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As told to Lauren Spear, 1879 words.

Tags: Candlemaking, Art, Business, Beginnings, Money, Inspiration, Multi-tasking.

# On prioritizing what you care most about

## **What is your relationship with beeswax like?**

I think beeswax is truly incredible. I fell in love with beeswax about six years ago when I was living in Prince Edward County, and I started visiting an apiary there called Honey Pie Hives. I don't even know if I bought candles from them, but I was definitely buying honey. Eventually, I was like, "I want to try making candles," because a friend was getting married, and I wanted to make her something special. So, I bought beeswax, melted it down in my kitchen, and here we are.

## **You use both silicone moulds and do free-form candle making. Can you explain the difference?**

I got into silicone mould-making shortly after I started making candles because I had this fantasy of a perfectly spherical candle. Well, not perfectly spherical—a little flat part on the bottom so that it could stand freely. I went looking for a mould and couldn't find anything so decided to make it myself, and ever since I've been making all of my own moulds and experimenting with different shapes. For the other methods, I guess there's kind of three ways that I do it. I make tapers, which don't require a mould and are instead dipped over and over again in a pot of hot wax. I have another method where I pour layers of wax onto a wick that's attached to a rig hanging from the ceiling. And then sometimes I'll sculpt a candle just using wax that's kind of half hardened, and then I can kind of make any form at all.

## **I feel like, over the years, your creative process has changed quite drastically. Can you explain what that process is like when you're developing a new candle?**

It happens spontaneously, and kind of randomly, I would say. I think in the beginning I was just really learning the technicalities of making candles, watching YouTube videos, and reading books, and was quite focused on the technical side of things. And then, as I gained a better understanding of the nature of beeswax, how candles burn, and all of that, I felt more able to experiment. I experience random, uncontrolled bursts of creativity that feel like an energy rising up in me, and then I go to the studio, and get into a zone and just make things.



**Have you ever felt like you want to create something different, but you can't harness that spontaneity?**

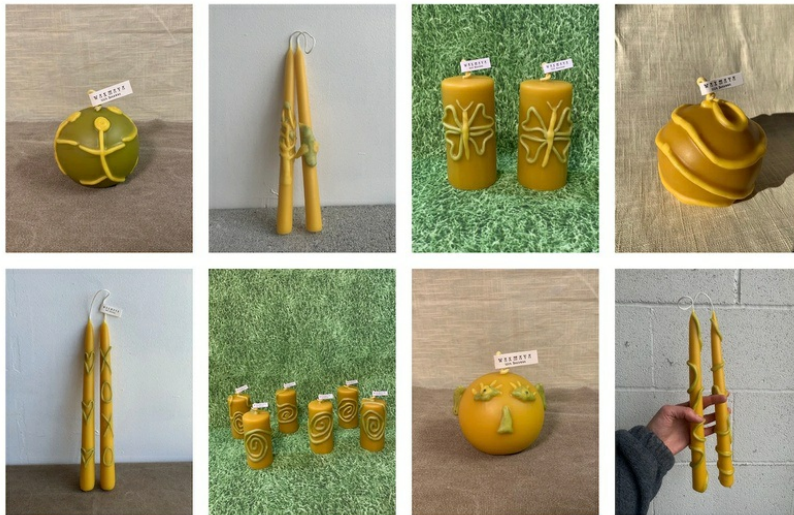
Yeah, definitely. My creativity is sometimes squashed by the fact that my wax-related creative output is also how I support myself financially. A lot of the time, the logistical business side of things really feels like a hindrance. Sometimes I'm just rushing to keep up with orders and I'm like, "I would like to make something new, or experiment," but then all of my energy is consumed by the backend. That I would say is an ongoing challenge.

**You do everything yourself, from candle making to shipping, to doing home deliveries. How do you feel running this business solo?**

I like it. I'm quite a solitary person, and especially with this creative process, I think I work well alone. I do get overwhelmed sometimes though, balancing all of the tasks required to make Waxmaya work. I think collaboration is really important and that it's a good practice to open up my workspace to people because I think I'm scared of that a little bit.

**Where do you find support when trying to find a balance between creativity and business?**

I should probably seek that out more, actually. An upcoming goal of mine is to have somebody to help me with the business side so that it doesn't feel so overwhelming and consuming and so that I can focus a little bit more on the creation. It feels like a little bit of a luxury, in that I'll have to pay somebody or offer them something but I'm at a point now where that feels like an important next step. I'm excited about that.



**A lot of people share photos of your candles in their homes, either taking a bath or having it lit with dinner. How does it make you feel to see your candles in strangers' homes?**

Oh my gosh, it makes me so happy. I obviously have no control over what happens with what I make after it leaves my hands, so people it's very fun to see the different roles that candles play in people's lives. For me, candles can be so many different things depending on the context, most often grounding and meditative or celebratory. And so, when I see people in their bath or home with a beeswax candle lit, it fills me with joy, to know that a candle that I have made could be part of someone taking care of themselves or others in some way.

**You mentioned the first apiary that you worked with was in Ontario, and now you've switched to one that is more local in Quebec. How did you find that?**

When I moved the candle-making operation back to Montreal, I was wanting to diversify my wax sourcing, and work with smaller farms, so I reached out to friends who work with bees and made connections with beekeepers that way. There's this older couple in Freighlighsburg in the Eastern Townships that I work with very often. And then this lovely beekeeper, Martin, near Shawville. I'm always looking for beekeepers who want to sell wax, if you're out there get in touch!

**I feel like, from my perspective, your business is very local and you've kept it that way intentionally. I know that you've had some offers to kind of expand, but you've kept it small. Can you explain that choice?**

Yeah. I think because this all started for me with the bees, and beeswax, that's the most important part of all of this, the material. I really care about bees, and I don't want to be using materials from bees who are exploited, or who are being tended to by farmers who don't care and engage in exploitative practices. Basically, the bees and the beekeepers fully dictate how big or small my business can be. I think inevitably when you grow a business to a certain size, you have to start compromising your values, and I don't want to do that.



**I feel like you're really involved in Montreal's community, with selling to local businesses and being in local pop-ups, et cetera. How do you feel working in Montreal? Do you feel like the city reflects your art practice at all?**

I've been able to establish a stronger sense of community here in Montreal through Waxmaya. I get to meet and be inspired and mutually supported by a lot of people that I wouldn't have otherwise met were I not doing the waxwork. People who buy candles, other craftspeople and artists, or beekeepers in the city. And that feels really nice. I've been here for a very long time and sometimes feel like I want to escape, but generally, I feel very supported here, my studio is here, it works.

**What is your relationship with your studio?**

I love my studio. Up until a year and a half ago, I was working out of my apartment and was forced to leave by the landlords, but ultimately glad it happened because it's very good for me to have a separation between home and work. I tend to work too much so the separation is helpful, and being around other people who are doing tactile creative stuff is really inspiring to me. I am now able to make a huge mess in my workspace too which is helpful and have different people come through for visits. It's a special place for me.

**Do you have a set schedule for yourself?**

I do. I mean, it's loose, but yeah, I do. I try to create a little structure for myself. And I really try not to work on Sundays. That's sometimes hard to enforce, but I have a Sunday rest policy that I try to stick to. So, that's something.

**I feel like your work involves your body so much. How do you care for your body?**

Oh my gosh, it's hard. My back and wrists are often aching, so I take warm baths and stretch a lot. I also try to get a massage maybe twice a year as a little check-in, a refresher. I've been told by bodyworkers that with the repetitive movements that I do, I need to be very careful to stretch and tend to my body so, I'm trying.

**Apart from Maya care, on your website, and through your Instagram, you talk a lot about candle care. Can you explain what candle hugging is?**

After you've burned your candle, and there's a little bit of warm wax on the outside, you just take both hands and kind of do a mini hand hug. Caressing the outside of the candle pushes the melted wax a little bit into the center, and that creates a much more even burn. It will make your candle last much longer. I didn't know about this for so long, and now that I do, I highly recommend it. And it's also just a nice way to be more intentional, and really build a relationship with these special objects.

**Can you tell me one thing that you learned through your practice, and also one thing you're currently learning?**

When I first started making candles, I was really concerned with making sure that every candle was perfect. I've tried to let go of that which has been a huge process that I think ripples out into other parts of my life in a really nice way. I remind myself that nothing is perfect and these candles are just little manifestations of the earth in some way and that thought is really freeing. Something that I'm

currently learning is how to balance business and creativity. I think that that's my biggest ongoing challenge.

**What advice would you give either to other people or to yourself?**

Stay connected to yourself and your community. If you prioritize what you actually care about, and your authenticity, then everything will be okay. That's kind of a guiding principle for me in all of this because Waxmaya just evolved really organically and I just kind of did, and continue to do what feels right to me whether people like it or not. Try to tap into your truest self and follow that, instead of trying to appeal to what you think others want you to be. Maintain connection and care for yourself and others. Maybe that's it.



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squash (the vegetable)

Rehearsals for Living by Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

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Maya Inglis

Vocation

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