

UPCYCLING IS THE WAY TO GO

RECYCLING IS PASSÉ... IT'S TIME TO SWITCH TO UPCYCLING, A FAIRLY NEW CONCEPT IN INDIA. **AMISHI SHAH**, AN UPCYCLER FROM MUMBAI, TELLS **ARUNA RATHOD** HOW TO CREATE QUIRKY YET CREATIVE PRODUCTS FROM WASTE WITH EASE.




such as coasters, key chains, clocks, card holders, diya thalis and more from the flat black plate. Sprightly and enthusiastic, she works with a team of designers and supplies her products all over India.

RECYCLING V/S UPCYCLING

Amishi explains that upcycling is a recent trend. To put it simply, it is the process of converting waste materials or products with no use, into new materials or products of better quality to save the environment. While recycling is a more popular term and heard more often, the difference between the two terms is simple. "Recycling involves breaking down trash into its base form and converting it into a product of lesser quality, while upcycling uses trash in its existing form and makes something of equal or higher quality that will delay its journey to the landfill," explains Amishi. For instance, taking a beer bottle and melting it to make another glass product is recycling but cutting a beer bottle to make drinking glasses is upcycling. "Upcycling uses much

Amishi Shah calls herself the 'Chief Upcycler' of 'The Upcycle Project' – her brainchild in Mumbai – a venture that makes young, quirky products out of waste. The 24-year-old speaks with passion about her project and how it is the need of the hour. As you look around her living room, you notice a smart wall clock – made from an old vinyl record. Upcycling vinyl records are Amishi's passion at the moment. She designs an array of products



less energy. For instance, the glass bottle can be cut and reused, hence it's a much greener process," she adds.

MAKING A CAREER

Finance and entrepreneurship always interested Amishi and, after her Bachelor's degree in Finance, she joined Edelweiss, a leading financial services company, in the wealth management sector. "There is always a gap between education and the industry, so when I began working, I learnt hands on. As part of my profile at Edelweiss, I developed a value-added bouquet strategy that involved collaborating with marketing, legal and other departments. I also worked on a strategy with an Indo-Japanese collaboration," explains Amishi.

EXPLORING THE TREND

After working for a year or so, Amishi decided to pursue an international Master's degree in Management. She enrolled at the University of Bath, in the United Kingdom. It was while studying there that Amishi came across the concept of upcycling in the

AMISHI SAYS...

◀ The quirkiest product I've designed has been my most recent vinyl record newspaper/key holder. It is a very unique design and the challenge was to make the entire product using just one disc to minimise waste. ▶

West. But once she understood it, she wanted to explore the field. Earlier, she would decorate wine bottles and gift them to friends and family, instead of throwing them away. "During my free time, I used to explore the city and since I had taken up entrepreneurship as a module in the last semester, I learnt about social enterprise. Most nationalities were upcycling products, right from the British to Nigerians," recalls Amishi. Awareness about sustainability

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: BEER BOTTLES MADE INTO DECORATIVE GLASSES, A WALL DECAL MADE FROM AN OLD VINYL RECORD, A POOJA THALI ALSO MADE FROM A RECORD, TEA LIGHT CANDLE STANDS, AND AN EXOTIC CAGE MADE FROM RECYCLED METAL STRIPS

the costing, manufacturing cost and feasibility and only then introduce the product," she states.

PRODUCTS GALORE

All the products made for the Upcycle Project are worth a dekko. There are beer bottles made into beautiful decorative glasses by just cutting the bottle; thematic



is very difficult to recycle and the material is highly toxic," describes Amishi. One of the most exotic products made by her are the cage lights. "It's an exotic cage made from recycled metal strips and then strewn with lights. It could be used as a lamp or as a lantern. Priced at ₹2,000, this is my most premium product," she says. The other popular creations include the wall decals for interiors. "Wall decals uplift any room or wall and are easy to fix – they can either be mounted or just stuck to the walls, doors or any surface,"

she informs.

Another super popular product is a real coconut with a zipper! "In India, a coconut is given



on auspicious occasions. I recycled the shells and designed them with a zipper to resemble a full coconut. This way, one could place any item inside the coconut. Being a multi-purpose product, the response has been very good. While some bought it to place their wedding invites inside, others bought it to give prasad (offering) during the Ganpati festival," adds Amishi, who prefers employing the services of people with a physical disability or mental limitation. Chief upcycler Amishi has many interesting plans in place for Upcycle Project and miles to go before she calls it a day.



DO IT YOURSELF

"Any old products can be re-imagined into quirky new decor. The idea is to be as wild with your imagination as you can. For example, an international artist used animal X-rays to make lamp shades! We have several DIY projects on our social media platforms on a weekly basis," Amishi says.



is huge in Western countries. "I also found that fair trade products are very popular there, and there is a huge value to them, and not considered expensive by citizens there," she adds. Having completed her Master's degree, Amishi returned to Mumbai and decided to set up The Upcycle Project. The goal of the project was to become a socially inclusive, environment-friendly, economically viable venture. "I would work on my design, show it to a few close friends and ask them if they would buy such a product, then work out

keychains; coasters of the popular *Game of Thrones* and vinyl records made into pooja thalis with kundan studded on them in an artistic design. Priced at ₹600, these have been a huge sell-out at various exhibitions during festive seasons. "The records are made from polyvinyl chloride (PVC) which