



Businesswoman finds her calling, follows her dream

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Sheila Samalin dips a felt rectangle attached to a wooden stick and expertly pens the word "baby" on paper tacked to the wall, as two novice calligraphers attempt to trace the movements on their notepads.

"Pressure, release and move right up to the line, pressure down, release at 5 o'clock, pressure, so that it's really a ribbon effect," she says to Wendy Frank of Cross River and Marion Salvador of Bedford Corners.

It's 11:29 a.m. at Paper Passions and this is the third week of classes, which are held in the basement of the high-end paper and stationery store on East Main Street.

"It's harder than it looks to get perfect," Frank says.

To that, Samalin responds, "Practice, as your mother says, will make you perfect."

Across the room, owner May-ma Raphael of Cortlandt works with graphic designer Aurora Diaz of Somers on invitations customers have ordered.

One recently completed job entailed using six layers of paper, including one that is hand-embossed.

Upstairs at Paper Passions, which opened in October, designer Kate Spade's stationery line, tins of key lime cookies and other hostess gifts, and sheets of embroidered and Florentine papers are among the featured items. Pineapples; richly-colored gold, blue and purple feathers; and teddy bears embellish some of the hand-made papers.

Raphael, a native of the Caribbean island Dominica who has also lived in Toronto, says she and her husband, Stewart, plan to open another store this summer in Tarrytown.

Curtis Mitchell, 31, of Rowayton, Conn., who buys a journal and photo album a few minutes before noon, says the store is unique and the quality of the products excellent.

"My girlfriend's up in Canada and asks me to come," he says.

A few minutes later, a regular customer arrives to pick up a special gift he purchased elsewhere, but had Paper Passions wrap.

Raphael, 30, says she was inspired to get into the paper business a few years ago after designing her own wedding invitations. Oprah Winfrey had discussed on her talk show how people could pursue their passions.

Raphael followed the advice and decided paper, design and stationery were her thing. Her personal results were featured on Oprah's show three years ago this month.

"I call it my 15 seconds of fame," says Raphael, who today wears a spring pantsuit with red, aqua and green paisley designs.

"I will never forget that day," she adds.

Salvador, who chats with Frank and Samalin after the hour-long calligraphy class, says she was happy to find a local class.

"It's something I've always wanted to do," she says.

"I want this store to survive because Mount Kisco needs it," she says, as she walks to get her coat at 11:46 a.m.

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IfYouGo

Paper Passions

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