

Clever, not naughty: this local entrepreneur makes cards great again

by Kelcie Pegher

Vikki Gutierrez Isaacson finds inspiration in just about everything: she carries a little notebook around and sketches out designs based on color combinations she enjoys, or phrases that pop up.

The result are greeting cards like: “I love you more than reality TV.”

Another top seller: “This is a vintage tweet.”

Gutierrez Isaacson runs Playa Paper, a one-woman operation, out of her Redondo Beach home. She turned her hobby of making cards into a career in 2013, setting up an Etsy shop and creating cards for just about every occasion. Her cards, which run the pop culture gamut, come with a coordinating stamp from her collection.

“I would say a lot of the customers are like me. I make cards that I would like or that I would want,” she said.

Her cards range like her interests: Korean dramas, interfaith messages (think Chrismakkuh), the beach, cats, dogs and sushi.

Gutierrez Isaacson loves Selena Quintanilla, the pop-star who was famously killed in 1995 by the founder of her fan club. When Mac released a Selena special collector’s lipstick, it sold out almost immediately—so Gutierrez Isaacson made a card. The playful result is a drawing of the lipstick with lyrics from Quintanilla’s most famous song: “Bidi bidi bom bom.”

“All of my cards are cute and clever, but they’re not naughty,” she said.



Vikki Gutierrez Isaacson runs Playa Paper cards out of her home. photo by Araby Patch

She works to release cards seasonally. Recently, at her Redondo Beach home, she folded cards and scored them for the Lunar New Year, the year of the rooster. Paired with a rooster stamp from the United States Postal Service, she explained her process.

“This one came to be in about two or three days,” she said. “Then I play around with it, paint it out, draft it, see what my inspiration is. If it takes more than a week, I drop it.”

And some cards just take off. She made two cards during election season: “I love you even though you’re a Clinton supporter,” and alternatively, “I love you even though you’re a Trump supporter.” As a member of a divided household, Gutierrez Isaacson said she wanted to create a card that was sarcastic, but not negative.

“I don’t want something negative, I don’t want to disparage them. It’s not my style,” she said.

So she came up with a card a bit more

tongue in cheek—and it’s paid off.

“These are still selling. People are buying them for Valentine’s Day,” she said.

Card-giving is a seasonal business. December, Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day are the biggest season for card giving, she said. Over the years, Gutierrez Isaacson has worked to create a business for other kinds of customers as well.

CJ Jack, who works for a financial services firm in Hermosa Beach, said the cards help to give a personalized touch.

“Instead of Hallmark, or Trader Joe’s, or American Greetings or whatever, we like to support our local business people,” she said. “Her attention to detail is far beyond anything we’ve seen locally.”

She sells at the Hermosa Beach Farmer’s Market some weeks, but primarily through Etsy. Her customers range from 18 to 70, she said.

“I have customers that are young millennials that are really passionate about paper. They consider it vintage,” she said. “I think they also understand it really stands out.”

Though her business was borne out of years making cards for friends and family, it has changed over the years. This year, she was so busy around the holidays, she didn’t get a chance to send out Christmas cards. She made the Lunar New Year card instead, only to find it’s selling well.

“As an entrepreneur, I’m always busy because I always have ideas,” she said. “There’s always going to be a busy time.”