



Cutting board with wooden fruits

It is a place that transports you back to your childhood, with its brightly coloured toys and puzzles that line the shelves of the shop. Each of these is more than just a knickknack that brings joy to a child - they are also cleverly designed to stimulate the mind, enhance development and inspire learning in children under the delightful guise of play.

Words Ayesha Inoon **Photography** Damith Wickramasinghe

Slices of bread or segments of fruit, held together by velcro, are easily sliced with a small wooden knife by the little one who wishes to play at being a cook. Knob puzzles come in a variety of shapes and forms - large, sturdy knobs on bigger shapes that are easier for the younger children to handle and smaller knob puzzles for older toddlers to master greater dexterity. Shape sorters teach the concepts of colour, shape and size and also the skill of

turn-taking while sturdy abacuses with large, bright beads introduce the young mind to the idea of numbers.

Learning materials that introduce letters and numbers are available in English, Sinhala and Tamil. Sandpaper letters allow little fingers to discover their shape and form before trying to emulate them on their own, and knob puzzles with letters and numbers reveal corresponding pictures when the letter or number is raised from its slot. There are colour tablets that teach the basic colours and bead wires that are bound to fascinate young ones while sharpening the agility of their fingers.

“We began this enterprise as a response to the great demand for high quality, reasonably priced wooden toys,” says Rohini Lintotawela, co-owner of Kidzkraft. Initially begun with a single shop in Tickell Road, Borella in 2007, Kidzkraft today has two more outlets in Battaramulla and Colombo 6. “The response for our products has been excellent,” she says, adding that the toys and learning materials, while suitable for all children, are especially valuable to aid the skills and learning of children with special needs or developmental delays.

The products at the store, which mainly cater to preschoolers, are all manufactured locally at their factory in Piliyandala. Rubber wood, a fast growing recyclable wood, is used in the production while paints used are nontoxic and the designs are vigilantly developed to ensure compliance to international safety standards.

“In the West there is now a demand for wooden toys as opposed to plastic and that is catching on here as well,” says Rohini, who worked with local designers and international clients to develop ideas for the products. She points out that wooden toys are more durable and may be preserved even for future generations.

Apart from toys and learning materials, Kidzkraft also offers a range of children’s furniture and offers the service of custom made designs. These include bedroom furniture, bookshelves, tables and chairs that parents can obtain in the secure knowledge that the need for their children’s safety will be met. With numerous plans for expansion, they hope to open branches elsewhere in the country, including Kandy and to develop an online market for their products as well.

In an era where toys that talk, flash lights and play music have taken centre stage, the toys at Kidzkraft are a refreshing change, inspiring young minds to begin an exciting journey of learning and discovery.

Kidz kraft: Learn through Play

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