PAPER MARKET

Dream of making and selling your own paper products? See how these 7 creatives capitalized on Etsy.com, craft shows and retail outlets to bring their original goods to market.

BY BRYN MOOTH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RANDY HOOVER



DESIGNER
Janine Vangool

FIRM
Vangool Design & Typography/UPPERCASE gallery, Calgary, Alberta; www.uppercasegallery.ca

LAUNCHED
2005 (Vangool Design opened in 1996)

MEDIUM
paper collage

AVAILABLE
UPPERCASE gallery; wholesale business coming soon

FOUND OBJECTS

Janine Vangool parlayed her experience designing for the arts, culture and publishing into a gallery and retail space that spotlights those same areas. Her two businesses—Vangool Design and UPPERCASE gallery—share space, so it was logical that Vangool started selling her own stuff. "Having a retail space was really what prompted me to design my own line of products," she says. "I've always loved making things, so having this immediate outlet for my ideas has been really exciting."

Vangool's Eclecto line includes notebooks created from and embellished with vintage papers and ephemera, plus cute little hand-stitched pouches made from maps encased in vinyl (Vangool's mom helps out with the sewing). In addition, Vangool makes and sells a line of typographic greeting cards. She scouts flea markets, relatives' attics and eBay to find the printed materials to make her Eclecto products; she's hoping to make the leap from selling solely at UPPERCASE to a wholesale business this summer.

She's encouraged by this DIY trend of designers producing their own goods, but offers a caution: "There's a lot of competition, so you need to make sure your products are unique in design and execution," she says. "It's relatively easy and low-risk to test out the appeal of your products through online outlets like Etsy.com before delving into large-scale manufacturing and distribution."



DESIGNER
Erin McCall

FIRM
Sunlit Letterpress,
Surrey, British Columbia;
www.sunlit-letterpress.com

LAUNCHED
2007

MEDIUM
letterpress

AVAILABLE
Sunlit-letterpress.com,
Etsy.com, art and craft
shows, some retailers

OLD-SCHOOL PRINTING

Erin McCall's letterpress addiction was born out of an intensive workshop at Vancouver's Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design with the master printer Jim Rimmer, who provided McCall's first press, a few bits of type and a can of ink. She tested the market by selling her first line of letterpress stationery at local craft and art fairs. Sunlit Letterpress houses two presses: a New Style Chandler & Price model (circa 1911) and a Kelsey tabletop press dating back to 1895. "I mostly use photopolymer plates," McCall says. "They allow me to combine old-school printing methods with new-school digital design." McCall advises other creatives who dream of launching a product line to focus on the highest quality. "Buyers love handmade," she says, "but they expect the same quality and even more attention to detail as [they do] from items made by machine. Paper choice, packaging and even how your product is displayed or shipped is very important for buyers."

DESIGNER
Jeff Martin

FIRM
Jeff Martin Ceramics,
Boone, NC;
www.jeffmartinceramics.com

LAUNCHED
2006

MEDIUM
screen printing

AVAILABLE
Etsy.com, Trunkt.com,
local shops

MULTIPLE MEDIA

Jeff Martin made art his full-time career in 2006, so he readily admits to being on a steep learning curve, "from purchasing raw materials to designing and marketing the final product, keeping the books and, finally, sweeping up the studio after I'm done." The self-taught ceramic artist/illustrator/designer had been selling small giclee prints of his work, but was unhappy with the "hands-off" process of having someone else produce the finished product. Martin's acquisition of a Print Gocco (a small Japanese screen printer) in December 2007 changed all that, and now he controls every aspect of his new paper-goods line, from sketch to ink on paper. "I love the look and feel of handmade paper goods," he says. "The Gocco resonated with me due to the endless ways to creatively use it." Martin notes that he shifts easily from 2D to 3D work: "The prints and ceramics mingle together in my mind, along with countless other sources of inspiration. I love the analogy of a football player who takes ballet lessons to improve his game. I feel the same about the two mediums; they help broaden my scope."





DESIGNER
Joy Deangdeelert Cho

FIRM
Nantaka Joy, Philadelphia; www.nantakajoy.com

LAUNCHED
2007

MEDIUM
letterpress, blind emboss, foil stamp

AVAILABLE
Anthropologie stores nationwide, Rare Device, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, Soolip Paperie, many other locations

THE JOY OF PAPER

Joy Cho launched her paper business as an outlet for her own (not her clients') creative vision. Originally intended as a line of textile designs (which she hopes to do eventually), Nantaka Joy papergoods are a side gig for Cho, who runs a design firm called Oh Joy! Studio. Cho's interest in pattern is evident in her greeting card designs, which she creates by hand; she outsources the printing in quantities from 500 to 1,000 of each piece. "There are so many aspects to deal with in a product-based business that it's nice to take one part out (printing, in my case) that you don't have to do on your own," she says. A debut at the 2007 National Stationery Show helped Cho land major retail buyers, including Anthropologie. Cho's best advice for designers looking to follow in her footsteps? "Start while you're still at your existing job or while freelancing. Most stationery designers have full- or part-time jobs to supplement their product lines. However, most of us didn't get into this business to become rich. We love what we do, and it's really a thrill to see your work in a store or get a sweet e-mail from a customer who uses your products daily."

DESIGNER
Erika Firm

FIRM
delphine, Rancho Santa Fe, CA; www.delphinepress.com

LAUNCHED
2001

MEDIUM
letterpress

AVAILABLE
Paper & Chocolate in Dallas, Poême in Cincinnati, Pearl Beach Paperie in Orlando, Portobello Papers in Atlanta, Sugar Paper in Los Angeles, many gift and paper shops nationwide

ALL HAIL GUTENBERG

Freelance graphic designer and copywriter Erika Firm introduced her first custom invitations in 2001, then ramped up and rebranded her business as delphine (named after her grandmother) in '03, with her first full product line of letterpress notecards. Firm peddled her goods door-to-door, looking for retailers where she loved to shop and where her products would "fit." Now, her gorgeous cards are available in 300+ stores nationwide, and she also does corporate identity work for clients (that's about one third of her business). She says her new Marine Life series was inspired by a trip with her young son to the beach in her hometown of Charleston, SC: "I'll think about a collection for months, and then when it's crunch time and I have only two weeks to design, print and ship new cards to a trade show, the entire series of notecards will dump out of my brain into my sketchbook." Firm works closely with her pressman at a local letterpress shop, encouraging him to experiment with ink color and to hit the impressions harder: "He recently told me we'd both have to say 10 'Hail Gutenbergs,' and then he printed the card deeper and we were both thrilled with the results."



DESIGNER
Anna Cote

FIRM
Modern Printed Matter, Bristol, RI; www.modernprintedmatter.com

LAUNCHED
2005

MEDIUM
screen printing

AVAILABLE
Etsy.com, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, various gift and paper retailers nationwide

NATURAL TENDENCIES

This environmental engineer-turned-graphic designer worked full-time at an engineering firm while she launched her design studio. "I slept very little until I made it happen," Anna Cote says. She started with a small line of cards, which she shopped door-to-door at local retailers; exposure at stationery shows brought enough business for her to open Modern Printed Matter, which also designs identity packages for business clients. An avid photographer, Cote manipulates her organic, nature-inspired images to create her paper designs, which she prints on a Print Gocco. "I love the hands-on printing experience and I'm always looking for new paper and ink colors to work with," Cote says. After getting her stationery into more than 250 U.S. retail outlets, Cote established a shop with the retail collective Etsy.com in 2007—contrary to the typical online-to-bricks-and-mortar path that most papergoods designers take. "Etsy has launched my business to a new level through online press exposure, with mentions on Design*Sponge, Poppytalk, Apartment Therapy, etc.," Cote says.



DESIGNER
Rania Hassan

FIRM
GoshDarnKnit, Washington, DC; www.goshdarnknit.com

LAUNCHED
2006

MEDIUM
screen printing

AVAILABLE
Etsy.com, local craft shows

HAPPY ACCIDENTS

An artist and paper fanatic since childhood, designer Rania Hassan says her participation in the Illustration Friday blog changed her creative approach. She began drawing regularly in Moleskine journals and then illustrating their covers. When she started tinkering with a Print Gocco screen printer, a new idea dawned: "My first Gocco-printed Moleskine in August 2006 was a happy accident," Hassan says. "Halfway through working on another project I decided to just give it a try and printed my silver leaves illustration directly on some Moleskine covers. I'm still using the very first screen." At a craft show in Washington, DC, in September 2006, eager buyers asked Hassan if she had an online store (her Etsy shop was, to that point, a half-hearted effort). "The first half of the day, I shyly said no, but by 1 p.m. I started telling people yes," she says. "When I got home I began frantically taking pictures and posting items to my shop." Those two outlets—craft shows and Etsy—continue to be Hassan's bread and butter. Although she works full-time as an art director for the U.S. government, she spends more time illustrating and hand-printing her products using the trusty Gocco and her own custom-mixed inks. Hassan's advice? "The design you like least might very well end up being your most popular product, so make sure you love everything you put out into the world." HOW

»ONLINE EXTRA

There was just too much fantastic work to show in these eight pages. To see more gorgeous collections of papergoods and to meet the graphic designers behind them, visit HOWdesign.com/PaperMarket.