



RAW classic and organic hemp rolling papers

# Back to Nature: The Evolution of RYO Paper

*As the whole world is increasingly beginning to show concern for the environment, sit back, relax, and enjoy your self-rolled cigarette wrapped in eco-friendly paper.*

By Thomas Schmid

It is said that cigarettes were “invented” by British and French soldiers during the Crimean War (1853-1856) when they – lacking proper pipes – started rolling up their tobacco rations in small newspaper scraps. Whether this anecdote holds true or not, one thing is for certain: the practice of roll-your-own (RYO) has endured over the centuries. And while it may once have been borne out of sheer desperation, today, it has rather become the expression of a highly individualized lifestyle, where RYO fans consciously forego ready-made smoking products and instead opt to create their own cigarettes whenever they feel like it.

For true connoisseurs, it’s not so much a matter of rolling a cigarette for a quick puff either, but indeed a veritable – sometimes almost religious – ceremony involving top quality tobacco and purpose-specific rolling paper. A scrap torn from yesterday’s tabloid simply won’t do. A number of internationally successful companies satisfy

the hunger for sophisticated RYO papers and are constantly developing new products or adjust existing ones to stay on top of prevailing trends (and, sometimes, rather short-lived fads).

## Natural Materials Globally In Vogue

Perhaps the most pronounced trend in recent years is the emergence of a preference among growing numbers of RYO fans for more natural, unbleached paper made from organically grown fibers, most commonly hemp, but also flax, cotton, and rice, or even a blend of two or more of these. This trend has, of course, been fueled by a general rise in environmental consciousness worldwide. A healthy proportion of – for lack of a better word – “self-rollers” are demanding that their papers be entirely “green” – even down to the gum, which nowadays more often than not has to be natural arabica gum rather than synthetic goo.



#### RAW natural hemp and cotton perforated rolling tips

“The quality of the product, or at least the perceived quality of the product, has become very important [to consumers]. By this I mean that they want to use ‘healthier’ or ‘natural’ options such as unbleached papers or hemp papers, and the gums used ideally should be natural, too,” confirmed Ashwyn Daryanani, managing director of the aptly named The Rolling Paper Company, a member of Indonesia’s Anup Group. The firm jumped on the “eco-friendly” bandwagon by expanding its own, long-standing 33 *Tabac* brand, which is exclusively sold in Indonesia and India (Daryanani: “But we’re always looking for interested distributors in further markets.”). It recently launched a range of both bleached and unbleached hemp-based rolling papers under the brand’s sub-monikers *Blaze*, *Stamp*, *Green*, and *Black*. But, the bulk of The Rolling Paper Company’s business stems from supplying other labels. “We contract-manufacture for about 150 brands worldwide and sell in about 40 different countries,” said Daryanani.

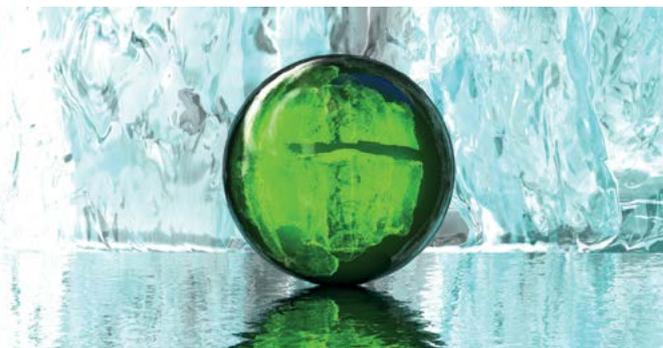
Meanwhile, French smoking accessories manufacturer Republic Technologies International SAS, a subsidiary of US-based The Republic Group, has also joined the trend towards eco-friendly papers. “We are currently pushing [our] OCB Organic paper range along with our paper filters, both of them biodegradable. The paper is manufactured from 100% organic hemp and is unbleached, which makes it a very natural smoking article. Of course all packaging is also made from recycled sources and printed with vegetarian inks,” explained Valérie Amiguas, the company’s marketing manager for new products. In 2013, the firm, currently represented in over 100 countries, further expanded its existing OCB range with its new OCB *Virgin* paper, which according to Amiguas is “the best natural unbleached paper in the RYO market today, the thinnest and softest unrefined paper that appeals to eco-friendly smokers [and which is] available in all sizes and formats.”

Joshua Kesselman, founder and director of Germany-based HBI International GmbH claimed to have foreseen this



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Lisa Esser, head of international business, Mascotte/Gizeh



Gizeh Super Fine

“green” trend as far back as a decade ago, prompting him to create natural unbleached papers under the company’s tremendously popular RAW brand, which enjoys a sort of cult following among discerning and highly individual connoisseurs. “Currently, our invention of natural unbleached RAW rolling papers is celebrating its 10-year anniversary,” he said, adding that “it’s [matured into] a trend across all [RYO] products, brands, and markets. As our world becomes more homogenized, there is a natural trend [among consumers] to seek out the authentic.”

Lisa Esser, head of international business at Dutch company *Mignot & de Block B.V.*, producer of globally renowned brands Gizeh and Mascotte, likewise highlighted “customers’ changed consciousness with regards to ecologically sustainable consumption” and added that both brands responded to this situation by introducing certified 100% organic, unbleached hemp papers some time ago. Furthermore, the company also offers heavier (18-18.5 grams per sq. m) hemp paper, which Esser regarded as a true innovation “because hemp paper is usually only available in very light and thin quality”. But she also judged the rising demand for unrefined rolling paper as “less of a trend, but rather a natural market development that our brands will have to continue taking into account in the years to come.” Yet, in the end, Esser thinks it’s “problematic to clearly define particular trends in our type of business.” Instead, consumers in every country had their own preferences and habits, she said. This held especially true for consumers who had taken to rolling their own cigarettes, which

was why Gizeh and Mascotte had always strived to offer as many paper varieties as possible “in order to meet any type of consumer preferences worldwide” – and regardless of prevailing fads or trends.

### Size Matters and a Nice Package is Important

Virtually every respondent *Tobacco Asia* interviewed for this article agreed that a second obvious trend goes towards king sized papers. One reason for this may be that regular size papers burn out too quickly, thus wasting tobacco. On the other hand, the larger sized formats tend to extinguish when left unattended and can be re-lit. “In the RYO segment we have primarily observed strong growth in the demand for king size products, not only in our traditional markets like Germany, France, and the Netherlands, but also internationally, where we have introduced our brands in various king size formats to satisfy different consumer preferences there,” said Esser. As a result, practically every manufacturer has either supplemented their existing brands with a range of larger format papers or developed new ones that addressed this demand.

Packaging has also experienced some very welcome revamping. New, fresh, vibrant, visually striking packaging now appears to have become just as important for promoting brand awareness as it is for rejuvenating the “dusty and old-fashioned image” some of the longer-established brands had garnered – at least among some consumers – for their comparatively bland and unimaginative presentation. In some cases, the packaging hadn’t changed in years, if not decades.

“All the main companies have updated their packaging within the last few years,” asserted Daryanani. Even his own company’s 33 Tabac house brand underwent an artful and modern redesign in both individual product packaging and display cases. Meanwhile, Gizeh went for a gaily colorful, eye-catching design that should pop out from store shelves. Yet, sister brand Mascotte decided to stick to a more subdued, softer color theme (at least in its organic paper range), perhaps to additionally emphasize its eco friendliness. Always at the forefront and a true industry trailblazer, RAW never took a lazy backseat when it came to presenting their products in the most appealing way possible. Its organic range packaging accordingly dwells on earthy colors that leave no doubt that this product is good for the environment. As a final touch – and not unlike a gift – each booklet or box is even neatly wrapped with a hemp string. Last but not least, Republic Technologies not only expanded its product range to organic papers, but also went the extra step of exclusively using recycled material and vegetable dyes in sprucing up the visual appearance of their OCB brand’s packaging.

## Diligent Flexibility and Intuitive Innovation

Large, long-established traditional brands may greatly benefit from being molded, curated, and advanced by a slick corporate management machine, their futures being decided in endless boardroom meetings. But the influence exerted by and the advantages bestowed through eager flexibility and out-of-the-box thinking often eludes them when it comes to marketing and innovation. Yet, this is exactly the forte of some of the other companies, where sluggish investment considerations and slow production adjustments are not generally a part of the everyday corporate-driven mechanism.

“One thing that sets us apart is our flexibility,” said Daryanani. “Most of our competitors have expensive, sophisticated, fully-automatic production lines and machinery, but they can only manufacture in limited sizes and formats. This makes their product development very slow as they’re unable to experiment with new textures and new ideas that do not make use of the base product, which is a normal booklet.”

For The Rolling Paper Company, on the other hand, it is well-practiced routine to quickly respond to customer inquiries and literally develop a new product from scratch in record time. The Indonesian company’s competitors usually have their manufacturing sites in Europe and find it difficult to set up labor-based production units, he



Gizeh King Size range

said. Furthermore, getting a different type of machine up and running to handle a completely new product also is prohibitively expensive for them. Development and testing can take years, and when they finally have their act together, the market has changed, according to Daryanani.

“This puts us in a far better position,” he said. “We can test out different packaging methods, materials, product ideas, textures, and designs within weeks and have a new product ready for the market within a month.” Currently, the vast majority



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of the company’s production output is for other labels, but even smaller orders by private customers are always welcome. “If someone wants us to design and produce customized rolling paper booklets for them, they can start their own brand for as little as US\$750 and have their order readily delivered to their door step,” he said. A great example for this type of business approach are the promotional booklets the company has produced for a slew of rock and pop bands. “A given band will contact us and order anywhere from 1,000 to 10,000 booklets to give away for free during their concert tours. Up until now we have manufactured for about 20 different bands.”

Besides laying claim to be the original inventor of unbleached rolling paper, he has since baffled the industry with some of the most remarkable new products that were clearly the result of extraordinarily imaginative out-of-the-box brainstorming: *ElementS* was the very first ultra-thin rolling paper made from rice, for example. *Juicy Jay’s* is a range flavored with the natural aromas of a whole basket of different fruits or berries, while *Brown Sugar* papers – despite their name – are infused with the mouth-watering goodness of chocolate mint or fine cognac. Whoever said smoking tobacco was boring? And if all of that is still not unusual enough, there is always *Klear*, a completely transparent rolling paper derived from 100% natural plant cellulose. “And I’m privy to tell you that the next products I [already] have in the pipeline will revolutionize the rolling paper market yet again,” he teased without disclosing further details. We can’t wait! Well, as long as it’s not scraps torn from old newspapers...☞

The Rolling Paper Company: 33 Tabac “Green” king size slim rolling paper from unbleached hemp fibers

“Paper is paper. The trick is to make more out of it” would seem like an excellent potential slogan for a trendsetting company like Joshua Kesselman’s HBI/RAW. Not that he would be in need for such a slogan, of course, because his and his development team’s creative juices are constantly flowing with unbridled power regardless.



33 Tabac “Blaze” king size slim rolling papers from bleached wood pulp