



## Green Papers: A Review of Three Options for Environmentally Friendly Print Making

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The production of photography has never been an environmentally friendly process. Photographers have often balanced the massive resource demands of the medium by using their images to champion environmental and social causes.

When it comes to natural resource use and pollution, digital photography is an improvement over traditional analog photographic processes, but it isn't perfect. Electronic waste is one of the major environmental issues of our time and photography equipment and computers play a major role in contributing to this problem. One piece of the digital production pie, print making, has begun to experiment with more environmentally responsible alternatives.

I have chosen three unique and very different papers for this simple overview. All of the papers were tested on an Epson R2400 printer using color profiles provided by the manufacturer (when available). This is not a very scientific review; it is a touchy-feely experience and not based on any technical experiments

### **Red River Paper Company Green Pix**

Red River Paper Company is a small paper company from Dallas, Texas. They produce a variety of high quality inkjet papers and Green Pix is no exception. Green Pix is made from 100% post consumer waste. The paper's smooth coating is applied to a bright white, archival base. Unfortunately, the longevity of the paper can't be determined because Red River can never know exactly what has been recycled and put into the paper.

Green Pix has the same look and feel as other heavyweight, matte photo inkjet papers. The visual print characteristics are very similar to Epson's Premium Presentation Matte, with nice deep blacks and a clean image. I haven't noticed any surface imperfections that distract from the printed image, which can be common with recycled paper. The color profile I downloaded from Red River's website produce an accurate and saturated print.

Green Pix is an excellent choice for a proofing paper or for making high quality prints for home or family. However, where this paper truly shines is as a greeting card paper. The print quality is excellent and the back of the paper is printable and writable. The thickness (254 gsm) feels sturdy and professional and creates a card worthy of framing. Red River sells a complete line of Green Pix greeting card packages that include matching recycled envelopes. Green Pix is of course, available in standard sheet and roll sizes too. For many fine art photographers, the unknown longevity of the paper out weighs its green production, which is a disappointment because the paper has plenty of potential.

### **ViaStone Premium Inkjet Photo Paper Glossy**

I stumbled onto this paper while shopping at my local office supply store. I was so intrigued I bought a box. ViaStone claims to make all their paper through a non-environmentally damaging process that combines rocks and minerals. They also boast that they don't use up any natural resources or produce any hazardous waste when creating their "stone" paper. I couldn't help but wonder what stone-mineral process doesn't involve some kind of mining and resource extraction. I contacted ViaStone with this question but didn't get an answer.

The surface of the paper is what most photographers would call luster or pearl - not glossy like the box claims. It is a thin, flimsy paper that feels synthetic. It doesn't have any characteristics of paper, or stone, for that matter. ViaStone's website doesn't offer any color profiles so I used Epson Ultra Premium Luster. I was surprised with the color, though the image did have a strong blue cast. It was pretty accurate for not using a dedicated profile. The image was sharp but the shadows were horrible, blocked up and grey with a terrible milky reflection. Yuck!

Personally, I wouldn't have any use for this paper. I don't think I would even print a snapshot with it. And even though I am still intrigued that this paper is made without any natural resource destruction, even if ViaStone could prove their claim, they would still have to improve the image and aesthetic quality of the paper in order for me to take it seriously.

## **Hahnemuhle Bamboo 290**

There are few companies that can claim to be over 400 years old and Hahnemuhle is one of them. They have been in the paper business since 1584, so you could say they have some experience. Hahnemuhle is known as one of the world's leading fine art paper makers and their line of papers is used by some of the world's leading photographers. Hahnemuhle has tried to keep the production of their papers as "green" as possible and now they have created their first "green" paper made from bamboo. Bamboo is a grass, which is considered an excellent renewable resource because of its quick growth. However, bamboo cultivation can be just as destructive as wood. This is especially true if wild bamboo is being harvested. So I contacted Hahnemuhle and asked them where they purchased their bamboo and how was it harvested. I got the run-around and never got an answer. But for now, I am going to give Hahnemuhle the benefit of the doubt here because of their long record of using responsible sources for their wood and cotton and for their commitment to the environment.

Bamboo 290 is rag paper that has a natural white base and is very, very thick (290 gsm). As a paper itself, it is absolutely gorgeous. It has a textured, moon-like surface, the roughest surface I have ever used. I personally have never liked the really textured papers, preferring a smooth or semi-gloss surface, so I had a rough time with it (no pun intended). This may also be the reason why it seems super thick to me. Most textured fine art papers are thick and I am not a frequent user of them.

At this moment, Hahnemuhle only offers color profiles for Bamboo 290 for a small selection of printers and the 2400 is not one of them. This is such a high quality, world class paper that I decided I would make a custom profile for it, since it deserved to be tested properly.

The paper's warm base wasn't super obvious during my first examination, but when I compared it to other papers and to the bright white board I usually mat prints with, its cream color was very apparent. Honestly, the work I do doesn't go well with warm based papers and I have always preferred neutral or cold tones. Nevertheless, the print quality is superb. The blacks were rich and dense and the highlights were alive with detail. To my surprise, the texture wasn't as distracting as I thought it would be, and didn't prevent the paper from producing a sharp image.

Bamboo 290 is a museum quality, exhibit worthy paper that is available in standard sheet and roll sizes. I want to love this paper, but it just doesn't match my work. This is a disappointment because this paper is a great example of ingenuity and environmental consciousness. Any fine art photographer, who uses rag papers, doesn't mind a warm base and wants to make a statement about the environment, should seriously consider this paper.

I believe these three papers are a step in the right direction. If only the printer, computer and camera manufacturers would get the hint and get on board the green machine. It's time the process of photography becomes as green as the images that are created with it.

## **Resources**

Red River Paper Company [www.redrivercatalog.com](http://www.redrivercatalog.com)

ViaStone [www.viastone.net](http://www.viastone.net)

Hahnemuhle [www.hahnemuhle.com](http://www.hahnemuhle.com)

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