

LIFE & ARTS

A Trendy New Planning Tool: Paper

Paper planners, totems of a pre-digital era, are enjoying a surprising resurgence; 'paper is so calming,' says one fan

BY ELLEN BYRON

Shelby Abrahamsen, a 26-year-old lifestyle blogger with multiple social media accounts, lives much of her life online. Yet her favorite way to organize her schedule is old-school: She uses two paper planners.

"Paper is so calming," says Ms. Abrahamsen, who lives in Champaign, Ill. She has tried using her phone's calendar, but disliked constant interruptions from Facebook and Instagram notifications. "I'd find myself down a rabbit hole and not remember what it was I was trying to do," she says.

Paper planners, totems of a pre-digital era, are enjoying a surprising resurgence. On Instagram, #planneraddict has nearly 4.5 million mentions. Retailers including Target Corp. and Michaels Cos. are giving planners more shelf space as sales rise. There are even conferences for enthusiasts; one called Go Wild last month drew 1,400 attendees to Las Vegas.

Paper-planner fans say it's about more than just scheduling—for many, it becomes a form of self-care. Buying a physical planner can represent a tangible first step to organizing life's messy disorder. Planner covers, inserts and stickers play into that, with soothing or motivational sayings: "Today is another chance to get better" and "Plan a happy life."

Fans often have more than one planner. Dedicating each to a different subject helps people feel like they are compartmentalizing their many responsibilities, making them seem less overwhelming, they say.

Planning has become more emotional, says Julia Langhein, marketing director for Filofax, which is owned by FLB Group. "It's about a level of self-improvement, and getting the most out of your life—it's not just about that dentist ap-

pointment," says Ms. Langhein.

The brand, a status symbol of 1980s yuppies, has broadened its range over time. Its Clipbook line, introduced in the U.S. late last year, includes a new cover and ring design that lets users easily change and customize the planner's contents, Ms. Langhein says.

Inside the cover of her 2019 planner, Dawn Paoletta wrote a vow to stay loyal to it for the entire year. She hopes to make up for last year, when she used 15. "I am going to try to be a monogamist one-planner girl this year," says Ms. Paoletta, a 54-year-old office administrator in Narragansett, R.I.

To help fellow planner addicts, Ms. Paoletta since 2015 has offered planner boot camps that involve exercises to find the best-suited calendar format. If participants manage to finish the month without buying more planners, Ms. Paoletta sends them a diploma. Lapses, including her own, are common, she says, especially when life gets hectic.

"You can have a fresh start every time you buy a new planner," Ms. Paoletta says. "You don't have to wait for a new year."

Michaels started carrying paper planners three years ago and now devotes 25 feet of shelf space to more than 1,000 planners and accessories. "There's a therapeutic aspect, a wellness aspect and a productivity aspect to this," says Eileen Miller, Michaels' vice president of paper crafting and celebrations.

At Joann Stores, Rob Will, general merchandising manager of the company's craft business, attri-



At a Texas gathering of Planners Gone Wild, fans swap supplies and stack planners. Fans of the old-school organizers often own more than one.



butes rising sales to consumers craving a digital detox. "There is this step back to an analog mentality that a lot of millennials and Gen Xers have," he says.

"Everyone thought planning by hand was all going to go away with the digital world," says Amy Steel Vanden-Eykel, Staples Inc.'s vice president of merchandising. "In fact it's really rebounded."

Even users of digital calendars succumb to the lure of paper planners. Danielle Beckham, a 43-year-old outreach specialist for a medical insurance company who lives in Mill Creek, Wash., uses a calendar on her phone to keep track of her family's schedule and an Outlook calendar for work obligations. Nevertheless she has bought—but barely used—five paper planners that she keeps stacked on her desk, including schedulers for fitness, meal-planning, personal development and a network-marketing business. She hopes one day to schedule time to use them.

"People are always on the search for planner peace, which is finding the best planner system that works for you," says Jeanette Richardson, co-founder of Wild for Planners Inc., which organizes the annual Go Wild Conference. According to a 2018 survey of 2,545

members of the group's Facebook group, 29% say they own four or more planners.

Stephanie Fleming, co-founder of Me & My Big Ideas, maker of the Happy Planner, urges moderation when she speaks with planner enthusiasts. "In order to be as personalized for as many people as possible we have to have a lot of products, but that doesn't mean everyone has to use every one of our products," Ms. Fleming says she tells them.

Some 60% of users of the Erin Condren LifePlanner say they own more than one planner and only 16% leave them at home, inspiring the brand to launch a large plan-

ner tote this month. The bag, which costs \$120 in leather and \$60 in canvas, can carry multiple planners and includes pockets for stickers, which 95% of Erin Condren customers use, the company says. "There's something that makes it less daunting when you look at a dental appointment that's a cute sticker," says founder Erin Condren.

Enthusiasts say planners are about more than just scheduling—they become a form of self-care.

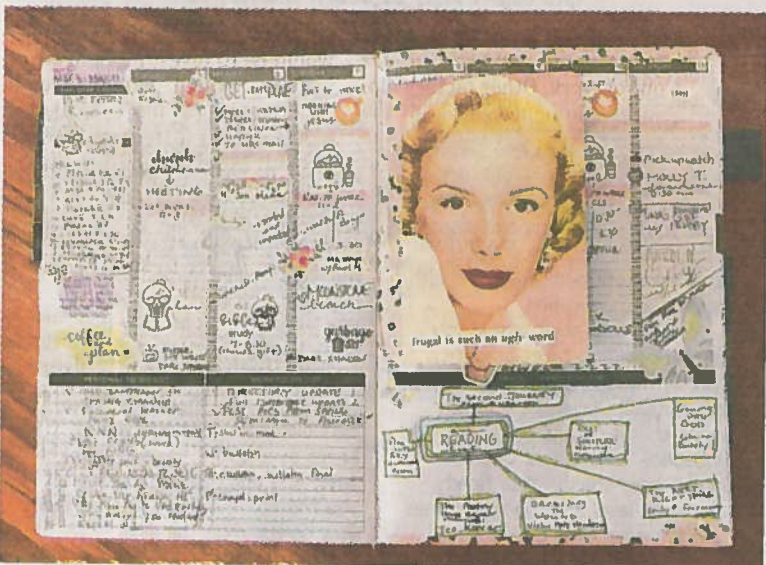
When Sylvia Valdez, a 37-year-old writer in Ignacio, Colo., wants to work on her four planners in

another room of her home or at the local library, she carries them in a large canvas caddy. "Sometimes I can't decide what planner I'm going to work on, so I take everything," she says of her collection, which includes calendars for her health, writing, personal life and her YouTube channel that is devoted to planners. Occasionally, Ms. Valdez falls behind schedule and finds herself "back-planning," or scheduling events that already happened. "It can help to record what we did as opposed to what we wanted to do," Ms. Valdez says. "People in the planner community call it a 'ta da' list."

When paper-planning fans get together, they often build "planner stacks," carefully erecting towers out of the planners they brought. But last month's Go Wild Conference skipped it because organizers still cringe at the debacle of 2017. They stacked 1,328 planners relatively quickly, but it took about three hours to return them, even with claim checks. "You can't let people just grab their own planners—what if they took the wrong one?" says Ms. Richardson. "We're never doing that again."

Louise Umeki, founder of PlannerCon, avoids planner stacks at her annual meeting of about 1,000 people, but tries to do them at all of the gatherings of 200 or fewer people she hosts across the U.S. throughout the year.

"It shows all the different types of planners there are out in the world," she says. "And that you can have more than one."



A week in Dawn Paoletta's planner. She finds it hard to stick with just one.

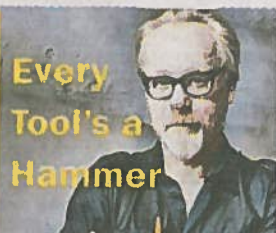
TINKERING

'Nerdy Science Kid' Adam Savage Moves Beyond 'Mythbusters'

BY DON STEINBERG

FORMER "MYTHBUSTERS" co-star Adam Savage hit the best-seller list in May with his first book, "Every Tool's a Hammer: Life Is What You Make It."

A godfather of the "maker"



took from it was the adventurousness and the exploration. We did not set out to make an educational show.

It was one of those few shows that kids would watch with their dads.

I was at BookCon in New York signing autographs and easily half