a popular features on custom tote bags and can add additional functionality to your bag. Pockets are often included to keep laptops, phones and keys safe and can also have closures if needed for extra security. Pockets can be positioned either on the inside or outside of your tote bag and can be made from a variety of fabrics and materials to suit your design. Custom tote bag pockets can also be printed with your logo or with enriching messages to add value to your brand.



Open top pocket on the front of a custom denim tote bag for Commission.



A close-up photograph of a white, textured Tyvek tote bag. A black fabric strap is visible at the top. A metal press stud closure is attached to the bag, with a black 'V' logo printed on the fabric just below it. The bag is resting on a crinkled, reflective silver surface.

Press stud closure on a
custom Tyvek tote bag for
The Number 4.

A close-up photograph of a hand with a green sleeve pulling a gold-colored zipper pull on a grey garment bag. The zipper is partially unzipped, revealing a black interior pocket. A black strap is visible at the top of the bag.

Metallic zip pocket closure
on a custom garment bag for
Henry Poole.

CHECK- LIST

START PLANNING YOUR CUSTOM TOTE BAG

Creating your custom tote bags will require some early organisation and planning. This checklist will help you to assess and consider all the main aspects before moving into production.

TYPE & SIZE



- Choose the most suitable bag style – flat, gusseted, or box-shaped.
- Decide on dimensions based on what the bag will hold, from lightweight retail items to heavier products.
- Select handle length and material to match the intended use – handheld or over-shoulder.

MATERIALS



- Select the right fabric – options include cotton, canvas, jute, or recycled PET.
- Balance durability, texture, and finish with sustainability and cost.
- Consider fabric weight (gsm) depending on strength and print coverage.

BRANDING



- Plan how your logo and artwork will appear on the bag.
- Explore print methods such as screen print, digital, or embroidery.
- Add finishing details like woven labels, contrast stitching, or branded tags.

SUSTAINABILITY



- Use materials that are organic, recycled, or responsibly sourced.
- Choose water-based or eco-certified inks and dyes.
- Avoid plastic coatings or trims that reduce recyclability.

BUDGETING



- Set your budget early and decide where to prioritise spend – fabric quality, print detail, or volume.
- Compare material and print options to balance cost and quality.
- Speak to your supplier about ways to optimise production quantities.

PRODUCTION & TIMINGS



- Allow time for sampling, testing, and approvals before full production.
- Confirm lead times and delivery schedules with your supplier.
- Plan ahead for storage, shipping, and future reorders.

TALK TO OUR PACKAGING EXPERTS

**START PLANNING YOUR CUSTOM
TOTE BAGS**

We can help you with all aspects of your custom packaging, from advising on the design, specifying and budgeting, prototyping and engineering, printing and production, to fulfilment and worldwide delivery – we've got it all covered.

Progress have over 25 years experience across all aspects of luxury packaging and understand what's involved in producing high specification complex projects.

GET IN TOUCH

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