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## Go green with these local brands

Apr 22 marks Earth Day, but for these businesses, being sustainable is an everyday affair. BY TAY SUAN CHIANG

### Quinn and Oliver

As a regular consumer, Terrie Koh acknowledges the convenience of plastic packaging.

But as a sustainably conscious one, she's more than concerned about how that plastic is disposed of.

"When it comes to single-use packaging for consumer products, we are producing at a speed way faster and creating more waste than we can recycle," says Koh.

Likewise, her business partner Sharna Nguyen notes about the kind of planet her children will inherit: "We read about the detrimental effects on our planet as a result of human consumption, and I believe we can do our part in use way or another to create a sustainable future," says Ng.

The duo, who run a boutique creative-renewal agency together, came up with Quinn and Oliver, a range of powder body wash in food-grade stainless steel containers. Customers only need to fill the bottle with some water, add the powder wash, and shake before using.

There is no need for single-use plastic packaging because the bottles can be reused, and the body wash also comes in refill sachets. "We reduce plastic waste pollution by not ever having to discard a plastic bottle. We also reduce carbon emissions because the powder refills are lightweight where we eliminated water as a component, compared to traditional heavy liquid-filled containers," says Koh.

It took the pair a year of experimenting with different formulas and variations within their factory partner in Thailand.

"We had to ensure that the end product has good viscosity, washes well, the powder has good dissolvability with any water type while maintaining the integrity of the ingredients," says Koh.

But doing less sustainable means higher prices. Koh says when the brand first launched, prices were higher as the products were produced in smaller batches.

"However, with time and intensive R&D (research and development), we are now able to develop the products in a more cost-efficient way while being price-competitive with conventional liquid body wash brands," says Koh.

"No adds." Customers are asked to expand the product range. It is very potent feedback, and we will look into it."

### MAE Syne

Sheo man's leads to two men's treasure, just as in Sam and Fabian Chia, who for the last 2 years have been restoring unwanted kimono and giving them a new lease of life under their label Syne Studio.

Sam and Chia previously worked in the fast-fashion industry and were concerned by the large amounts of waste that was created. It inspired them to start Syne Studio.

Sam collects kimono and Chia likes how traditional clothing can be modern-

ized. "The kimono would thus be a easy step-up from typical jacket forms to a piece that works as a bridge between casual util. util, smart-casual, and formal styles," he says.

The kimonos are sourced directly from Japan. They come in varying conditions – the better-conditioned ones end up in secondhand stores, while worse ones end up in the bin.

"We have been able to connect with these suppliers to take the bins, packed with kimonos in whatever condition," says Sam.

The duo restore the kimonos themselves, cleaning off stains and hand-stitching pieces back together. The restored kimonos are stylish enough to be part of everyday wear.

"There are those who wear it as a fashion piece, pairing it with an outerwear but with a deeper story to it, both functionally and for what it represents in the culture of sustainability and the circular fashion economy," says Sam.

They recently launched MAE Syne, a collection of vintage high-end kimonos with extreme detailing using traditional techniques. "We started Syne as an initial invitation to the world of sustainable fashion, and MAE Syne is our foray into sustainable luxury," says Chia.

Sam adds: "All MAE Syne pieces showcase details that were originally meant for the highest tier of Japanese cultures. The new collection features exclusive pieces that can never be recreated, and are for an audience that lives within that realm of luxury."

MAE Syne was started as a suggestion from food consultant Ryan Hong, who also runs Shiro Yuzurufi, a well-photography studio. Hong had brought a Syne Studio kimono and felt that a more luxurious collection was missing – hence MAE Syne.

To let customers better appreciate MAE Syne, Hong has given his studio a Japanese touch, with a little Zen landscape garden and bamboo racks displaying the kimonos.

"The trick is to inspire the thoughts and theme of Japan meets modern Singapore," says Hong.

### The Kint Co

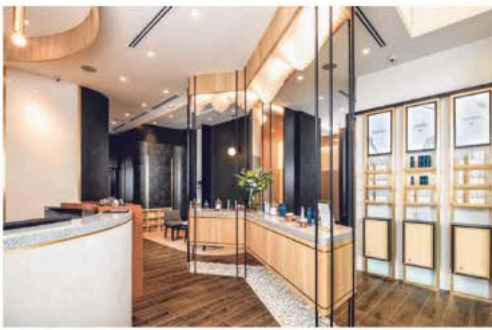
When Zen Lin started creating Fifty, an activewear label, a few years ago, her mission was to sell quality and affordable gear that fits all body shapes.

The outdoors and sports enthusiast says starting Fifty taught her a lot about the activewear and fashion industry.

"However, it didn't fit right with me because I realized I was doing this at the expense of the environment," says Lin.

Fifty gear was made from virgin raw materials. "When the customers have outgrown their activewear, these items will be breaking for the landfill and there's no way to do compare them or reuse them," Lin says.

After almost a year of research, she re-launched Fifty as The Kint Co. But it is more than just a name change.



Above: Skincare brand Porcelain's sustainable efforts extend to its spa, where light fixtures are made from old bottles. Right: activewear label Sharna Ng (right) starts Quinn and Oliver (below), a range of powder body wash in food-grade stainless steel containers. PHOTOS: FORCLARA, QUINN AND OLIVER



"Most people think the label 'sustainable' means 'double the price', but it's not necessarily so. It's for us to communicate and show them how affordable and accessible our products are as a brand."

Zen Lin (above), founder, The Kint Co

The Kint Co's activewear is made from post-consumer plastic bottles, which have been crushed into pellets and then spun into yarn made of recycled polyester fibres (RPET). A sports bra is made from 10 recycled plastic bottles, and leggings are made from 13 such bottles.

"The only way to grow long-term is to switch to a more sustainable fabric. Right now we use RPET for our activewear, and this fabric can be broken down and recycled repeatedly into other products, with no effects on its quality," says Lin.

She has also switched from using untreated craft paper to biodegradable bags, to compostable cornstarch bags, to water-soluble packaging.

Lin, however, feels that more can be done. She says that production of RPET still uses energy and also produces carbon emissions. "I don't think it is possible to be 100 per cent sustainable. It is a constant work in progress," says Lin.

She does her part by making sure that the products are produced in an environmentally responsible way. In addition, she works with reforestation companies, where a tree is planted for every order.

Lin still has the uphill task of converting customers to make green choices. "Most people think the label 'sustainable' means 'double the price', but it's not necessarily so. It's for us to communicate and show them how affordable and accessible our products are as a brand," she says.

### Porcelain

Since 2015, home-grown premium skincare brand Porcelain has been making

small and consistent changes on the sustainability front.

This year, it began formulating its products with more sustainably harvested or lab-developed ingredients.

Its plastic bottles are made from recyclable plastics and, where possible, the brand uses glass bottles and droppers to minimize non-recyclable waste.

While online orders for its products have gone up over the years, this has required more packaging.

The brand now uses biodegradable bubble mailers, corrugated cardboard boxes and acid-free tissue paper printed with soy-based ink to minimize the strain on local waste management systems.

Its sustainable efforts extend to its spa, where light fixtures are made from old Porcelain bottles, and even the therapists' uniforms are made from fabric, using a mix of natural fibres and sustainably harvested wool.

Their efforts have not gone unnoticed by customers.

"They have been very enthusiastic about sustainability, more so than we had expected," says a spokesperson, adding: "We draw inspiration from the feedback we receive from our customers."

Its latest move comes after requests from customers to manage their empty bottles. Now, when customers return clean empty bottles of any brand for recycling, they are rewarded with points, which allow them to try Porcelain products.

"At Porcelain, it is all about doing well and doing good. We aim to better the lives of those we interact with through building deeper relationships while being highly conscious of the impact and value we create in the world," says the spokesperson.

### The Powder Shampoo

For the last 4 years, Lynn Tan has been making sustainable choices when it comes to daily necessities. She's switched to using reusable cotton pads, laundry bags and fluorescent hand washes, and always brings along her own shopping bags when buying groceries.

On the supermarket shelves, there was one item that bothered her a lot: shampoos.

"Almost all are packed in single-use plastic and are non-refillable," says Tan.

"A lot of water is used to produce liquid shampoo. Clean water is scarce and should be kept for consumption versus for production."

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Left: The Powder Shampoo, Stocked by Lynn Tan (above).

Far left, from left: Sam Syng, Ryan Hong and Chia Lin, MAE Syne.

Quinn and Oliver.

PHOTOS: THE POWDER SHAMPOO, MAE SYNE

## Go green with these local brands

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So she decided to create The Powder Shampoo. Like its name implies, the shampoo comes in a powder form. To use, sprinkle some on the hair and then add water to lather, or add it to wet hair.

Tan says that because The Powder Shampoo is not diluted by water, a 100 gram bottle can give 100 washes.

The shampoos come in different formulas to suit various hair types. Tan says the biggest challenge starting the brand was finding the right shampoo formulas. But she had 30 years of experience selling botanical hair care to draw on to identify the right ingredients needed.

Since plastic bottles are bad, her shampoos are sold in recyclable aluminium bottles and refills come in paper pouches. Tan also decided to sell her shampoos in 100g sizes rather than smaller ones that are available from other brands.

"I did it knowing full well that my customers will enjoy more value for money and will also take a longer time to re-purchase," she says.

It might not make business sense, but Tan says she wants her customers to refrain from over-consuming.

In addition, Tan is also planting a tree for every bottle sold. Her goal is to plant 1,000,000 trees by 2030. She has also set her sights on expanding her product range, with the launch of powder hair conditioners and body wash in the near future.

### Left-handless

left-handless.com

Stationery made from recycled paper are plentiful, but those from Left-handless can give anyone green fingers.

The greeting cards and notebooks have seeds embedded in them, while pencils and pens come with seeds enclosed in a tiny capsule at the end.

Rather than throw the stationery in the bin, users can plant it in a pot and the seeds will eventually grow into greens such as tomatoes, mangoes, basil and chilli.

Touted as Singapore's first plantable sta-

tionery and lifestyle brand, Left-handless is the brainchild of Radhika Mayani, self-confessed stationery and nature lover.

Mayani, who left her corporate job in advertising to start Left-handless, was looking to "provide a solution instead of creating just another brand in the crowded market," she says.

She came upon the idea of plantable stationery, which would allow users to connect with nature through a product that has zero waste.

"It's a beautiful feeling when you give new purpose to your products when they reach their end of life," says Mayani.

The plantable stationery costs more than regular ones because of the materials needed and also because such is hard-made—but that hasn't stopped customers from snapping them up.

"Our customers are mostly driven to make the switch to eco-friendly, sustainable, conscious products in their daily life style. Also, when they hear or see this concept, they are intrigued how you can 'plant' after using," says Mayani.

Still, there is the challenge of converting a consumer into a repeat customer.

But Mayani isn't deterred by it. She adds that the ongoing pandemic has made people more aware about having a sustainable lifestyle, and has seen an increase in demand from corporates ordering stationery for their offices or clients.

### Chopvale SG

chopvale.com.sg

Ever wondered what happens to disposable chopsticks after they have been used? Many end up in landfills—but some have been turned into furniture and homeware, produced by ChopVale, a Canadian company that recycles chopsticks from restaurants, houses and schools to turn them into usable items.

In 2021, entrepreneur Evelyn Hew brought the franchise to Singapore. Hew is no stranger to the business of sustainability. She is the founder of a Sustainability Solutions, a sustainability consultancy that provides Internet of Things solutions to



Touted as Singapore's first plantable stationery brand, Left-handless (right) is the brainchild of Radhika Mayani (left). PHOTOS: LEFT-HANDESSON

the waste management industry in Singapore. Hew stumbled across a video of ChopVale and decided that Singapore needs this too.

ChopVale SG currently partners with 110 restaurants, 4 hospitals and a few schools for its chopsticks recycling programme. Each month, it collects 2 tonnes worth of used chopsticks.

"With the pandemic, the concept of takeaway food or purchases is common. As such, the usage of one-time use disposables has increased significantly," Hew says.

At its factory in Taiwan, chopsticks are sorted, washed and dried at high temperatures to destroy any bacteria. They are then pressed into blocks before they are as-

sembled to form desks, chessboards, and decorative wall panels.

Hew says that most of their customers are new homeowners or those renovating their homes.

"The concept of an upcycled product is relatively new in the Singapore market, and it takes time for the public to accept products that were created by something that was deemed as waste."

"However, those who have made a purchase like the concept, and they also want to support a local brand," says Hew.

While getting sufficient material isn't a problem, it has been a challenge finding skilled woodworkers in Singapore. Hew hopes to expand the team regionally, and has plans to collaborate with local designers too.

chopvale.com.sg

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### DESIGN

## Designer to watch

Design buffs will want a piece of Frank Chou's creations now. BY TAY SUAN CHIANG

FRANK Chou always knew he wanted to be a designer. "I am naturally interested in creative things and also making a difference, and it seems that being a designer is just the right career to achieve that goal," says the Beijing-born Chou.

The 34-year-old studied wood science and furniture design at Beijing Forestry University and founded his eponymous firm in 2012.

For may not be a household name among Singaporean homeowners but Chou has won accolades from his peers.

In 2016, he was named best young designer at the Elle Deco International Design Awards of China. This same year, he was the first Chinese designer to win a SaloneSatellite Design Award at Salone del Mobile during Milan Design Week and in 2019 was chosen for the Rising Talent Awards at Maison&Object in Paris.

Chou recently designed a sofa and armchair set for Louis Vuitton Objet Nomade, a showcase of travel-inspired furniture and objects made in collaboration with internationally renowned designers. Besides Chou, other designers in the collaboration include Andre Fu, the Campana brothers and Patricia Urquiola.

His Signature Sofa & Armchair have curved seats and backs. The indoor version is covered with Louis Vuitton leather and a dotted fabric from Italian brand Paola Lentz. Chou's creation is also the first Objet Nomade specifically designed for

outside use, and the outdoor version comes in a waterproof canvas and another colourful Paola Lentz fabric.

The pieces were inspired by the layering of terraced fields in Yunnan, China, and the naturally sculpted forms of Azule Valley, Arizona. Chou describes his piece as "a sculpture that embodies a connection with time."

"One of the first inspirations is that we were thinking about China's influence on our daily life, including our society, environment, culture, history and nature. Therefore, at that time, I started in China, attracted me and stuck in my mind," he says.

### Serving purpose

On the collaboration, Chou says: "Objets Nomades provide us with a more imaginative and spacious platform for design."

Like most creative folk, he finds inspiration anywhere and everywhere. "My inspiration always comes from my own experience of life and the world we live in. Everyone I know in my life or from history, such as musicians and directors (and) even ordinary people could influence my work."

Chou is excited about the design scene in China. "It is now at a tipping point, where it's starting to mature. As the whole economy moves into branding and developing society, design is bound to change dramatically," he says.

He adds that Chinese designers like himself should aim to deliver value. "But also

materially the most useful thing is the acceleration of Chinese business and society into a brand era, where China will spontaneously move into a state of actively protecting intellectual property rights. It's definitely going to happen, and I think it's going to happen soon."

He says his role as a designer is not necessarily to design countless objects, but rather "to solve problems and serve purpose." "As designers, we should design for the progress of human beings, and the new and varied products that need to be solved in each era," he says.

He cites an example of a recent design of a product that combines a tray with an ultraviolet lamp with the purpose of protecting users from viruses. "It's something that can be incorporated into our day-to-day life. It is accessible and highly relevant to daily life today. Meanwhile, we are still looking for partners to realise the concept to the fullest," says Chou.

While he is designing mostly furniture for now, he says that might all change in the future. "As designers, we still need to keep solving the problems which are present and not limit ourselves to the field of product design," says Chou.

Louis Vuitton's Savoir Faire universe is on at the Pioneer Centre House 18 Apr 26. Viewing is by private appointments only. To book, call Louis Vuitton Client Services at 6788 288.

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Frank Chou (above) in 2019 was chosen for the Rising Talent Awards at Maison&Object in Paris. Below, left to right: Lento Armchair, Habitat Colton Table, Signature Sofa & Armchair. PHOTOS: FRANK CHOU COLLECTION, LOUIS VUITTON

