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**CAWTHRON MARLBOROUGH  
ENVIRONMENT  
AWARDS  
2015**



## **JUDGES' REPORT BUSINESS INNOVATION PAPER RAIN PROJECT**

<b>INTERVIEWED</b>	Indigo Greenlaw and Wills Rowe
<b>DATE</b>	19 December 2014
<b>JUDGES</b>	Roger Kerrison, Karen Walshe and Bev Doole

### **INTRODUCTION**

Indigo Greenlaw and Wills Rowe came home to Marlborough in 2013 to build their business, The Paper Rain Project, which specializes in graphic design, Fair-Trade organic T-Shirts and skateboards made from recycled materials.

This is a diverse business mix with an underlying ethic of high quality, sustainable and creative products. The Award judges focused on the use of recycled wine barrels to make skateboards that are works of art and beautiful to ride as well.

Rather than buying new, Indigo and Wills are keen to give a second life to used materials. Wills dismantles old oak barrels and selects the best staves to form the boards while Indigo comes up with the design to be laser-etched into the wood. The board is topped off with crushed wine bottle glass to create the grip and the finished board is a truly Marlborough product, with the smell of wine to prove it.



The judges were impressed with the attention to detail that goes into all aspects of this business plus their highly crafted skateboards are a sustainable form of transport too.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The Paper Rain Project was set up in 2010 to make customized long boards out of old water skis. It has since expanded into graphic design, photography and Fair Trade T-Shirts.

Indigo is a graphic designer and photographer. Wills is an arborist and self-taught wood craftsman. Together they combine their skills to run The Paper Rain Project.

They grew up in Marlborough and still have strong family connections here – their workshop is on the family orchard and Wills makes the boards at his grandfather's wooden work bench. They appreciate the ease of doing business and developing networks in a small place, whether it's finding barrels to recycle or bartering design work for coffee.

They source their materials from within Marlborough as much as possible. The oak barrels come from Seresin Estate and provide strong and durable wood that Wills crafts into the boards, ready for Indigo's designs.

They have replaced the usual plastic grip tape with their own alternative: water-based sealant mixed with wine bottle glass crushed by local company Expleco. Leftover oak is made into platters, tea light holders and key rings. The metal barrel rings are generally passed on to a recycling company but they are always looking for alternate uses - one winery has used them as a component in planter tags.



Customers range from a commission for a bespoke board for a birthday present to a wine company seeking corporate gifts.

They have strong links to the wine industry with their target group aged 20-55. Their boards are popular with winemakers who find the winery floor space ideal for skateboarding.

As well as making new boards from old oak, they recycle old skateboards to create new hanging works of art.

The Paper Rain Project also creates limited-edition organic cotton T-Shirts that look cool and have a strong sustainability story behind them.

The plain T-Shirts are sourced from Free Set, a Fair Trade co-operative based in Calcutta, which takes women out of the sex trade and teaches them to sew. For some of the designs, The Paper Rain Project runs an online art competition that attracts entries from around the world. They are keen to encourage other artists and introduce more people to the Fair Trade approach to doing business.

Indigo and Wills do the screen-printing and sell the hand-numbered limited edition T-Shirts direct to the public or through selected retailers. The artists are given a fair share of sales through a print contract.

Building links with their community, especially school children, is another part of The Paper Rain Project. Indigo and Wills visit schools to talk about recycling and upcycling and show how cool it can be - much more than just returning glass bottles and aluminium cans.

They also provide their design services as sponsorship to other environmental projects such as Sustainable Coastlines, Dolphin Watch and Natures Tours, and the National Whale Centre.

## PROBLEMS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

There are limited options in New Zealand for greener alternatives to the products used to seal and provide grip on the boards. All boards must have a sealant that is UV resistant and durable, at the moment that means oil-based varnish. Wills and Indigo are investigating a source of more eco-friendly resins and varnish and are prepared to become the importer.

Under their oak barrel deck is the hardware – wheels, trucks and bearings. They seek high quality parts that last, rather than cheaper ones that need replacing. They also encourage customers to re-use previous set-ups if they are upgrading to a new board.

Potentially there is a lot of waste from an oak barrel, such as staves that aren't suitable for skateboards, the top and bottom circle of wood and the metal rings. Indigo and Wills have found ways to use all parts of the barrel, either in new products or to the metal recycler.

## SUMMARY

Wills and Indigo have built a business based on their strong belief in creativity, sustainability and working with their hands. Their complementary skills make this a strong partnership with Wills crafting the wood and Indigo creating the designs and managing communications.

Their skateboards are a fantastic Marlborough product and story, enhanced even further by their uncompromising demand for high quality design and workmanship. They are perfectionists and while this might mean slower growth at the start they are very likely to get greater satisfaction and success in the end.



The judges were impressed with their strong belief in building a sustainable, planet-friendly business and their consistency with this throughout the operation.

The Paper Rain Project is a welcome addition to the Marlborough creative scene and the region's environmental and business reputation. They are building up a community of like-minded producers, suppliers and retailers and their success should be an encouragement for other young people to come to Marlborough to live and develop a business.

It is hard work, but The Paper Rain Project is succeeding. Everything they do, from recycled skateboards to organic T-shirts, looks good, feels good, is good.

## SUGGESTIONS

- Focus on Marlborough-sourced materials. Investigate if discarded vineyard plastic (irrigation hose, beater rods from grape harvesters) and mussel floats could be 3D printed off as skateboard wheels. Approach the Marine Farming Association – they are working with Victoria University to recycle mussel floats.  
Joanne Taylor, [joanne@marinefarming.co.nz](mailto:joanne@marinefarming.co.nz)  
  
Consider finding a way to get the word 'Marlborough' on the finished board.
- Create a story for each board – tracking back to where and when the barrel was made, the Marlborough winery that used it, which variety of wine was made in it.
- Approach a wine journalist to pitch a story about Paper Rain's partnership with like-minded wineries – recycling oak barrels and connecting with skate-boarding winemakers to promote the winery brand, e.g John Saker, wine editor for Cuisine magazine, 04 475 4222, [john.miro@clear.net.nz](mailto:john.miro@clear.net.nz).
- As part of connecting with schools, make the most of your cool factor - design a helmet (cycling/skateboarding) and high-viz vest that kids and teenagers would be keen to wear. These could be sold through schools. Robyn Blackburn, Marlborough District Council road safety co-ordinator, may also be interested: 03 520 7400  
[Robyn.Blackburn@marlborough.govt.nz](mailto:Robyn.Blackburn@marlborough.govt.nz).