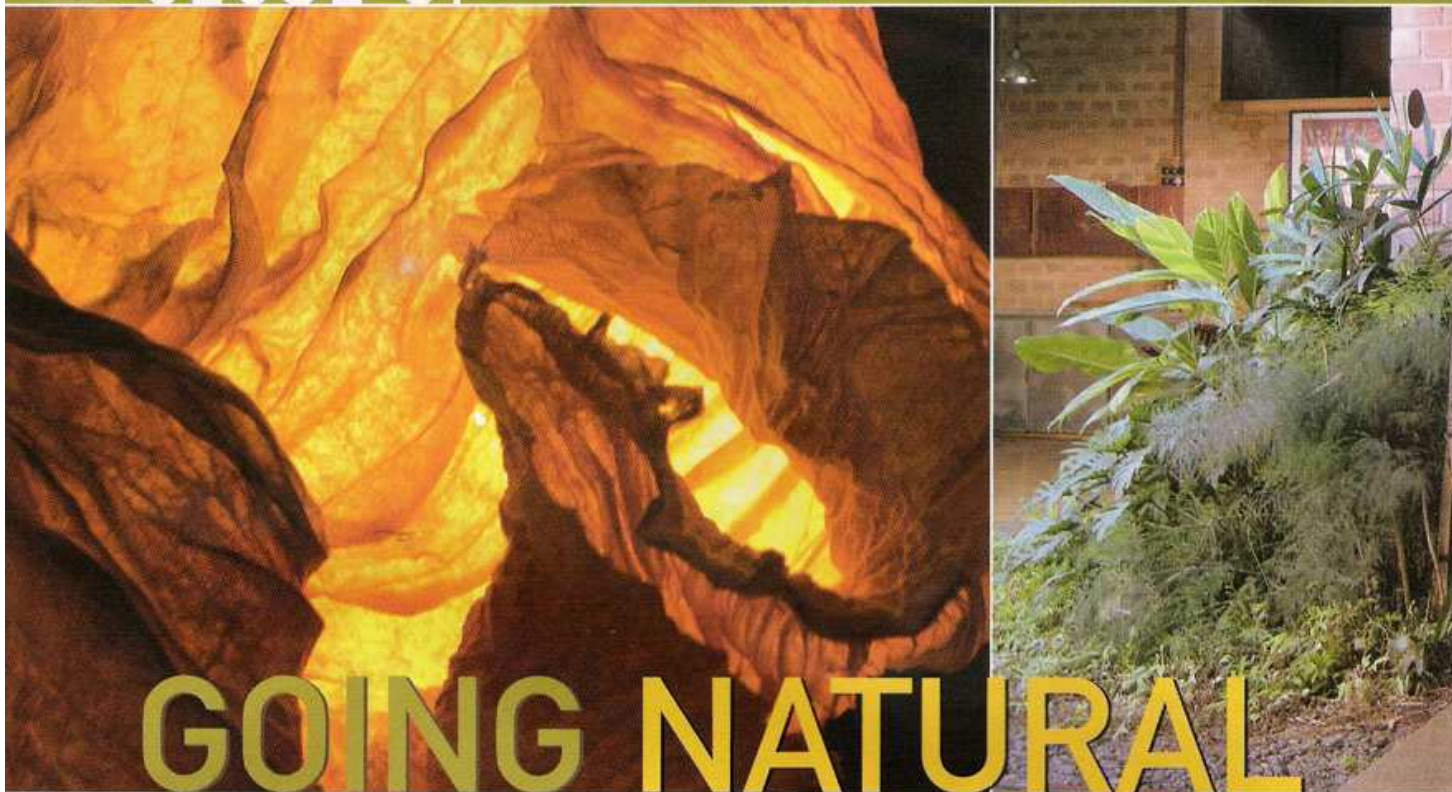


CLOSE UP



# GOING NATURAL

Jenny Pinto kicked up her filmmaking career to make beautiful, translucent and textured paper products recycled from agricultural and craft waste fibre like banana, sisal, mulberry, river grasses, pineapple and more, writes **Mala Kumar**

**Clockwise from above:** The soft quality of the handmade paper allows light to gently pass through; a view of the studio; book covers from organic paper; stone, paper and twigs make a lamp; Jenny Pinto



**IMAGINE THIS** commercial: A picture of decaying plants. Cut to a workshop where some material is being beaten to pulp. And finally a happy family sitting in the warmth of light seeping out from the gossamer shade of a stylish lamp. In just 20 seconds, you have an advertisement for a beautiful lamp made out of recycled materials. "Actually, lamps designed with handmade paper take a very long time to make," laughs Jenny Pinto, who gave up a hectic 17-year career as commercial filmmaker to devote herself to the making of handmade paper products.

Jenny makes paper the old-fashioned way—slowly, carefully and without chemicals in her studio that shares her

paper's unique characteristics. Like the handmade paper, the studio designed by architect Chitra Vishwanath is truly a part of nature. While the paper is made from organic wastes, the studio is made of mud blocks. The rough, earthy look of the studio is reflected in the delightful textures of the handmade paper that wait to be transformed in the hands of Jenny.

Jenny makes a unique range of beautiful, translucent and textured paper from agricultural and craft waste fibre like banana, sisal, mulberry, river grasses, pineapple and more. "I love the look and touch of beautiful paper, and enjoy exploring various natural fibres," says the designer. "Banana fibre is my preferred raw material. The inherent





“ I try and create interesting shadows, both within the paper, using various wet and dry techniques, and in the design of the lamps, books and accessories I make. ”

– Jenny

strength and beauty of the paper it produces, is a delight to work with. With light, it's sheer poetry. It seems to invite the light in and envelop it with warmth and sensuality. The magic of paper and light lies in the eloquence of shadows. I try and create interesting shadows, both within the paper, using various wet and dry techniques, and in the design of the lamps, books and accessories I make.”

Jenny started making paper only a few years ago. After she gave up filmmaking, she relocated to Bangalore from Mumbai with her cinematographer husband and her then six-year-old daughter. The Art Resource Centre in The Valley School, where her daughter started schooling, introduced







**From L to R and below:**  
Studio designed by  
Chitra Vishwanath; a  
hanging lamp; a floor  
lamp; twin pyramid  
lamps



Jenny to pottery. "I soon realised that pottery wasn't for me. While helping the school to start a paper-making unit, I discovered my passion for handmade paper. Paper making made me feel free to explore and to create," recalls Jenny.

Jenny then set out to learn everything about paper, travelled to countries which surprised her with tonnes of free access to the learning process, and came back to set up her own paper-making unit. "Used to seeing the power and potential of technology in my years as a filmmaker, the interaction with papermakers and other artists taught me to respect everyone who worked with hands."

Jenny's designs do not start *on* paper, they start *with* paper. They come from a mind that sees what nature does to material. "When I make paper, I allow it to dry naturally, observe what shape it takes, and then imagine a lamp or home product in that shape." The whimsical poetry evident in the shapes and sizes of

the lamps stir the senses, whether they are lit or whether one is seeing them in broad daylight. "A lamp must look good at any time of the day, and that is something I always strive to achieve," says the designer.

Stick, twigs and granite complement the paper of the lamps. The amazingly thin paper with its high fibre content is surprisingly strong. In fact, the strength allows the paper to be dried in the form of threads that are woven to form beautiful tapestry. Jenny has worked with textile designer Julie Kagti to design woven paper. "But the challenge lies in designing so that the paper mats look like paper and not like jute mats!"

Inspired by Japanese designs and the minimalist principles of designers from Denmark, Jenny plods on with her papermaking, akin to "cooking on a slow wood fire instead of the pressure cooker". The award-winning designer now designs products for specific



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interiors, often getting the advantage of interacting with interior designers and architects even while the building comes up. "Lighting points are hardly ever given the thought they demand, and the most beautiful lamp can look drab when placed in an inappropriate corner," maintains Jenny.

Happy with the popularity of paper in interiors, Jenny is taking paper beyond lights now. She is working with non-governmental organisations to promote livelihood through making handmade, organic paper. Truly, she sees the world through paper-tinted glasses.....

In Jenny's studio, some windows are adorned with paper pressed between sheets of glass—translucent paper that lets in light through the intricate veins of well-pressed pipal leaves embedded in the paper.

Says Jenny: "My inspiration is nature. Stone, bark, the desert, the sea, parched earth, the forest canopy, the forest floor..." So it was natural for her to dream of a studio that blended totally with nature.

Jenny dreamt of a studio far away from the maddening crowd, and bought a piece of land on the outskirts of Bangalore. Says architect Chitra Vishwanath: "The land was beautiful. The biodiversity was amazing, with a lake in front and all kinds of birds there. But by the time Jenny bought the adjoining site too, the city had suddenly grown to eat up every inch of land around, and Jenny's new site had a huge mound of debris from the apartments built nearby!"

"We left the debris as it was, and grew creepers on it, making it part of the landscape," adds Chitra. The design of the studio is totally in sync with the sensibilities of the papermaker and the architect. There are no electric fans, air-conditioners or coolers here—and there

Design follows material. Just like the handmade paper she makes, Pinto's designs too seem to flow naturally. Like the pattern (below) and the swirl (on right). There is no hint of artificiality in the studio as well. Notice the leaf imprint on the floor (bottom).





Close up  
GOING NATURAL

Jenny's designs do not start on paper, they start with paper. They come from a mind that sees what nature does to material



A wall lamp (above) and a floor lamp (right)



is no need for them.

The 3000-sq. ft studio is built with mud blocks. A judicious use of granite in all shapes and angles adds to the earthiness. Horizontal slabs for the steps leading to Jenny's office and store upstairs, vertical slabs along the walls, and stoneware birdbaths and planters go well with the brown of the mud walls. The simple cement floors get a touch of the exotic thanks to Jenny's idea of plonking huge leaves on the wet cement. "The leaf motifs have become so popular that I have repeated it in the homes of my other clients—but I always give credit to Jenny!" says Chitra.

Papermaking is a highly water intensive activity. It would have been a crime not to recycle the water. And so,

Chitra and her husband Vishwanath, both architects from CEPT, Ahmedabad, put the rainwater-harvesting system in place. Every drop of water here is either used to irrigate the organic garden, or conserved for later use.

The architects studied the process of papermaking thoroughly—some places become damp, some places need to be dry, some need light, some need darkness, and some processes make a lot of noise. The studio has a large work area where Jenny and her assistants can work on the floor. Long windows that reach down to the floor allow maximum light. Like Jenny's paper lamps that create magic with light, the studio too allows for an interesting interplay of natural light. ■