

Publication: Vulcan Post Online

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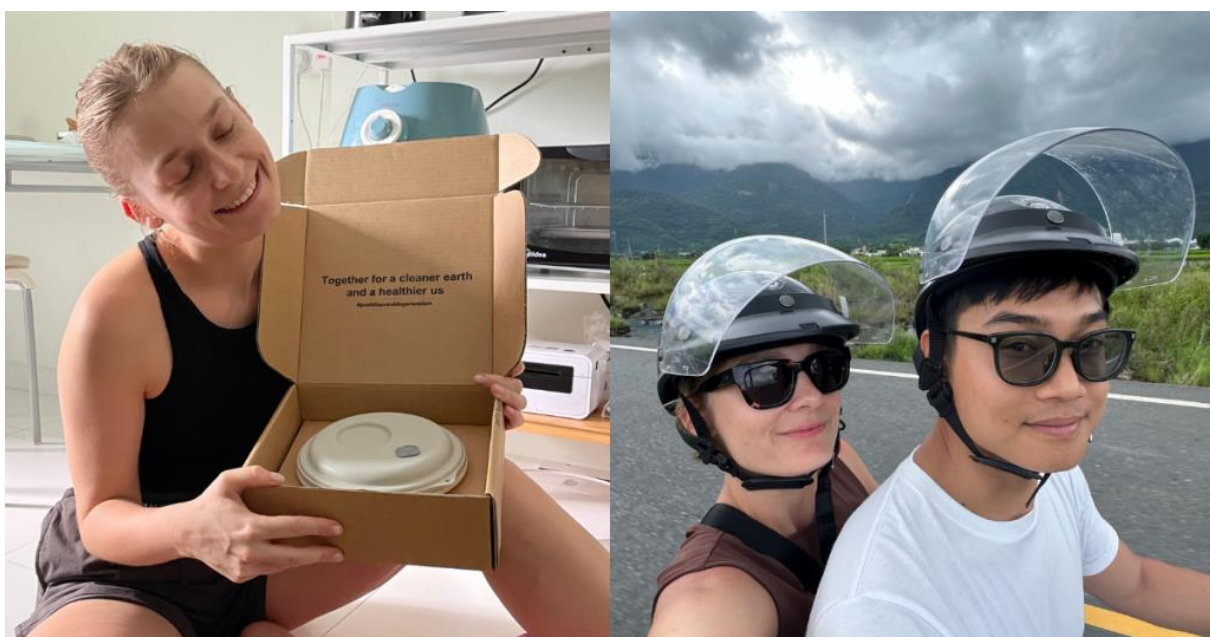


You probably have at least one Tupperware or container sitting at home.

So, why is this Singaporean startup trying to reinvent the wheel with their own container?

Behind the brand

Sometimes it takes an outsider to notice problems, and that's what Julia Chia Ciaciek has done. Originally from Germany, she is the CEO and co-founder of kūpaa.



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Before moving to Singapore, she earned her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. In 2021, she made the bold decision to pursue a Master's in Management & Sustainability at Singapore Management University.

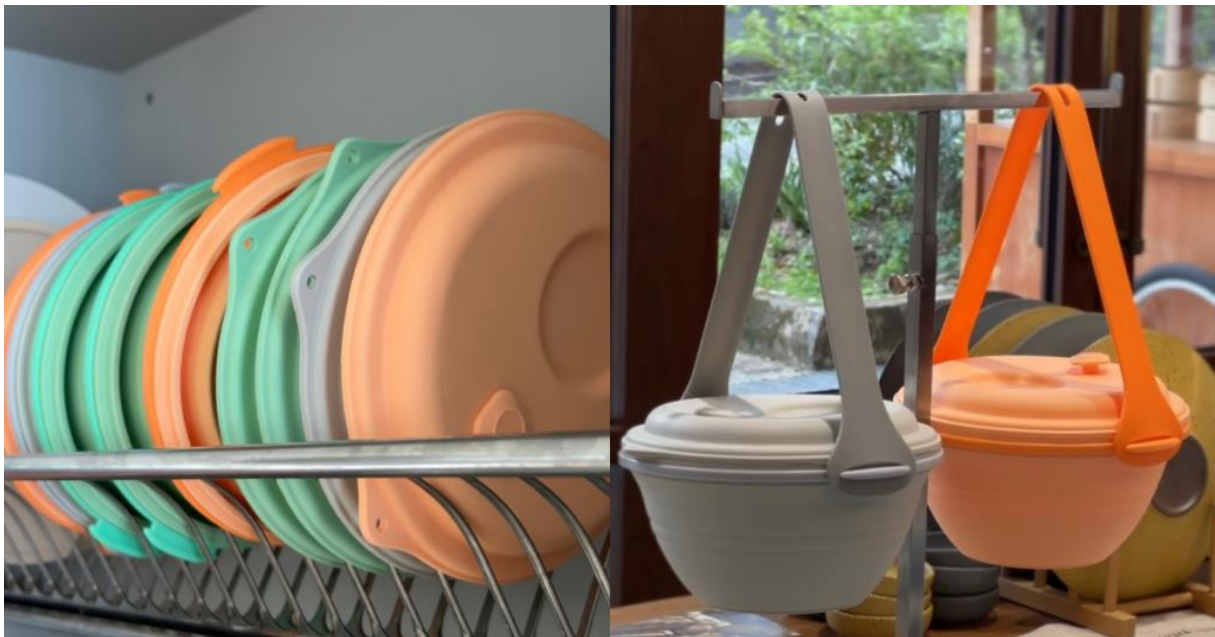
"I was drawn to Singapore's unique blend of cultures, its role as a global innovation hub, and its commitment to sustainability and progress," she explained.

Having worked at various startups and tech companies, why did she end up trading a stable career for entrepreneurship?

"The turning point came when I was laid off from my previous job, leaving me with no more excuses or safety nets to fall back on," Julia told Vulcan Post. "In that moment, I realised it was time to fully commit, and dedicate my undivided attention and focus to building kūpaa."

Resolving a real issue

While living in Singapore in 2021, Julia couldn't help but notice the excessive amounts of single-use plastic used for food takeaway.



During a family Christmas dinner where Julia and her Singaporean co-founder (and now husband) went out to pick up takeaway food. They were struck by the sheer volume of single-use plastic containers and packaging for the food, sauce, utensils, and carrier.

"It wasn't just an abstract observation—it felt personal and frustrating," she said.

"My husband and I often struggled with the same issue when trying to enjoy our favourite local dishes like Laksa, Yong Tau Foo, or Mee Siam," she elaborated. "Finding a way to take these dishes home in a healthy, sustainable, and convenient way felt nearly impossible."

This made them wonder: Why is there still so much single-use plastic being used? Why aren't there better options available?

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From there, they began deep diving into the single-use plastic issue. The environmental consequences were devastating, but what was even more shocking were the health risks associated with plastic dependency.

“Motivated by a cleaner earth and healthier living, we decided to tackle the problem head-on and co-founded kūpaa in 2022,” Julia said.

The idea was straightforward: To design a takeaway solution that is not only culturally relevant so it'll actually be used and not tucked away in the back of a cabinet but also healthy, inclusive, and aesthetically pleasing.

Basically, to make something people would proudly use every day.

With that agenda, the duo committed to R&D in 2022. They spent the year on experimentation, learning, and refining. By 2023, they took the big step into mass production.

Designing the perfect container

The design process for kūpaa's Duet was an intense and meticulous journey, Julia said.

“My co-founder, in particular, quit his day job to dedicate countless hours—day and night—refining the design to ensure it addressed as many customer pain points as possible and also offered certain aesthetics,” she said.

To understand pain points faced by users, they turned to an unexpected source: customer reviews on ecommerce platforms for existing takeaway solutions.



By resourcefully analysing what customers liked and didn't like, they were able to come up with a design that they believe hits all the marks.

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This iterative process of their design spanned over 1.5 years. With neither co-founder having formal experience in product design, it was an experience that required immense patience and persistence.

After extensive research, the two chose premium food-grade silicone as the primary material as silicone offered a unique combination of benefits that other materials couldn't match.

Not only is it safe for hot and oily foods, it's flexible and collapsible, microwave-safe, lightweight, and durable.

Julia assured that their silicone is certified to meet both the LFGB standard (Lebensmittel-, Bedarfsgegenstände- und Futtermittelgesetzbuch)—the highest certification for food-safe silicone—and the Singapore Food Authority (SFA) standards.

But kūpaa's product definitely isn't the only silicone container available on the market. Yet, Julia believes the container stands out for a myriad of reasons.

"What sets kūpaa apart from the many options available today, including other silicone-based products, comes down to a combination of quality, intentional design, aesthetic appeal, and long-term vision," Julia said.

Catering to local lifestyles

You'd think that it would be counterintuitive to ask people to buy yet another container in an effort to be more environmentally conscious, though.

To that concern, Julia shared that kūpaa's primary goal is to reduce reliance on single-use disposables—not to promote unnecessary consumption.

"We've always been clear and transparent about this: if someone already owns reusable containers that they actively use, there's no need for them to purchase a kūpaa Duet," Julia said.



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“Our focus isn’t on selling more products, but on encouraging mindful choices and offering a reliable solution for those who truly need it.”

However, the reality is that many people don’t use their existing reusables because they simply do not fit into their lifestyle.

Additionally, as she mentioned, some reusable containers are made from plastics that may pose health concerns, especially when exposed to hot foods.

“In such cases, it’s not just about sustainability—health and safety takes centre stage, ensuring that the products we use daily are safe, reliable, and truly fit for purpose,” she said.

Reaching the masses

kūpaa was officially launched in July 2023. 1.5 years in, the reception and interest have been “incredibly encouraging and continue to grow steadily,” Julia said.

She believes that people were drawn to the kūpaa Duet for its aesthetic appeal as well as the practical and thoughtful design.



Julia admitted that a huge challenge the team has faced has been getting the word out about their brand and product.

“We knew we had a great product that people genuinely love, and there was definitely a certain level of product-market fit,” she said. “However, figuring out how to grow our reach, build awareness, and create momentum proved to be an entirely different challenge.”

Primarily targeting working individuals, the team has found a level of success focusing on a mix of organic social media content, targeted ads, and TikTok live streams. These channels allow them to showcase the product in action, share their brand story, and build genuine connections with their audience.

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Thankfully, word-of-mouth has played a significant role in their growth. "People who have tried the Duet genuinely love our solution and often gift it to their family, friends, and colleagues," Julia shared.

Scaling thoughtfully

Currently, the team is focusing on perfecting their core product, the kūpaa Bowl & Carrier Duet, and offering it in a variety of colors.



Rather than rapidly expanding the product range, they believe in refining and optimising their flagship product.

That said, they do plan to expand their product range thoughtfully, ensuring that every new addition aligns with kūpaa's mission of sustainability, innovation, and mindful living.

In the long term, she hopes to see kūpaa become a globally recognised lifestyle accessory brand that combines functionality, sustainability, and style.

"We want our products to not only solve everyday problems but also become a statement of mindful living and an essential part of people's daily routines worldwide," she concluded.