

# Diary of a stationery addict

From her first Biro to starting her own business, stationery has always been a passion for writer Emily Murray



I've always loved writing on paper. In the first years of school, we wrote in pencil until our handwriting was deemed good enough to progress to pen. I would select a lead based on my mood: a hard HB when I felt perky and precise; softer 2B for those fanciful days when I believed in fairies. As I looped, joined and flicked, the graphite eroded and reshaped under my fingertips. I turned the pencil slightly as I wrote, chasing the perfect edge – not too scratchy, not too flat.

One of the best things about pencil writing is rubbing it out, and in the Eighties I rubbed out in style. If status was determined by the calibre of your erasers, I was queen of the classroom. There was the scented glitter ice-cream rubber. The shooting-star-with-rainbow rubber. The tiny pastel kitten rubbers, too cute to use. I wrote, I rubbed, I sniffed and I sighed with absolute contentment.

At last, pen graduation day arrived and with it my first bottle of Tippex. In my teens, this was used to draw daisies on my Dr Martens

and my blue Biro yielded to a 10-colour leviathan. Pink and purple inked notes, complete with green underlining, vastly improved dull physics lessons and by the early Nineties, scented ballpoints conveyed my anonymous love on Valentine's cards.

Of course, a pen requires something to write on, and something to say; as what I had to say changed, so did the paper.

**“If status was determined by the calibre of your erasers, I was queen of the classroom”**

Thanks to *Just Seventeen* magazine, I was equipped not only with the wisdom to see me through puberty, but also a range of stickers to brighten the cover of my notepad. Voilà, the ideal diary for recording my 1992 dreams, dissatisfactions and undying love for Malcolm The Model.

In 1996, for my gap year in Zimbabwe, a weather-proof Alwych notebook protected my emotional outpourings from the

African elements. By the mid-Noughties, working at Vogue House and aspiring to chic, I progressed to my all-time favourite diary: a pink Smythson Soho, perfect for reminding me of champagne at Claridge's or photoshoots in, er, Soho.

I always savoured my trips to the stationery shop, but as the digital age gathered pace, I forgot about pencils and paper. My diary was kept on my phone, appointments tapped in, reminders set. Letters to friends and lovers became emails, each character an Arial 12-point carbon copy of the last. But this paper-free period was never going to last. This year, tiring of technology, I've finally bought a Montblanc fountain pen and swapped my iPhone diary for a yellow lambskin Smythson Panama.

I've also just started my own business and I'm ridiculously excited about how my brand will look in 3D: the pink-inked headed paper; the cardboard-thick dark grey business cards, foiled so you can literally feel the words. Now, faced with a pile of launch party invites to write – where's that HB pencil gone before I progress to pen?



**“PEOPLE WANT SOMETHING MORE PERSONAL THAN AN EMAIL”**

*Sidonie Warren, owner of design-led stationer Papersmiths in Bristol, discusses the joys of notebooks and pencil sharpeners*

**How did Papersmiths come about?**  
In 2012, I started a design studio in the arts quarter of Bristol in a space set up as a shop. We hadn't planned to go in to retail, but as the space was suitable, we thought why not run the studio and sell stuff at the same time as it didn't require much extra investment. The question was what to sell? My love of paper's tactility meant stationery seemed the obvious answer, especially as we were surrounded



by it in the studio. We outgrew the space in 2014 and moved to our current location, which has allowed us to split the design studio and shop,



→ and gives the shop part more room. We're planning to open another Papersmiths next year, but haven't decided on the city yet.

**With everyone Tweeting, Instagramming and Whatsapping, is it a difficult time for stationery shops?**

You might think so, but actually stationery is increasing in popularity. I think there's a technology backlash and people are looking for something more personal and permanent than an email. We always wrap our products in specially designed gift paper and include a handwritten note, which people actually keep.

**Apart from running Papersmiths, how does stationery fit into your life?**

For me, stationery stands for organisation. Every time I get a new notebook, I know I'm going to be super-organised, and this goes back to childhood. When I was seven years old, I remember writing a Christmas list consisting solely of items – files, plastic wallets and pens – from the Viking office catalogue. As a kid, buying back-to-school stationery in August was one of the highlights of my year.



BY OPENING PAPERSMITHS, SIDONIE CREATED HER DREAM JOB



**How do you choose which products to stock?**

That's the best part of running Papersmiths: taking trips to different countries and cities to look for lovely new items. I visit markets looking for local designers and crafts people. I also find a lot online and through Instagram. I'm not usually looking for anything specific – I just know.

**Which products are your five must-haves?**

That's hard! I love everything we sell, but the Marble Memopad is a personal favourite – we designed it in-house especially for Papersmiths and had it printed

and foiled in Bristol. Everyone also needs a planner and I think I've found 'the one' in the Nordic Planner. Plus the multi-coloured graphic pens with the felt tip point are perfect for colour-coordinating your day and the little penguins tabs – which came to us all the way from Korea – are great for marking important dates. Then there's the super-sharp Danish scissors – they're the dream desk accessory.

**How did the magazine wall come about?**

I visited these amazing magazine shops in Berlin that looked like art galleries and I thought a wall of arty magazines would make a great, paper-based interior feature.

**What are the highs and lows of running your own business?**

It's very rare I have a low although I guess sometimes I find it hard to juggle all my responsibilities. But really it's one big high, like working on a brilliant, never-ending school project. By starting Papersmiths, I've created my dream job.

[papersmiths.co.uk](http://papersmiths.co.uk); 6 Boyce's Ave, Bristol BS8 4AA

**EMILY'S DIARIES IN DETAIL**



**1992**  
My first diary, decorated with *Just Seventeen*



**1992**  
Inside, a precise five-point warning to snoopers



**1996**  
The perfect gap year notebook – the all-weather Alwych



**1996**  
The Alwych and Emily's travels to Zimbabwe, documented

**2006**  
Aspirations of chic: the fat, pink Smythson Soho

**STATIONERY MUST-HAVES**

Sidonie selects some of her favourite desktop essentials



Scissors by Hay, from £27



Penguin tabs, £4; Deco stickers, £3



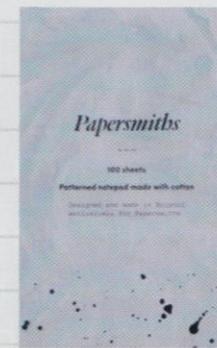
Nordic planner, £20



Sharpener by M+R, £4.50



Graphic pens by Pentel, £1.10 each



Marble Memopad, £11



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