

UNIQUELY SINGAPOREAN

THESE CLEVER NEW ITEMS AROSE FROM LOCAL INVENTORS WANTING TO SOLVE REAL-LIFE PROBLEMS

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It is not every day that you hear of a bag woven from the tapes of cassettes and a wallet that automatically sorts your coins for you. Sounds intriguing and creative? It is. But better yet — these items are Singapore-made, and created with the aim of solving everyday problems.

Creator of the MusicCloth bag, Jessica Chuan Yi Xin, said the idea behind the tote was to make people aware of the issue of electronic waste (e-waste).

“More than 4.6 million tonnes of e-waste end up in landfills. The toxic chemicals in electronic products can leach into the land over time or are released into the atmosphere,” explained the 30-year-old product designer, who works at an online retail company.

Indeed, according to the United Nations University, 41.8 million tonnes of “e-waste” — defined as any device with an electric cord or battery — were dumped around the globe in 2014, and only an estimated 6.5 million tonnes were brought in for recycling.

As such, Chuan decided to utilise old cassette tapes for her new project. “We are fast evolving into a culture that primarily downloads and consumes entertainment from the cloud. Analogue (items) such as cassette tapes are slowly being phased out,” she said.

Sentimentality was another reason for the creation of the bag — cassette tapes were part of Chuan’s medium of communication with her best friends (who live in Australia) when she was young, and smartphones had not been invented yet.

When Chuan found her cassettes again during a major clean-up of her room sometime in January, she “came up with this idea to use them (the tape) to weave into a piece of cloth”, she said, adding that this was a way “to make waste beautiful”.

WEAVING MUSIC

Chuan started to collect cassette tapes from her friends, and also roped in three other friends and family members to help.

They spent nine months engaged in intensive research and various at-



The MusicCloth bag (above) is made from the tape from cassettes tapes woven into a fabric (right). PHOTOS: JESSICA CHUAN YI XIN

tempts to modify their weaving technique until they were satisfied with the end product.

The result is MusicCloth — a bag that comes in three sizes — mini, regular and large.

Creating the bags is a labour-intensive process. For instance, for a mini-sized tote, the tape from cassettes is woven into two pieces of A4-sized cloth with a needle. It is then sewn together with a lining fabric using a sewing machine. “We spend about 20 hours to weave (each mini-sized bag),” Chuan said. The lining fabric for the bags is available in teal and olive hues.

On Nov 17, Chuan launched her project on crowdfunding platform Kickstarter, and began collecting cassette tapes from donors around the

world as she finds that these tapes tell a story. “I feel that I am not collecting cassette tapes, but I am collecting their memories and turning their memories into a brand-new item,” she said, adding that the initiative would help to reduce electronic waste as well.

About 700 cassette tapes have been collected, with help from her families, friends and donors.

So far, 20 bags have been made. These bags will be sent to the Kickstarter backers when the campaign ends on Dec 26. As of 12pm yesterday, Chuan managed to raise S\$8,362 on Kickstarter, just a tad shy of her S\$10,000 goal.

Asked what she would do if she does not reach her goal, Chuan said she would still send the items to her Kickstarter backers. “No matter if it is successfully funded or not, we promise you will get what you want,” she said. The backers simply have to drop them a message with their mailing address, and they will be sent out once they are ready to be shipped, she added.

Chuan has since launched some sizes of her MusicCloth bags on digital marketplace Ahalife, as well as design retailer Naiise outlets. Prices range from S\$69 for a mini-sized bag to S\$269 for the large version.

“I want to make products that can be used every day and by everyone. Recently, tote bags have also been sold as a more eco-friendly replacement for disposable plastic bags, given how they can be reused many times over,” Chuan said.

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SMART WALLET

Similarly, the Kin Wallet is another statement piece that solves a common everyday problem — how and where to keep one's loose change. The inventors — local National University of Singapore industrial design students Lim Li Xue, 23, Cheryl Ho, 21, and Ng Ai Ling, 20 — told TODAY that “Kin was born when we noticed that the problem of keeping change had gone by unaddressed for so long”.

Their creation helps to sort your cash in a fuss-free manner — simply dump all your money and coins in the top compartment, and the coins will automatically be sorted in the built-in pouch of the wallet. The wallet also adopts a smart mechanism that prevents the coins from sliding out.

As for how it works? It is a secret, said the trio. But Lim did say that “the inner mechanism is crafted and sewn in a manner so as to prevent the backflow of coins once they have been inserted into the wallet”.

The product, which took 13 months to get from ideation to the final design, was created originally for a design studio project they had to work on in school. It was also there that the trio met. “For that semester, the

theme was to create projects for the crowdfunding audience,” Lim explained. Coincidentally, Kickstarter launched in Singapore around the third quarter of this year, which was why they decided to pick it as their platform.

Lim acknowledged that the ideation phase was the toughest. They had to go through 100 to 200 concepts that got rejected many times over before they eventually came up with the final one.

None of them had any prior knowledge in wallet-making, either. “We were cutting up wallets and understanding how other wallets were constructed. Many nights were spent learning to sew from scratch and refining the product further into something we are proud of,” Lim shared.

The rest, as they say, is history. After launching it on Kickstarter on Nov 1, with a goal of S\$4,000, their product garnered tremendous buzz.

The Kin Wallet was mentioned not only on local news outlets but also on international platforms such as New York-based website Mashable and on Japan Internet media business Tabi Labo. Within 27 hours, the inventors successfully got funded. They eventually raised S\$280,468, way more than their original goal.



The Kin Wallet has a smart mechanism that prevents coins from falling out and lets users access their coins easily.

PHOTO: KIN STUDIO

The Kin Wallet comes in five colours — Burnt Sienna, Ultramarine, Olive green, Meteorite Grey and Kepler Black — and costs S\$47 each (S\$5 off if you sign up for the mailing list). The wallets, which are made of acrylic canvas, will be sent to their Kickstarter backers in July next year.

Pre-orders are open now at the online store. The inventors are still refining the product and exploring new developments, now that their idea has enjoyed success.

“We have plans to further this venture and are looking into further developments, be they in the

current wallet design — new versions of our wallet design — as well as a range of products with similar mechanisms or future new products,” Lim said.



> All sizes of the MusicCloth bag are available at digital marketplace, www.ahalife.com/. Only the mini-sized tote bag is available on the Naiise website as well as at its outlets at The Cathay and Clarke Quay. The Kin Wallet is available at <https://kinstudio.sg/>.