

YOU'LL NEVER SHOWER ALONE...

Liz Kirchner on a bubbly eco-soap entrepreneur

As you lather up in clouds of fragrant steam, warbling a hearty 'O Sole Mio!', it may come as a surprise to learn there are orangutans in your shower. Indeed, rainforests too.

WHEN WE FIRST TRIED MAKING PALM-OIL FREE SOAP, IT WAS LIKE MAKING A BAD CAKE

Liverpool eco-entrepreneur Jane Hampson, 30, founder of Scouse Soap, has made it her business to let everyone know about the wildlife in their bathrooms. In their Allerton kitchen that smells, Jane says, "like an explosion in a flower factory", she and her family handcraft soaps, lip balm, and aromatic oils with Scouse-proud names like 'Sergeant Peppermint', 'Lavender Me Do', and the geranium and rose-scented 'You'll Never Wash Alone'. As up-beat as it seems, though, Scouse Soap's got a serious side, and that's where the orangutans climb into your shower. Palm oil, a principal ingredient in most soaps, is produced on massive palm plantations that destroy complex, carbon-balancing rainforest: prime orangutan habitat. Palm-oil free, Scouse Soap and Jane raise customers' awareness of how much of the world they could fix just by sudsing responsibly. They contribute a percentage of profits to The Orangutan Foundation, which works in Borneo managing rainforest habitat to generate sustainable economic health through tourism and sustainable forestry. Three years ago, Jane re-trained as an aromatherapist, and returned to Liverpool. "In London, people 'follow'", she says, "In Liverpool, there is more room to be creative." (150 young entrepreneurs launched Liverpool-based businesses this year, many of them environmentally or socially focused, citing the same reason.)

THE BUBBLY BREW

Jane's little business stirred together a solid base of IT, chemistry (her dad is a chemist) and aromatherapy knowledge. Social networking skills, and infrastructure like Liverpool's Young Entrepreneur forum, and tireless Internet research helped the business start. Then it added the zest of humour, pluck, and patience. Jane recalls merrily low-tech early soap-making forays. "When we



first tried making palm-oil free soap, it was like making a bad cake. It was hilarious. When we finally got it right, we made our own soap molds and cut the bars with guitar string." When the Be-Q storage shelves in Jane's bedroom stacked with inventories of poppy seed, rose hips, and 'Let It Be Rosemary' soap became impassible, rather than getting rid of shelves, they donated her bed to Oxfam and built some more shelves!

BATHE AND SAVE LIVES!

Now, with the family kitchen full of beakers, whisks, scales, and soap molds, there is a whiff of success. The little company is mentioned on BBC, in national newspapers, and listed in 70 Ways to Save Planet Earth. Scouse Soap is sold in the Liverpool Cathedral and 08 Place Tourism Centre. Still, palm oil is in everything from peanut butter to lipstick, and orangutans are expected to reach extinction in 10 years. "Well, you can't just let it go down the pan," says Jane. "When I go to meet my maker, I want to say I did more than go shopping, and, you know, if everyone does a little bit..." Her thoughts trail off and suddenly eco-entrepreneur, Jane Hampson, looks very young. Her fragile, fledgling business is full of chronic worries: hopeless causes, late payments, and unreliable suppliers, but, really, it seems these ingredients have yielded a family bonded by work and noble effort. "My dad makes a lot of the soap," says Jane. "It's provided a funny link between the two of us." "For Heaven's Sake," you may sputter, "can't I simply take a bath without banyans sprouting from the linen closet?" Not anymore. But in this case, a shower with an orangutan, is not only easy, it's fun, and it smells terrific. ■