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Red Bee Wins It With Design

by HOWARD SCOTT
Pembroke, MA



Marina Marchese, owner of Red Bee Studio, shows a few of her bee products for sale. (© Red Bee Studio, 2003)

Marina Marchese, of Boston, Connecticut, is a designer who has created a bee product line based on her design skills. She said to herself, "If I'm a designer, I can design my own products." Keeping bees was an afterthought. Still, if the five-year business is any indication, her products will find a place in the marketplace.

Marina explains her road about path: "After graduating from the New York School of Visual Arts, I became a designer. I began designing appliances and accessory goods. Then, I illustrated books and products for companies like Microsoft and Fisher-Price. I spent four years in China working on product creation. When I lived there, I grew to appreciate the Chinese way of using natural medicines.

Nobody uses Ashi or aspirin because the Chinese do not ingest chemicals. Instead they follow a natural approach to healing. For instance, the cure for headaches is to rub camphor oil on one's forehead. One side lesson is get rid of angles. When I returned to my home in 2000 and decided to say hi, one thing I wanted to do was create natural products using my experience in China and my design skills. Honey by-products seemed the perfect choice. The bees are all natural. They're good for you. They're not imported. And they can all be produced by hand and in this country."

Once Marina decided to create a bee-themed business, she came up with the name, Red Bee Studio, based on a bee character she created named Roswell. Marina also decided on the name of her

cosmetic products. She called a Rosswage, which means red bee in Italian. But there's more to the story. Marina's family once owned a villa in Tuscany that's named Rosswage. Legend has it that all the inhabitants were once saved from a fire by the burning of honey bees. As if that could help to the story, Marina's charming cottage in Connecticut is painted bright red. Obviously, Marina's Italian heritage means a great deal to her. Consequently, her products contain many Italian influences.

Her Roswell character is sweet, gentle and very feminine. It has become her mascot, logo and main character on all her designs. Her design philosophy reads, "Charming design with a unique sting of color."

She then began to tinker with greeting cards, using Roswell. Exploring the rela-

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Marina started beekeeping recently and plans to increase her colonies this season. (© Red Bee Studio, 2003)



A sampling of beehive products that Red Bee Studio sells. Lip balms, salves, rubs, soaps and candles. (© Red Bee Studio, 2003)

tionship between drawings and playing around with the word "bee," Marina came up with several concepts: Love and the Loveliest, You Make Life Sweet, Peace the With You, Be Yourself, etc. Friends, who loved her work, were her first customers. But when she used a Valentine's Day card for a promotion in February, many business and individuals bought cards. That

success encouraged her to create a dozen cards and market her line. Five are holiday cards, five are specific and two are general. When Florida magazine, an international woman's publication that recently ceased publication, featured her cards on its pages, Marina received orders from all over the world. Customers included a foreign diplomat in Belgium, a Santa wrestler

in Japan, and a California retailer. Business really took off. That effort kept her busy for two years.

A next-door neighbor, Rowland Blackstone, who is a beekeeper, began selling cards on his web site (Blackstone also nudged Marina to give a try at keeping bees herself. She purchased a hive and placed it in her back yard. This year, she intends to begin two additional colonies.

Marina says, "Now I really appreciate the honey bee. The hierarchy of jobs, the organization of the colony, and the pristine hive are all amazing. And they produce honey, the most natural food I like to pull a chair alongside my hive and watch them. Their motives are calming. It is very powerful, which seems strange, since bees are so energetic. They make me realize that life is bigger than all of us."

During this time, she also began to experiment with beehive products. She discovered "ancient recipes" in books and on the Internet. She worked on designs and logos and packages.

Of course, her experience as a designer helped. She knew containers and sizes and how labels fit and how to package and how to price and what to charge for shipping. One by one, she came up with a line of lip balms, hand salves, foot rub, candles, soaps, and an amazing product called bee pollen tissue, which is tucked on foreheads to organically relieve headaches.

Her pollen and propolis soap has, and now, not been sold in the United States, even though it is very popular in other parts of the world. A personal favorite is her Rosswage and Honey Soap. She is especially fond of Mediterranean oils and scents, such as shea butter, lavender,



Hand-knitted rug and chairpad collection which use Red Bee Studio designs.

orange butter, and rosemary. These ingredients add a touch of coziness to her containers, as well as create a pleasant aroma.

Marina says, "Every product uses completely natural ingredients. Each item combines the purity of beehives with natural oils and scents that soothe the body and go deeper inside. This natural approach to living is, believe it or not, the appeal of my products."

Last year, the National Honey Board selected two of Marina's greeting cards to be their official holiday cards. She received a 1,000-card order. That has inspired a renewed interest in the cards.

Marina's marketing efforts are diverse. She sells products from her web site (www.redbeestudio.com). She sells through wholesalers such as Glenfield Foods, B Warehouse, and Rossmore Appliance. Stores around the country carry her line. Another outlet is the beekeeper neighbor's web site. She also participates in a weekly farmer's market in the summer and a high-end holiday craft shows in the winter. She also enters the New York and Atlanta trade shows. Another outlet is high-end spas. As of now, 51 outlets from around the country sell the Red Bee line.

Marina says, "My biggest push is stores. I'm a big fan of that's Bee's. I like how that business sells to shops all around the country. So, I am trying to always increase the outlets who carry my product. When I hear of a retailer with anything 'bee' in its name, I send them a product kit with samples. Often the store contacts Marina. When the owner of Stone Bay Trading Post & Mercantile Company, in Oregon, received a holiday card, she decided that she had to sell them. It was easy to contact Marina, because her phone number was on the back of the

card. From that beginning, Marina convinced the woman to try her cosmetics line. Product buyer Debra Barone, of Best Company, says, "Red Bee's cosmetics are fantastic. I use all of them. I like them because they're potent, not greasy, and they give off a really strong smell."

Marina also focuses her Roswell character on her products ranging from mouse pads to ready-to-put rugs to soaps. She receives royalty on the number of items sold.

Before product, Marina figures cost of materials, packing, labeling, time, and works backwards to a "fair market price." Perhaps her prices should be higher according to cost, but she wants to remain competitive. For instance, her labels are all full-color and that's expensive, but Marina's design instincts dictate that full-color is important. Thus, the 2 oz. jar of hand salve retails for \$12.00. She sells wholesale for anywhere from 30% to 50% off retail. Becoming a dealer requires a minimum order of \$1.00.

To help her turn out product, Marina relies on a cadre of high school and college students. Sometimes the red and orange is bustling with activity, almost like a beehive. A number of beekeepers in the area supply the shop with wax and pollen. Another help has been her SCORE representative, who has given her good advice as far as marketing product, pricing, and merchandising. SCORE is an organization of natural excretive that provides free consultation for new entrepreneurs.

In her first year of business, Marina's five products line has grossed \$22,000. That's not a fortune, but it is the beginnings of a solid enterprise. The way val-

ues is going, she fully expects to see major increases in the next few years.

Marina concludes, "The number of products coming out of a beehive is amazing. I'm just there to provide a helping hand. The bees do the real work."

Marina's Marchese's Design Rules

- Color is very important. Use color to attract or appeal.
- Your product must have a personality.
- The composition must be balanced, pleasing, visually exciting.
- The drawing should create something unique.
- You must believe in the product and get the retailer to be a believer.

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