



HAND MADE  
SOAP

# How *to* Wash WITH JOY

One local couple's new business is hewn from a desire to make sure that mindfulness, luxury and socially-minded commerce are not mutually exclusive. In the creation of their handmade, cold-pressed soap ranges from their home-based business, Alex Tuppen and Kelly Henderson are on a mission to remind us of the quality, sustainability and pleasure of solid soap and to encourage us all to Wash with joy!

**Words: Rob Davis.**

AFTER ALMOST A YEAR of living in a global pandemic where hand-washing has become a most effective preventative to the spread of Covid-19, hand-soap has never been more in demand, say soap-artisans Kelly and Alex.

Equally, however, the regularity with which we are washing has perhaps highlighted more than ever before the need for good quality soap to avoid the host of damaging effects that over-washing with chemical laden gels and liquids has on our skin.

These include dryness, cracking, soreness and flare-ups of common conditions such as eczema and psoriasis.

Top off the pandemic with the existing climate and waste crisis caused by damaging consumer and manufacturing habits and we find ourselves re-evaluating how and what we buy and looking more closely at the impact less holistic habits are having on our health and on the well-being of the planet we share.

"We named our company, 'Oname,' which is pronounced like the two words, 'Honour Me' to reflect our commitment to better health habits for ourselves and the planet," explains Kelly, teacher and soap-maker. "We thought really hard about our company message –



'Wash with Joy!,'” explains Alex, a graphic designer and creator of the soap-making equipment and packaging.

"We create natural soaps, with ethically sourced, good-quality, skin-kind ingredients that are made to be used and enjoyed."

A world apart from the old, hard, cracked and unpleasant soaps of the past, Alex and Kelly bring solid soap up-to-date with their modern take on naturally coloured and scented bars.

Sold naked or in uniquely styled recyclable wraps, these soaps offer a wider pleasure. Alex takes 'eco' beyond the utilitarian brown paper designs that they find so uninspiring, and focuses his design skills on custom made,

playful, fun and colourful packaging. "Our designs are what makes our soap different," says Alex. "Part of the work, and the creativity of the brand, is constantly thinking of new ways to present them."

An artist at work, Alex also screen-prints their designs onto the interior of their four bar gift boxes. "We want our soaps to be a pleasure, a surprise to open, something exciting," he says.

Soap-making was a new challenge that Kelly first undertook after receiving a book from Alex for Christmas 2017 called *No More Plastic* by Martin Dorey, founder of the Two Minute Beach Clean initiative.

The book gives hard-hitting facts that really opened the couple's eyes to the devastating environmental effects of single-use plastics today. Martin Dorey exposes plastic bottles and coloured tops as some of the most frequently washed up waste, choking our oceans and the beaches today.

"I was looking for ways to eliminate the single-use plastics from the weekly shop, and the book suggested making your own soap," says Kelly. "An intensive year of soaping and prototyping soaps, packaging and branding followed." >>

**Main Image:** Kelly and Alex Henderson set up Oname to produce ethical cold-pressed soap to enable locals to 'wash with joy' each day.

## COLD-PRESSED ARTISAN SOAP

>> “We showed our initial designs to my yoga students and our families in October 2018 and had enough encouraging feedback to continue. “We were walking the South Downs Way on New Year’s Day 2019 when Kelly and I started talking – *really* talking - about the possibility of running a business together.” says Alex.

They focused first on deciding what would become the cornerstones of the business; plastic-free, natural, responsibly sourced and cruelty-free. “Having our ethos clear, really helped make decisions,” explains Kelly.

“Based on our cornerstones, we always avoid synthetic fragrances and chemicals, we source essential oils from suppliers in Nottinghamshire – who send these to us without plastic packaging – and we ensure our ingredients are Leaping Bunny certified.”

As consumers become more mindful, these are the kind of assurances that eco and socially conscious consumers today look for. As a sort of pledge to their customers, they have printed their cornerstones on the four points of the wraps that fit around the soaps.

Making soap is an age-old craft; there are records dating back almost three thousand years to Babylon where an early soap-like product made of water, alkali and cassia oil was used.

“Soap-making is an art and a science and there was so much to learn.” Kelly says. “It required a year of research, practice and experimentation to refine our initial recipes,” she says. “You learn as you go like any craft that you commit to.”

As Kelly’s confidence in ‘soaping’ grew, the couple began to batch larger amounts of soap. “While the look and feel of our brand is deliberately bright and modern, we really are artisanal in scale.”

“Alex has designed and built the tipper, the cutter, the moulds and all our soaping equipment. When you have the skills to take your own business in your own direction it can feel really liberating,” explains Kelly.

From ancient soaps to Oname’s modern artisanal soaps and on to those mass-marketed, all soap comprises the same basic elements – a solvent, an alkali and an acid which are combined in a process known as saponification. “We use plant-based oils as our acids, water as our solvent and Sodium

Hydroxide as our alkali.” explains Kelly. “Very simply put, the acids are gently heated, and the alkali dissolved in the water. Once cooled, this is carefully combined with the warm oils and stirred until it thickens or reaches what we call ‘trace.’ Scents and colours are added before pouring into a mould to cool and harden.”

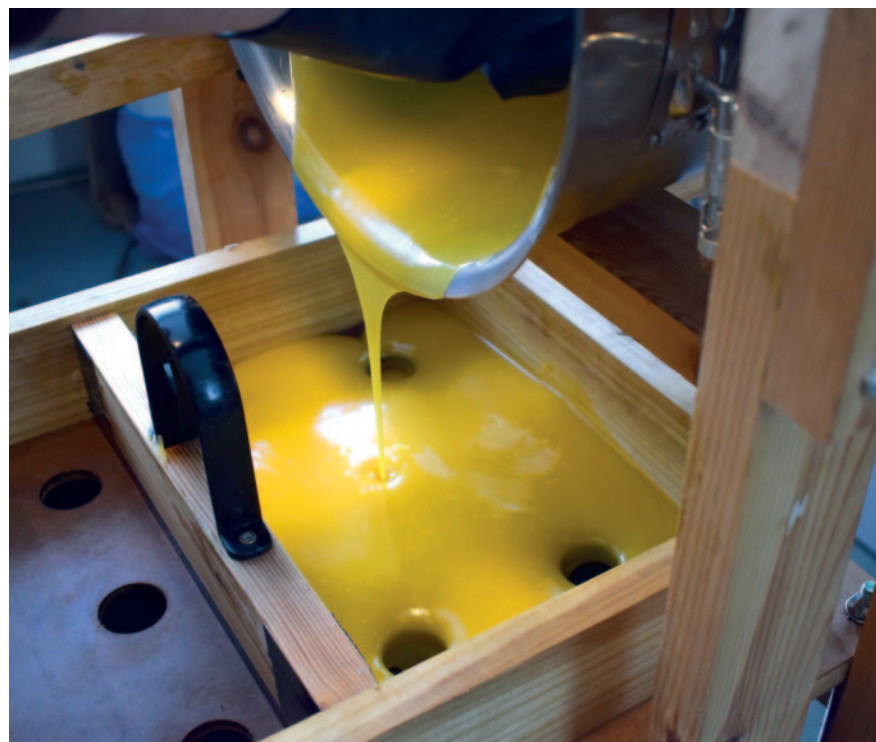
While it sounds straightforward enough, we all know very well that there is soap... and then... there is *soap*. Childhood memories of the medicated scent of coal tar soap might trigger a degree of nostalgia but not necessarily of a great pleasure. Perhaps the huge transparent bars of Pears soap are a memory that takes you back.

The hilarious article in The Guardian in January 2011, entitled, ‘This Pears just won’t wash!’ pitches nostalgic memories of a soap bar that smelt of clean linen with the grave reality that Unilever has changed the ingredients and that now, ‘this bar was more reminiscent of burning rubber and recycled cooking oil,’ with ‘an ingredients list to rival Sunny Delight.’

This is not the kind of uninspiring soap that Oname produces and highlights the

difference between poor quality mass-produced soaps compared to hand-crafted, small-batch soaps made with thought, care and finer ingredients.

Unlike early soap recipes using just one oil such as Castile soap, Oname’s first range of soaps – named Essentials – comprised Calming Lavender, Purifying Tea Tree and Cleansing Charcoal, and are made from a fine blend of Olive, Sunflower, Coconut and Castor oils.



**Above/Right:** As a socially-minded enterprise, Kelly and Alex will donate 25% of their profits from the sale of their Oceans range to the Two Minute Beach Clean project, which aims to remove plastic and other litter from our seas.



Kelly combines oils to create creamier lathers. “Sulphates such as Sodium Lauryl Sulphate (SLS) are responsible for the lathers that we so enjoy in our shampoos and body soaps but SLS is a detergent that strips the skin of natural oils and often causes dryness and irritation. The creamy, natural lathers in Oname soaps, by contrast, moisturise and protect the skin.”

Inspired by gardeners, their two exfoliating soaps, Reviving Rosemary, for hands and body, and Invigorating Citronella hand scrub, each use ground walnut or poppy seed as natural exfoliators too.

The couple’s Oceans range which includes Black Pepper & Basil or Palmarosa, Lavender & Geranium Rose bars, are richer blends made of six base oils, with added blends of essential oils and clays, each offering benefits to the hair, face and body.

Coconut oil, for example, has really great cleansing properties while also hardening the soap bar. Softer, lighter oils like Olive or Almond oils are known for their cleansing and conditioning properties.

“One of the nice things about our products is their versatility,” says Alex. “We’ve made solid soaps to wash the hair as well as the body, bringing simplicity back to the bathroom. I just like one soap for everything.”

As the trend for solid shampoos gains momentum, Kelly emphasises that commitment is needed when swapping to solid shampoo. Because conventional hair products are often chemical laden and can strip the hair of natural oils, it can take a month or so for the scalp to adjust to its natural oils again. For many, bouncier, thicker locks do make it worthwhile.

Kelly *superfats* her soaps to make them extra softening, a method in the recipe process of carefully calculates a percentage of the oils to remain unsaponified so they benefit the skin when washing.

“When I taught through the first lockdown, I actually observed how cracked and sore the hands of some of the children and staff were becoming due to washing with gels so many times a day. I gave each child mini soap and took in a variety of the Essentials range for staff. They loved them because they cleansed and soothed their hands but without drying the skin.” >>



## COLD-PRESSED ARTISAN SOAP

“Scent is pleasure,” explains Kelly, “And feedback from our customers is that they love the way our soaps smell!”

One of the cornerstones of the business is that the key ingredients are natural. This helped Alex and Kelly to decide they should scent the soaps with essential oils, even though these are a more expensive addition compared to synthetic fragrances.

“Scent is real pleasure,” explains Kelly, “And feedback from our customers is that they love the way our soaps smell.”

“We’ve blended some lovely oils into our soaps, like Cedarwood Atlas and Clary Sage – two very calming oils – and we encourage our customers to inhale the lathers as they wash to really enjoy the whole experience of washing with our soaps.”

Stripping off for the New Year, the couple, tongue in cheek, have launched their new Embrace Naked campaign, offering their current soaps without wraps.

Customers can choose any four soaps to be delivered in a screen-printed box. Aware of the current need for home-delivery, the couple have planned a subscription service from May, also offering a simple yoga-

inspired Breathe, Focus and Stretch activity in a smaller box holding four 75g soaps, made to fit through the letterbox.

“We’ve had some really amazing feedback from local customers in the Barleythorpe and wider Oakham area wanting to repeat buy, that it seemed a sensible move forward.”

In support of the efforts made by the Two Minute

Foundation, Alex and Kelly have also committed 25% of the sale of their Spearmint & Peppermint soap bar to the foundation, again building on the company’s initiative to go beyond making soap and make a difference socially too.

The goodness of these natural soaps and the playful packaging are a light reminder to us all to join the plastic clean up and make sure that we can all *Wash With Joy!*

■ Oname soaps are available by mail order from £4-£6.50/ea. Four-bar boxes of gift soaps £22.50. For more information see [www.oname.uk](http://www.oname.uk).

