

## The handmade tale

In an age where anything can be made with machines, a growing group of creatives have found new business opportunities by using their fingers. BY TAY SUAN CHIANG

### DESMOND TANG

Founder, Hikari & Shores  
instagram.com/hikarishores

As the Covid-19 pandemic began to take its toll on the bridal industry, wedding photographer Desmond Tang found himself getting fewer and fewer jobs.

"A lot of jobs were put on hold, so I needed a creative outlet, one that didn't require me to be behind the camera," says Tang. After several attempts to find alternative work, he finally found an activity that he was passionate about and didn't mind spending hours on.

Tang started Hikari & Shores, which he calls, "an experimental place for me to explore various types of handmade art". He makes miniature buildings, such as houses and lighthouses which are stuck on small pieces of rock or wood. Encased in glass with a wooden frame, they have a whimsical feel and make for suitable tabletop decor.

"Hikari" - pronounced as "hikari" or "light" in Japanese - and "Shores" was chosen because of Tang's love for the ocean and surfing. He says that his previous job as a photographer had always been about gathering stories, emotions and daily routines, then piecing them together to form an image. "I guess this sort of aesthetic had been brought over from making an image to making art from nature," he says.

For Tang, who is currently taking a break from photography, the first step to creating his art pieces is to find suitable rocks. "This is my favourite step in the whole process," he shares. There are no specific places where he finds them. "I try to keep a lookout to see what nature has to offer," says Tang, who is based in Johor Baru and heads out to the hills and beach to find materials.

He uses different types of paper to create the buildings and dry twigs for the trees. "It almost feels meditative trying to piece everything together," he notes. Each piece takes at least 20 hours to make. "The biggest challenge is that some houses have to be very small to fit onto the rock, but those are the most satisfying to complete," he adds.

His works are mostly sold to buyers in South-east Asia. He believes his artworks have an appeal because not only are they good conversation starters but his customers, like himself, also feel at peace with nature when they look at them.

Spatial designer Simon Chiang, who purchased a Hikari & Shores piece, says: "It is very therapeutic to stare at the mini lighthouse."

### CONNOR SU

Co-founder, Slow Green  
slowgreen.store

Connor Su doesn't hesitate to admit that it was a difficult choice to give up his corporate job to dive full-time into his weekend hobby. "But I know it is the right thing to do because I really like doing this," says Su, who previously worked in consulting and finance. "I like building my own products and my brand that I can work on for many years to come."

His product? Slow Green, a collection of artisanal landscapes for tabletops.

"We get a lot of energy from working on them. And we feel this is a pursuit we can do for a long time, like when we get to 60, we probably can still sit down, put wood and stone together and get a kick out of doing it," says Su, whose wife Sabrina helps on the weekends.

They were initially making pieces for themselves, but soon realised others liked them too, and they started getting requests for them. Each piece is intricately designed, typically takes 2 weeks to complete and uses over 20 materials, from stones, soil, wood, plants and moss.

Su says Slow Green prides itself on its high standard of craftsmanship, and how each material, be it wood or plants "weave and grow with each other like in nature. That is how we want to recreate the scenery", he explains.

Their tabletop landscapes were inspired by their hiking trips, and they also learnt from other craftsmen in bonsai, aquascape and paludarium arts. In addition, there was a lot of trial and error too. Neither has an art background but "both of us have a lot of artistic drive pent up inside."

Some of their pieces, particularly those that use real dried moss and require no watering, have found homes overseas. For other pieces that have live plants, the couple even offer a maintenance care service for them.

Despite having to do everything himself, from planning, making to even delivery, Su still finds the passion to go on. "Our clients tell us that our products make unique and meaningful gifts. We are really privileged to have the opportunity to serve a purpose in our customer's life," he adds.

### MABEL LOW

Founder, Papersynthesis  
papersynthesis.com

Do you love plants but struggle to keep them alive? Mabel Low might have the perfect solu-



Above: Desmond Tang, founder of Hikari & Shores, believes his artworks have an appeal because not only are they good conversation starters but his customers, like himself, also feel at peace with nature when they look at them. Left: A miniature lighthouse from Hikari & Shores. PHOTOS: HEAR & SHORES



Above: Connor Su, co-founder of Slow Green, creates artisanal landscapes for tabletops. Right: Each piece is intricately designed, typically takes 2 weeks to complete and uses over 20 materials, from stones, soil, wood, plants and moss. PHOTOS: SLOW GREEN



Above: Mabel Low, founder of Papersynthesis, a paper floral studio. She chooses to specialise in flowers and foliage (left) because she loves nature. Some flowers are hard to design, but there are also those that are hard to make. PHOTOS: PAPERSYNTHESIS

tion. Low is the founder of Papersynthesis, a paper floral studio.

She started experimenting with making paper plants in 2018 after realising that she didn't have green fingers. For two years, she

sold her paper plants on a casual basis. But in 2020, she decided to take a leap of faith, quitting her job to focus on paper crafting full-time. She started Papersynthesis doing bespoke commissions, selling paper flowers, cre-

ating DIY kits and running workshops.

The former designer/general manager at a local design store says her design education background and work experience have come in handy. "Being equipped with skill sets like marketing, prototyping, computer illustration, manufacturing, and service design, allows me to run the business alone and assume different roles in a company when needed."

Low has always been fascinated with paper, as it is versatile and easily available.

"From a flat piece of paper, I can create a 3D form by simply making a fold or a bend. The possibilities of what can be created are endless," she says. Some of her bespoke commissions include a replica of a wedding bouquet,

and an arrangement for the launch of an international perfume brand.

Low chooses to specialise in flowers and foliage because she loves nature. Some flowers are hard to design, but there are also those that are hard to make. She sometimes adds a touch of paint to make some plants more life-like.

Low's plants have travelled outside of Singapore. In fact, most of her customers are in Europe and North America.

Her DIY plant kits are also popular. "Learning how to make paper plants can be therapeutic and it is also something that anyone can make for family and friends," she says.

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