



## THE PAPER CHARM

OUR CONTRIBUTOR NADIA BINTORO VISITS SARASWATI PAPERS THAT TURNS PAPER WASTE INTO BEAUTIFUL PRODUCTS...

Everybody seems to be striving to overcome the overflowing plastic waste that has been engulfing Bali beaches. Series of regular beach-clean ups have been done to get rid of this environmental threat from the once idyllic beaches of Bali. But how about other wastes, like paper?

In Indonesia alone, it is estimated that per capita consumption of paper

has reached 32.6 kg of paper per person yearly. Meanwhile, the Rainforest Information Center reported that it takes 10 to 17 of trees to produce one ton of paper. So we can only imagine how quickly the destruction of forest is happening given the growing demand of paper globally. Much of these papers are used for offices, school supplies and product packaging. While they are very much needed to support

the education and the country's development, the question remains; what can be done to limit the negative impact of these excessive paper wastes?

A company in Bali addressed this question in a fun and creative way while empowering the local Balinese women. Aptly named after the Hindu goddess of the arts, beauty, knowledge, science and poetry, Saraswati Papers is a company that produces handcrafted recycled paper made from the overflowing paper wastes in Bali. What started as a personal endeavor by one lady has now turned into a boutique business that is proud to employ only women, to train and teach them traditional skills, to empower them for a better life.

An Australian native Kali Sari used to be a professional chef who has traveled around the globe. A new adventure brought her to Bali in 1994, where she was first introduced to the growing problem of waste management in Bali; or the lack thereof. With this concern, Kali resorted to her hobby of papermaking and started to put her





kitchen blender to a new use and began making handcrafted paper from recycled materials.

A proper papermaking course followed and with the support of Wisnu Foundation (a non-profit foundation for the conservation of Balinese environment), Kali enlisted the help of the local women to be part of this movement. From then, Saraswati Papers was born in May 1995.

Fast forward to 21 years later, Saraswati Papers has now grown into a robust company, with a factory in Dalung as well as two shops in Ubud and Batu Belig that showcase its handcrafted recycled papers along with other products including stationary, wrapping papers, business cards, gifts and more.

## A PIECE OF ART

It was almost noon when I visited Saraswati Papers "factory" in Dalung. The sun had slowly risen and almost reaching its hottest position of the day. A perfect time to hang the laundry or in this case, to dry the paper. Stacks of big rectangular frames are lining up in

front of the factory. Each frame holds three wet paper dough that is ready to be sun-dried in the open air.

As I was entering the factory, I was quite surprised to see the lack of machinery inside. Instead, I was greeted with friendly smiles of Balinese women; all dressed in blue T-shirts with Saraswati Papers logo on the front. Each of them was busy doing something with their hands. One was cutting the ready-made paper, while others were folding the paper into ornamental boxes.

Crafted to perfection, Saraswati



Papers is 100 percent handmade with environmental sustainability principles underlying every step in the production. With the help of other waste management organizations in Bali including EcoBali recycling, Saraswati Papers collect paper wastes from hotels, offices, schools, homes and various establishments across Bali.

These papers are then cut and sorted based on their conditions. The blank sections with all-white area are being cut and piled into one stack

while the ones with printed black inks are sorted in another pile that will be used to create darker and more blotted papers due to the ink contamination. These piles are then soaked in water and mashed into pulp porridge.

"We used to knead these dough by hands, but now as our production demand has increased, we started to use this custom-made giant blender. Throughout all the production process, this is the only part where we use electricity powered machinery, and the rest is done by hand," said Tya, Saraswati Papers' manager during our tour in the facility.

And indeed, they do. Following the blending process, the dough is then mixed with starch that will determine the thickness of the paper. The ready dough is then set onto a molding frame. It is then hand-pressed to rid of the excess water. This pressing needs to be done several times by hand to make sure that all water is out. As the lady's hands skillfully ensures the consistency of the paper sheet, I can



Kali Sari, the founder of Saraswati Papers



see how labor intensive the whole process is.

Tya also pointed out that the wastewater from this process is then being re-used to soak the next batch of paper dough so that no water is wasted unnecessarily. "In every step of the production, we try to be as environmentally conscious as possible. As we all know, clean water scarcity has become a problem in Bali nowadays. So, we aim to reduce our water consumption as much as possible," Tya remarked.

By noon, all these molding frames have been filled with the paper dough and ready to dry under the sun with no use of an electric oven to reduce the electricity consumption as well. With this traditional process of blending, dipping and hand-pressing method, Saraswati Paper is able to produce 300 sheets of recycled work of art.

## BEYOND PAPER

In its 21 years of operation, Saraswati Papers has expanded their production from mere recycled paper

sheets to all kind of paper products, including frames, stationery, spa products packaging and a growing demand of environmentally conscious resorts' collaterals.

"Our design and products are always evolving. We are also maintaining our core principle of using all organic materials, natural dyes from the earth, roots and leaves, and only using plant fibers to decorate the paper," Kali mentioned.

From a basic sheet of recycled paper, Saraswati Papers has put a creative twist into their final products. Putting her chef background into action, Kali has switched from creating dishes to using various natural elements from flower petals to onion layers, and shredded bamboos to decorate recycled papers. The result is simply stunning; a thin sheet of soft paper with a quaint hint of rose flower petals scattered around as if it is a silk fabric.

The company has also ventured into the making of product packaging using recycled papers

and partnering with several companies for their CSR programs. "With Bali Safari & Marine Park, for example, we have collaborated to create recycled papers from the elephant's poo," said Tya.

As she handed the poo paper to me, I instinctively put the paper under my nose to smell it. And trust me, it didn't smell bad at all. This Safari Poo series even looks stunning with elephant printings and ornamental designs. If not because of Sarasawati Papers, who would have thought that smelly wastes can be turned into these beautiful pieces of arts? ■

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Saraswati Papers welcomes guests to learn the art of recycled papermaking process in their factory. A private workshop is available for at least two persons with prior appointment.