Upcycyling Interview - Ms Flinter

1. What was your very first piece of upcycling?

Wow first ever piece was an old tatty jewellery box I bought for 0.50p at Farmer Palmers Car boot Sale. It’s one of the best local markets for finding hidden treasures to upcycle!  Remember 'one man's rubbish is another man's treasure'

1. Which tools do you use?

The box was dirty and full of cobwebs so a little damp cloth - (I don’t use chemicals or sprays – they are bad for the environment and amazingly a little time and water does most.)

Once clean I used the amazing chemical free  'Frenchic Furniture Chalk & Mineral Paint' a chalk brush (they are round instead of flat - which means they hold more paint making your paint go further and more cost effective) I painted the box with two coats so the colour looked awesome. Once it was dry Frenchic has a natural Bee's Wax which you rub all over with an old tshirt to seal and protect the paint. You must always seal the paint because its Chalk - you know if you write on a chalkboard - you only need to make it wet and it comes off! So you must always seal!

1. Where do you find your resources? Do people donate items?

So the best places to hunt is Charity shops, second hand shops, online ebay, Auctions Houses are a lot of fun (even just to watch) and luckily many people know me and my shop so they come in and offer to sell items of furniture to me, or tell me they have a broken something and see if I’ll take the challenge to fix it or make it into something new! For instance a gentleman came in with a wet broken pallet - I dried it, fixed it with nails back together and painted a Christmas tree on it, then decorated it with other people’s broken Christmas decorations and made it my window display. I have also been given broken car tyres and turned them into a Christmas tree and won an award for most inventive Christmas window display! Instead of throwing anything away fast - stop - think- can I turn this into anything else?

1. Which items do you find the most useful?

I’m obsessed with chairs - all different wooden chairs all shapes and sizes! I love to paint them different colours and everyone always needs a chair so they become my best sellers. Many people don’t like the colour now of old wood so instantly think they have to dump their old (perfectly working chairs) for new WHITE ones.....this to me is a crazy waste - so I encourage people to give me their old brown chairs and I paint them for the customer to prove you can rescue not throw. Saving items any reusable items from landfill is very important. Teaching the public to save, rescue and restore will eventually save the planet.

1. Do you ever get stuck for ideas? If you do, where do you get your inspiration from?

I get stuck plenty of times - especially if a customer brings in an item broken that I’ve not used before! So if the answer doesn’t hit me as they walk in I say yes to the item and then leave it in a corner in my shop. Everyday I will walk past it and think mmmmm what could you be, what do you have? Strong sides but a broken seat? A lid but not legs?

Then I like to spend an evening in my shop after it’s closed, alone with my music on and I will sit with the item. We will stare at each other - sometimes I have to paint it a different colour still broken to find the answer! By then usually something silly comes to mind for another window display! Many people come in the shop and say 'what you doing with that then Eloise?' It’s fab to hear their ideas to and get people thinking outside the box!

For instance:  Wine bottles and jam jars hold food and drink. Once empty we throw these perfectly good glass bottles in the bin, why not paint them, decorate them and put a pretty flower or candle in them or even spare change and they become your mini savings bank. At my shop we have rescued over a 1000 bottles - painted, decorated and then sold them for table decorations - people have even ordered my bottles for their wedding receptions - how crazy is that ? It started as someone’s rubbish.

1. How did you learn the skills to upcycle? What made you want to start upcycling?

I am proudly dyslexic so I am creative, I naturally think differently and see things in a different way - this is my power to make things that are not the usual and then others find it of interest. The rest is ALL hard work and practice. Trial and error, hundreds and hundreds of times. I read a lot about wood, old wood, antiques, craftsmen in the old days and talk every week to carpenters, joiners, tradesmen etc as they know everything about 'how to make stuff'!!

I have a massive passion for helping our beautiful planet and proving not everything needs to be new or have a chemical in it. Learning about history and how we began shows us all we can do it. When my father was a little boy, my grandma in the war had no choice but to Upcycle everything! She didn’t even have the internet to look things up for ideas. Back in those days they were the best upcyclers, so we can too.

Skills are about learning, failing, trying again until you got it whatever it may be. My daughters laugh at me sometimes when they see me on the floor covered in wood and paint and tools and refusing to buy anything new but I’ve become stuck again. However eventually I get there and sell it in the shop and it’s an awesome achievement.

1. What is your favourite item you have made?

WOW good question - I LOVE convincing customers to give me their old horrid pieces of furniture and painting them so they fall back in love - but that’s not physical making something different. So in that sense it has to be my Tyre Christmas tree. It was up again this year and it’s so funny to watch people walk past going oh look another tree...then they stop in their tracks and say 'hang on' 'that’s old car tyres' 'amazing!’ I have lost count how many people took pictures of my tyre tree and the talks I did on it. The tyres came from a car garage - so then tyres have lost their thread and are not safe for the car they are removed and pierced once to not be used again. All car garages then have to pay for all old tyres to be sent to landfill and disposed of, causing more pollution. Therefore I asked a garage for 8 particular sizes. After 3months and collected them and cleaned them, then painted them green and put them upon each other with a fairy on top!

Someone said to me 'aaahhhhhh but after Christmas then they become waste' I panicked! I can’t have that I thought. So after talking to some gardeners I realised tyres are fab for potting plants in, and painted up they look fab for the garden as borders! So that’s what happened! Since then I’ve seen on the internet people turn them also in dog beds.....imagine that?

1. Which is your most popular item?

100% the upcycled empty wine bottles, and my handpainted chairs - (so many angles to paint they take a lot of time so people love them done by me instead of trying to do it themselves)

1. Do you have requests for certain things or do you make only 'one of a kind' pieces?

When people come into the shop they see things are different - it gives them the time and freedom to think of different things and ways of living - many people come in each week/month for inspiration and ideas, then when they are ready they will ask for advice usually on something broken they have at home that they haven’t yet thrown away - so together we work on trying to rescue it. Presently the shop has been in high demand for customers furniture painted by myself or lessons in 'how to' so my creation time has fallen. This in another aspect in life and business owning - getting enough time to fit it all in!

1. What has been you largest and smallest creation?

Smallest has to be upcycled slate tiles into coffee coasters

Largest again is my 8ft tyre Christmas tree and crazy pallet Christmas window displays. I also had assistance but turned two windows and a kitchen worktop into a blanket box which was cool.

1. Can anyone upcycle? YES YES YES
2. What did you have to do to win your Apple Award?

It’s all about being Eco friendly in every aspect you can find. I won gold because I have made the entire business ECO! I don’t use any chemicals, I found a paint that is environmentally friendly and in the UK. I don’t buy anything new or factory made or shipped worldwide or out of a catalog, everything is local and saved from landfill. It takes time, effort and it’s not fast and it’s with my bare hands, BUT it makes a difference.

1. Where and from whom did you receive your award?

Well this was the most surprising part for me - I was invited to the Houses of Parliament in London where a Green MP called me up on stage and gave me my award for Best Green Practice for my entire business Deja Vu Upcycling.

1. How did you feel at the presentation?

Very excited and emotional to think little me and my idea could make such a difference in the world that I received recognition from London and Parliament...... I didn’t sit still the entire day! If I’m honest I’m still in a little shock now !!

1. Was it difficult to achieve this award?

I’m still exhausted by the effort, but wow it was worth it. To not be lazy and use machinery or buy new! To sit and take the time to save is real effort and dedication. Our world now is so fast and we have all become so quick to give up on an item and replace. So to spend every hour every day saving everything takes a lot of will power. However if you have the passion for change you can achieve anything. Now my mission is even bigger than Parliament!

1. What tips and ideas could you give us to start upcycling?

Start small and always start AT HOME. We are naturally hordes - we have cupboards and drawers and lofts and gardens full of old, boring, dull or even broken things! Even old broken beads off your bracelets girls - find some garden string and mix them all up and make a new bracelet or even a windchime (add some shells too)! Boys got any old toy trucks? Fill with some dirt and put some herb or flower seeds in them and put the trucks out in the garden, make a little display, a mini flower village! Or even ask your parents if they have any old picture frames you could upcycle - get some paint and make them colourful once again and dry some Autumn leaves that are still on the ground to make as the picture.

1. Do you have any plans to expand your business?

First expand your mind! Dream, work and grow! Yes 100% we NEED to save more. At present I’m only saving old furniture - I need to expand this to the outside too/ I’d love to look into obsolete machinery as SO big to dispose of, so huge waste saving necessary.

1. Would you be able to come into school and help us to launch our upcycling competition?

Yes of course I’d love to help!