

BY MATT PORTER

A YEAR OF PAPER

To create a promotion that designers would be willing to keep on their desks all year, Neenah Paper teamed up with a talented designer and printer to create this calendar promoting its Crane line.



PRODUCTION

PAPER KEEPERS

What makes a printed promotion special enough for clients and prospects to hold onto? Neenah Paper discovered that magic formula for a recent calendar project.

Sometimes a printed sample is so good you may want to boil it or burn it. Jessica Hische says she got two such gifts over the 2011 holidays. "For me, if people send something useful, I tend to keep it. Calendars are great obviously, but this past season, I was sent a lettering/design promo on a jar of mulling spices and was thrilled to be able to try it out. Then, Little & Co. sent me a box of three awesomely designed and printed matchboxes. I'm afraid to use the matches because the package is so pretty, but I kept it nonetheless!"

She may change her mind when the electricity goes out on some cold, gale-blown night in San Francisco, but apparently some design can be too effective. So what makes you want to keep a printed design you've received from a friend, colleague or vendor? What makes one become a "keeper" and another a quickly recycled crumple? The fact is, it isn't easy to come up with a useful, beautiful object in paper, one so exquisitely balanced in form and function that you must return to it time and time again.



WHAT MAKES A KEEPER?

Abbey Fowler of 6-25 Paper Studio in Grand Rapids, MI, has found a few. "I have pieces that I've kept for over 10 years, so long that they even hold a bit of nostalgia for me, reminding me of certain points in life, or exciting turning points in my career. I will look at something over and over again every day on my wall if it says something motivating while backed by a bold, timeless design."

For other designers, what makes them want to keep a print promotion can be personal. But they all agree that for a piece to be a keeper, it must balance aesthetic quality with utility and purpose. Beauty for beauty's sake is art. To be effective design communication, it must inform and delight.

"If it's educational or can be kept as a reference or resource, I'm likely to hold onto it," says Atlanta designer Maxey Andress, creator of many paper promos over a distinguished career. "Print quality, unique paper or substrate and unusual artwork are also important. Size helps, too ... small and sacred or 'wow, how'd they'd sell them on doing it so big?!"

Ingred Sidie of Design Ranch in Kansas City takes it a step further: "What makes us decide to keep a promotion are qualities like thoughtful, interesting and unexpected. If it's a postcard with a picture, we don't keep it. Many promotions aren't 'designed' and that's the problem: If your audience is creative, then your piece should be just as creative. We'd rather see one exceptionally designed and printed piece than a series of quarterly uninspired promotions."

Bill Grant of Grant Design Collaborative in Canton, GA, demands a good story: "It all begins with

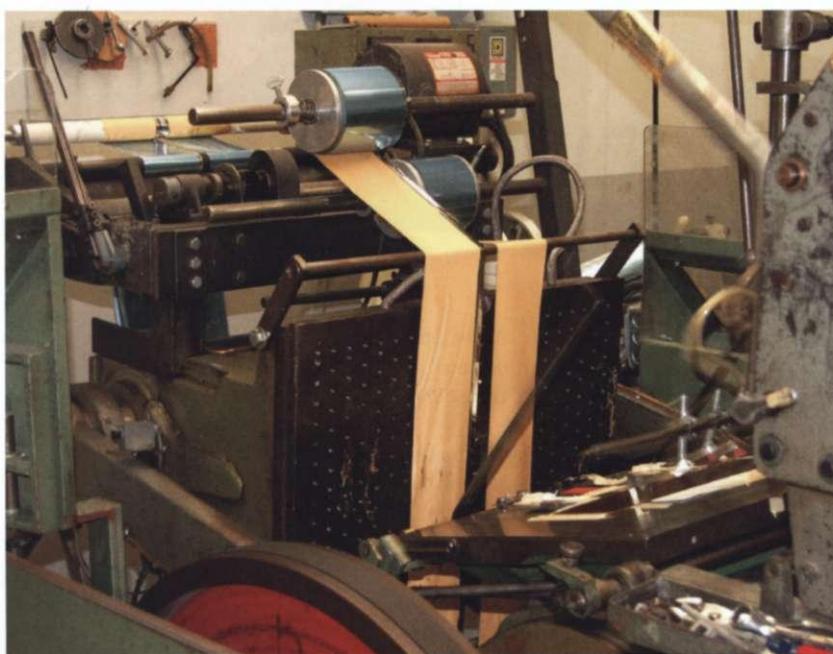
meaningful, well-written copy. Most printed matter is disposable, but I can never discard a beautifully designed and written piece that transcends the mundane in a powerful manner."

Austin, TX-based Pentagram partner DJ Stout wholeheartedly agrees. "There is a lot of chatter about the death of print, but I think that print is beautiful and effective and timeless, but it has to do what all communication media has to do to survive and to be vital. It needs real content," he says. "I hate getting bloated, flashy print pieces that are selling paper and printing techniques that have no meaning, no content and no passion. I throw those pieces away as soon as I get them (adding to the landfill). I know that printers can achieve all kinds of wondrous effects, many of them brought to us by the very technology that is supposedly killing off print."

"What's killing off print, and websites, and blogs and everything we do as graphic designers, is a lack of intelligence and actual content," Stout continues. "Content is king! The few paper promotions and print pieces that I've held onto over the years are those pieces that inspire, educate, elate and entertain. I've held on to those pieces because they fit into my bookshelf, and I return to them often. They are a part of my life."

THE MAGICAL INGREDIENTS

While beauty is in the eye of the beholder, technical quality may be objectively measured. With the best printing, you not only see it—you can touch it. This mandates technical brilliance, or at least a warehouse



full of printer experience and fine tools. But it requires other tangibles. Tom Wright, director of advertising and design at Neenah Paper knew that he wanted the 2012 Crane Papers calendar project to be the kind of promotion that people would keep on their desks for an entire year. To do that, he realized he would need four magical ingredients:

1. One of the finest substrates in the world—Crane Papers
2. A printer with extensive old-school experience and tools—Contemporary Graphics
3. A designer who could knock you over with a feather—Pum Lefebure of Design Army
4. A strong working relationship.

"First, credit goes to Contemporary Graphics [director of business development] Stuart Slater who caught my attention with an idea they produced and shared with me more than a year ago," Wright explains. "I loved its size, its enduring appeal and the way it showcased 12 different sheets using a wide array of old-school print techniques. While his sample packaging and display were beyond what we could afford, we knew we could find a way to make an affordable, attractive package while letting the paper inside remain the star of the show."

THE PROCESS

With the printer in one state and the designer 150 miles south in Washington, DC, electronic files and overnight couriers did the yeoman service. Designer Pum Lefebure explains, "The process was smooth considering the distance between us. A good portion was shared back and forth via PDF, but then we needed numerous foil and ink tests to ensure that design intent could be achieved from sheet to sheet."

Contemporary Graphics' Stuart Slater says the nature of the project required more collaboration than normal. "As the manufacturer, we had to guarantee results," he says. "This meant investing much time early on, discussing each image and the design intent. It meant developing a plan to overcome potential obstacles where we were uncertain that a chosen process could meet designer expectations. This extra care enabled us to move ahead smoothly, from development through manufacturing, to fulfillment and shipping without any major setbacks."

The quality of the Crane product played its part. "The Crane brands are premium, and so are its customers. What better way to showcase the versatility and the elegance of Crane Papers than to put them to work using some of the finest and most hand-crafted printing techniques anywhere?" Wright says. "The key was to have just enough technique—but not too much—so that users see a refreshing change in style and look throughout the year. At first glance, the finished product is understated. But the thought and skill behind this is richly layered and delightfully complex."

Slater describes a layering of printing techniques as exquisitely composed and interwoven with surprise as a Japanese Garden. He explains, "At every step on every sheet, the paper felt the human touch. Across 12 sheets of Crane Papers, we used engraving, lithogra-

phy, embossing, foil-stamping, letterpress printing and digital printing. We also combined these processes to create some months, so some sheets were touched three or four times before they were trimmed. For example, for January we engraved the word 'winter' then used a sculptured emboss to highlight and create detail. April and May also display such combined techniques: for April, engraving and letterpress printing; for May, engraving and foil-stamping. Every sheet felt the impact of our letterpress."

that still left the packaging dilemma. "The packaging breakthrough was using our new Environment Folding Board to create a substantial, value-added and utilitarian presentation," Wright says. "It allows recipients to see value in smaller, well-produced materials versus the mass consumable commodity. It looks rare. It looks rich. But, with the right materials and talent, an extraordinary end product is attainable."

THE RESULT

So, with all the positive attention Neenah's Crane Paper 2012 calendar is getting, will it join the pantheon of "paper keepers?"

"I think so," sighs Justin Ahrens, principal of design firm Rule29 in Chicago. "I sure wish I could keep mine. While it's refreshing to get a usable, simple and

well-designed paper promotion, and this calendar is all that, I just wish I could keep mine from disappearing off my desk."

Mr. Ahrens, call your paper rep while supplies last. Then hot-glue it to your desk. **HOW**

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