

The paper revolution

In an age of BlackBerrys, laptops and Palm Pilots, the supremacy of the keyboard seemed unchallengeable. But whether it be personal correspondence, notetaking, or the simple thank-you note, the arcane, labour-intensive art of writing by hand has re-emerged of late as a statement of personal style and panache.

Whether as a result of a general passion for all things retro, or one of its more particular expressions – such as the current interest in etiquette – pen and paper and quaint old snail mail are back. It's a vogue that encompasses everything from exquisite monogrammed cards to personal and business letterhead and bespoke

stationery. It's easy to see why. In an often impersonal world, the personal touch has never been at such a premium, not least because it requires that ultimate luxury – time.

According to a range of industry experts, there are many deeply embedded social and cultural reasons drawing us back to more traditional forms of communication. The simple thank-you note, for example, has evolved into a powerful business tool, carrying within it a level of thoughtfulness that can't be matched by the ping of an email, no matter how timely its delivery.

According to Sydney-based stationery buyer for David Jones, Rebecca Link, the thank-you note is

“increasingly a way to drop the boundaries”, in large part because such notes bring things “back to someone's handwriting on a card – they have chosen the card, they have chosen the words, they have mailed the card”.

There is also a fresh appreciation of old-fashioned formality, particularly in situations where electronic communication seems inappropriate. As Mary Davidson, owner of Melbourne-based fine and bespoke stationery supplier Paper Impressions, says: “How can you send a condolence by email – would you do that and what would be the reception?”

Apart from correspondence, the keeping of handwritten notebooks and journals

has also become a way of expressing oneself in a more meaningful, reflective and creative way. The Moleskine – modelled on the notebook favoured by some of Europe's great artists and intellectuals – has suddenly assumed cult status. While the Moleskine has led the notebook revolution, locally made journals finished and bound in traditional handcrafted fashion have also captured the attention of a whole new generation of users.

Specialist paper products manufacturer and distributor David Piesse runs a Melbourne-based company Paper and Book Arts (soon relocating to Byron Bay) that hand makes and finishes a range of journals under its Apogee Paperkraft

label. Retailing at around \$50 in A5 size and finished with high quality writing paper and traditionally bound leather spine, the Apogee Paperkraft journal is a popular item. Piesse cites a single reason for the trend: nostalgia for a more refined and leisurely era.

Martin Raymond of London trend consultancy The Future Laboratory confirms that the notebook has become a whole new status symbol, as a countertrend to the omnipresent Palm Pilots and BlackBerrys. “I go to a lot of meetings where I would have traditionally expected people to take out a BlackBerry, for example, where now they would take out a Moleskine,” Raymond says.
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