

STYLE & FASHION | LOVE STORY

# Paper Planners in the Digital Age: Why We're Still Addicted

A digital-media maven on why she can't quit the charms of old-fashioned datebooks, sales of which are up \$50 million in the last two years



AM I DATING MYSELF? The author's archive of planners. PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Lane Florsheim

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I've never tried iCal. I use Google Calendar at work of course—refusing to accept co-workers' meeting invites would be confusing and rude—but the idea of reducing the rest of my life to tiny cells on my phone screen fills me with dread. As a digital editor at The Wall Street Journal, and a millennial, I may not be the likeliest proponent of paper day planners, but I've been a devotee since my preteens.

Back then, picking one out was a ritual I embraced ahead of each school year, every planner an instrument of self-expression. The summer before seventh grade, at the Riverpoint Village Shopping Center in the North Shore of Milwaukee, I begged my mom for a Time.Mine datebook whose cherry-print cover, I thought, qualified as Pop Art; I later embellished it with part of my sticker collection. In high school, I developed an appreciation for August-to-August planners

with their bland covers, winningly ugly font and abundant space to list homework assignments (12 lines per day!).

I doodled in my planners with brightly colored pens and highlighters, made elaborate countdowns for my baby sitter's wedding and my siblings' birthdays and dutifully recorded my friends' phone numbers in the address-book section. Planners gave me a place to construct an identity before I really knew who I was. They were a vehicle of teenage hopefulness, as if writing my class schedule in bubble letters on the first page had the power to precipitate exciting events for me.

Nowadays, the emotional rush I feel when I open my planner to the current month is the instant "read" I get on my upcoming schedule. I experience a mild euphoria, quite unlike the mixture of anxiety and boredom my desktop work calendar often triggers: The latter's coldly digital time slots signifying meetings and deadlines don't satisfy me the way the handcrafted order of my datebook does.

My habit is to mentally divide each day in my planner into thirds, creating a section for the morning, afternoon and evening. I can immediately see how busy I am, the plans I'm looking forward to (or not), when I might have time in the morning to write and, gloriously, if one of my weekend days is entirely free.

There's also the anticipation of filling in the future blanks: Flipping to upcoming months, where I've noted the details of an upcoming trip or a good friend's visit, can efficiently elevate my mood. Years later, reviewing the handwritten record of so many moments, penned in various ink colors and peppered with scribbled notes, is like looking back at an old diary.

Fellow devotees of the planner have their own reasons for loving one. "It's a way for me to keep organized without the distraction of my phone," said Alexandra Porter, an independent art adviser in New York City. Some enjoy the ritual of penning in an entry. "There's more formality to it," said Cora Hilts, the co-founder of the London-based sustainable fashion company Rêve en Vert, who uses a weekly Moleskine planner. "It's lovely putting in a dinner date with your friends." The act of writing down an imminent event, she said, helps her remember it's coming up.

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My paper datebook also sidesteps the myriad unnerving scenarios that can disrupt a phone-based schedule: a dead battery, times and names mistyped on a tiny keyboard, a sudden fatal

plunge to the floor. Smartphones have changed the whole tenor of organizing our lives, and while accessing years at a time with a mere tap of a thumb may seem infinitely satisfying to some, it's not to me. My fondness for using datebooks has become a conspicuous oddity. "You *still* use a planner?" is a question I am asked with out-and-out disbelief. I usually say it's the only thing that makes sense to me, since I compulsively need to write down my plans (ditto my to-do lists).

I feel a camaraderie with friends who use datebooks too, a sense of fellowship some find on websites like Philofaxy and Plannerisms, arenas for the day-planner blogging community. The ranks of fans are unpredictably growing: According to the market research firm NPD Group, datebook sales in the U.S. increased by over \$50 million during the last two years, from \$290.7 million in 2014 to \$344.1 million last year.

Molly McCarthy, author of "The Accidental Diarist: A History of the Daily Planner in America," traces its origins back to our Founding Fathers, including George Washington, who most likely used an almanac to keep track of time, calculate the interest on his loans and act as a guide to local roads and inns. (I wonder if an iCal would have served our first president as well.) Planners, as we think of them today, didn't catch on until the mid-nineteenth century, when improvements in printing technology made them more affordable to produce and buy.

Shopping for next year, I wanted something similar to my 2017 planner, a black Paper Source agenda that is compact enough to slip into my narrowest purses. One night after work, I walked to Smythson on New York's Upper East Side, where each tiny shelf on the store's back wall holds a different brightly colored agenda. I lingered, studying them, even after I'd made my choice, a pocket-size cobalt agenda called the Panama. At the counter, it was laid in tissue and placed in one of the brand's Nile blue boxes, which was tied with a thick ribbon. It was an early holiday present, I thought, a gift from my past to my future. Surely it would portend good things for the year to come.

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*tiffany.com*



This faux-croc leather book opens to a week's worth of space. Embossed Notebook, \$102, *graphicimage.com*

Featherweight paper fills this cross-grained lambskin classic. Panama Agenda, \$60, *smythson.com*

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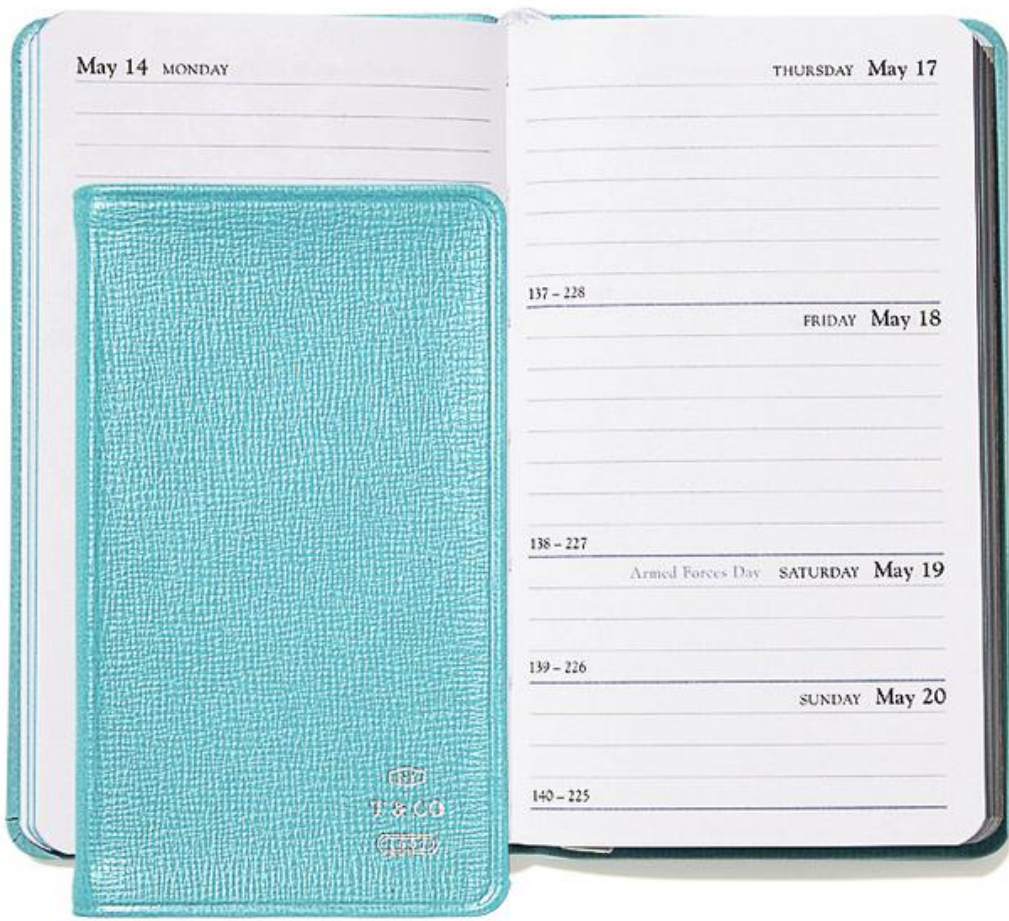


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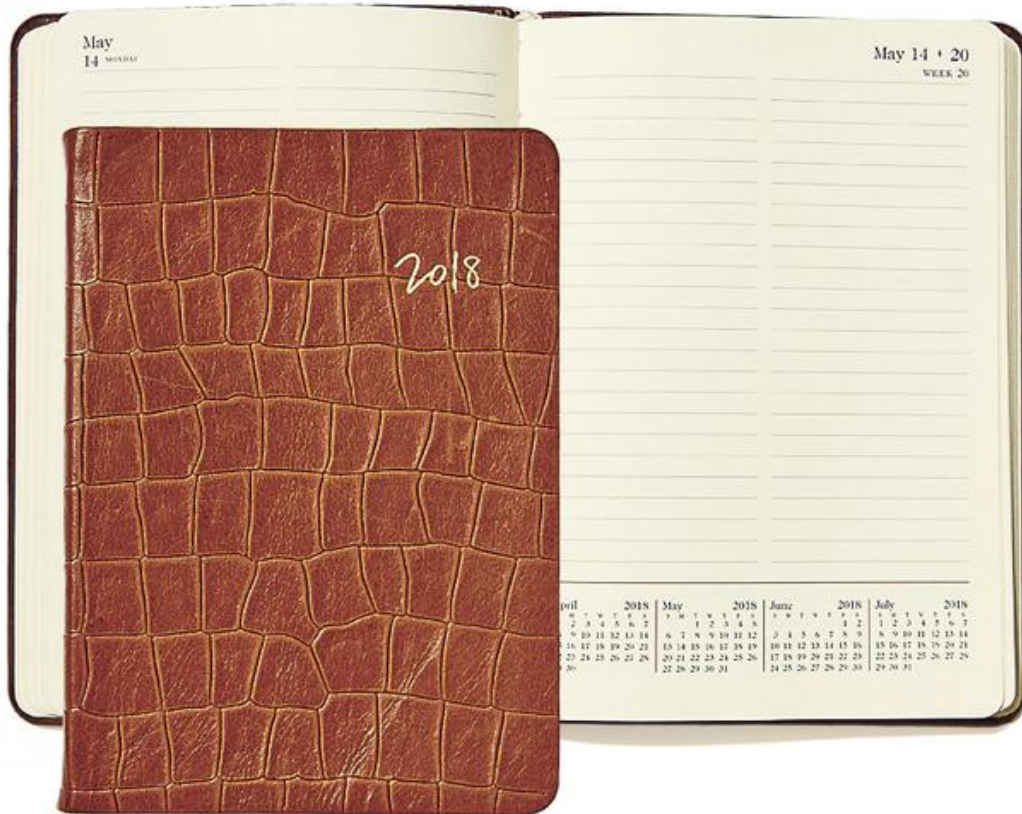


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