



Send it with *Love*

Francesca Lee chats to Laura Chevalier about cards, Christmas and clichés

Hi, Laura, it's lovely to meet you. You started your personalised cards company Celandia in 2009 in your Battersea flat. Tell me a bit more.

I lived in a ground-floor property and converted the basement into a studio. It was a small space but I made it work. Some of my design inspiration still comes from the area; places such as Battersea Park feature in my stationery, even though my husband and I and our daughter are moving to Barnes. We got our cat Coco from Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, so it will always have a special place in my heart.

Where does the name Celandia come from?

Taken from my favourite childhood book, which my dad used to read to me, called *Enchantica*. It featured

Celandia, a winged summer fairy who inspired all with her charm, lightness of being and visual presence – the Celandia brand was conceived.

Can you tell me what you're working on at the moment?

Believe it or not, Valentine's cards! I'm basing them on old postcards and using slightly risqué quotes that will make people laugh. I'm also selling my Christmas cards, which I designed in the summer; being a card creator I have to work very much in advance. Although having said that, I received my first Christmas card at the beginning of November, which was very early.

What is it that you like most about this time of year?

Christmas is so exciting. Everyone loves to send



and receive cards – there's nothing like getting a heartfelt festive wish through the letterbox, and I also like how people use them to decorate their homes.

Where do you find your inspiration?

It may sound a cliché but everywhere. I was born in Hong Kong then moved

to London when I was 18 to study at the Chelsea College of Arts, so travel plays a big part in my designs. My family live all over the world, from my brother in Australia to my sister in Canada.

My latest range, which is called Palmier, is inspired by beaches and palm trees, while the kids' Safari Collection is based on all things Africa-related, including my love of elephants from when I worked in Botswana. Even my baby shower was themed around them!

Beautiful objects also play an important part – my auntie lives in St Tropez for half of the year and recently bought our daughter Olivia an old toy box from a brocante fair, which features a dancing clown. It's so unusual and I know that I'll use a photo of it on my designs in the future.

What would you say are your signature marks for your designs?

I adore the vintage look, but recently I've gone for a more contemporary edge, embracing new trends. Having said that, I'll always love wine and coffee stains, wax marks and torn edges; creating unique, timeless, well-travelled keepsakes.

What did you do before founding your company Celandia?

I started my career as a fine-artist painter, but in my first exhibition I remember hanging my paintings on the wall and although I loved it, it just didn't feel 'me'. I also worked as a freelance fashion photographer, interior designer and art director.



What do you think of the rise in digital designs such as e-cards?

For me, there's nothing like receiving a card through the post and having it on display on the mantelpiece for days on end, but I've embraced digital media and I'm happy to design cards for Paperless Post too.



You talk about your love of sending and receiving post; what's one of your earliest memories of this?

When I was younger and living in Hong Kong, my mum used to help me to pen postcards to my grandma in England. There's just something so magical about writing a message for a loved one from far, far away, and now I have all those letters to treasure forever.

What is it that makes your cards stand out from the crowd?

It's all about the story behind the stationery. I want someone to see my designs and find something that resonates with them. All my work is printed on luxury paper that's been produced in England – the look and feel are just as important as the design. The cards can either be left blank or made bespoke to the client and I try to deliver orders by hand if I can, although I have stockists in the Scottish Highlands so it's not always possible.

Is there a particular design that you've created in the past that sticks out in your mind?

I designed a full wedding stationery set, including wedding thank-you's for a couple who live in Battersea Square. I took a photograph of the square and aged it, created a London-style stamp mark and it had a monogram of their initials on it. It was so sweet, they even sent me one of the cards to say thank you for making them. You can't get much better than that! ■

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