

Getting to Know After-Market Ink



By Personally Visiting the Ink Manufacturer
Example: **SAM-INK** (their factory and demo room)

After-market ink is growing in popularity as print shops are learning that the key is to distinguish between cheap low-bid third-party ink and reasonable quality after-market ink at a reasonable price. This reasonable quality ink is a significant saving in money from paying for an OEM brand (and remember, 90% of the printer manufacturers are not able to make their own ink; they buy their ink from other ink companies). The irony is that many manufacturers buy ink from after-market ink companies and rebrand it as their OEM brand at up to 100% higher price!

Starting several years ago, we at FLAAR Reports began to study ink to learn more about the reality. From 1997 onward we used only official Encad ink for our first test printer. From 2001 onward we used only official OEM ink from Hewlett-Packard for our HP 2500 test printer.

When we evaluated Canon printers for Canon we naturally used only official Canon-branded ink. But gradually we noticed that most distributors around the world were selling after-market ink. So we began to visit ink factories to learn more.

Today in 2014 we have about six years experience studying inside ink R&D labs, ink company demo rooms. Plus we visit print shops to see how these inks function in the real world.

And, we hear a lot from distributors about what inks do not work: they fade quickly, or clog the printheads. So now in 2014 we are focusing more on making a list of which ink companies you should consider. We start with a company where we have visited print shops for over three years who are using their ink in HP and their eco-solvent ink for DX printheads in Roland and Mutoh printers.



An engrained feature of our programs at FLAAR is to learn about wide-format inkjet printing by making the effort to actually visit the demo rooms, the factory, and the headquarters of pertinent companies.

There are several additional reasons for the popularity of the FLAAR Reports, probably because print shops and distributors and manufacturers realize that we really enjoy learning about inks, printers, media and substrates, cutters, laminators, RIP and color management software.

Second, many readers realize that FLAAR comes from a university background, where research is key, and where education is the goal. Research is good to undertake at the factory demo room of the products you want to learn about

Plus it helps that we do not accept banner ads, and most importantly, we do not publish PR releases which show only the wishful thinking of what-if the product really did function as claimed (but of course no product is perfect, so we avoid regurgitating PR releases).

For all aspects of research, visiting a factory and demo room are helpful. So if you are a distributor, or a print shop of significant size (large enough to buy ink by the container load direct), you might want to consider a visit.



When you do visit an ink manufacturer, realize that size is not the key factor: what counts is the spirit of the owner and key managers: are they really deep into the world of ink chemistry (or the other products that they make). Or is this simply a side-line.

A small ink company which focuses on producing ink in reasonable amounts is as useful to visit as another ink company which had buildings one after the other for what looked like close to a kilometer. There were so many dozens of factory buildings of this one company I could not keep track. Their ink was equally impressive.

But we also like to visit smaller companies, where they can focus on a deliberately limited inventory of kinds of ink. So let's look at Sam-Ink. I have been to their factory three times:

Nicholas on his first visit in 2010.





Dr Hellmuth on the second visit in 2012.





Nicholas on his third visit, 2014.











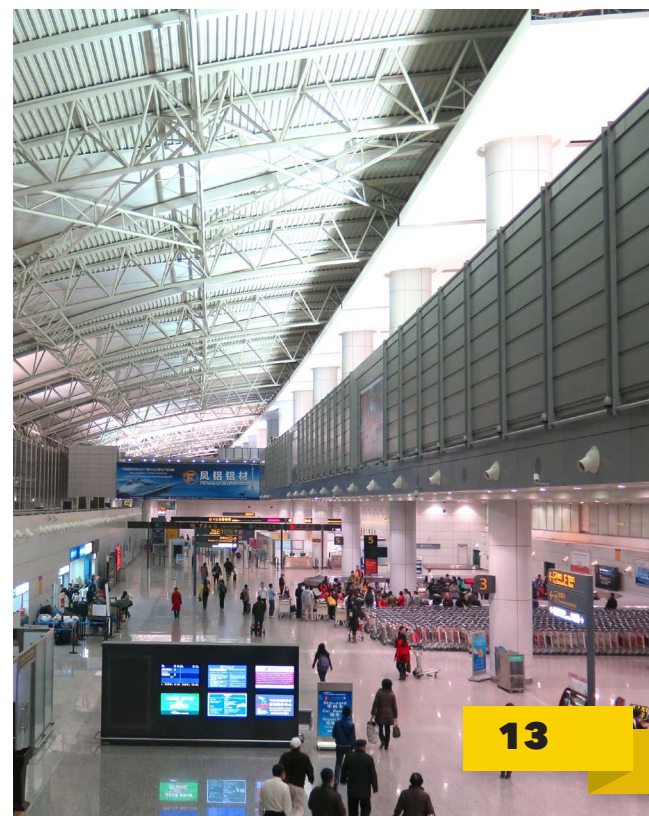
Singapore

The headquarters of Sam Ink is in Singapore. Singapore is sufficiently popular as a destination that the airport has many flights to and from major cities around the world. In other words, Singapore is easy to get to.



Singapore Airlines is rated as one of the best in the world. In fact Singapore Airlines and Emirates are airlines that are a pleasure to fly (however Emirates is not a member of any of the three multi-national airline alliances; Singapore Airlines is a member of Star Alliance (United Airlines, etc).

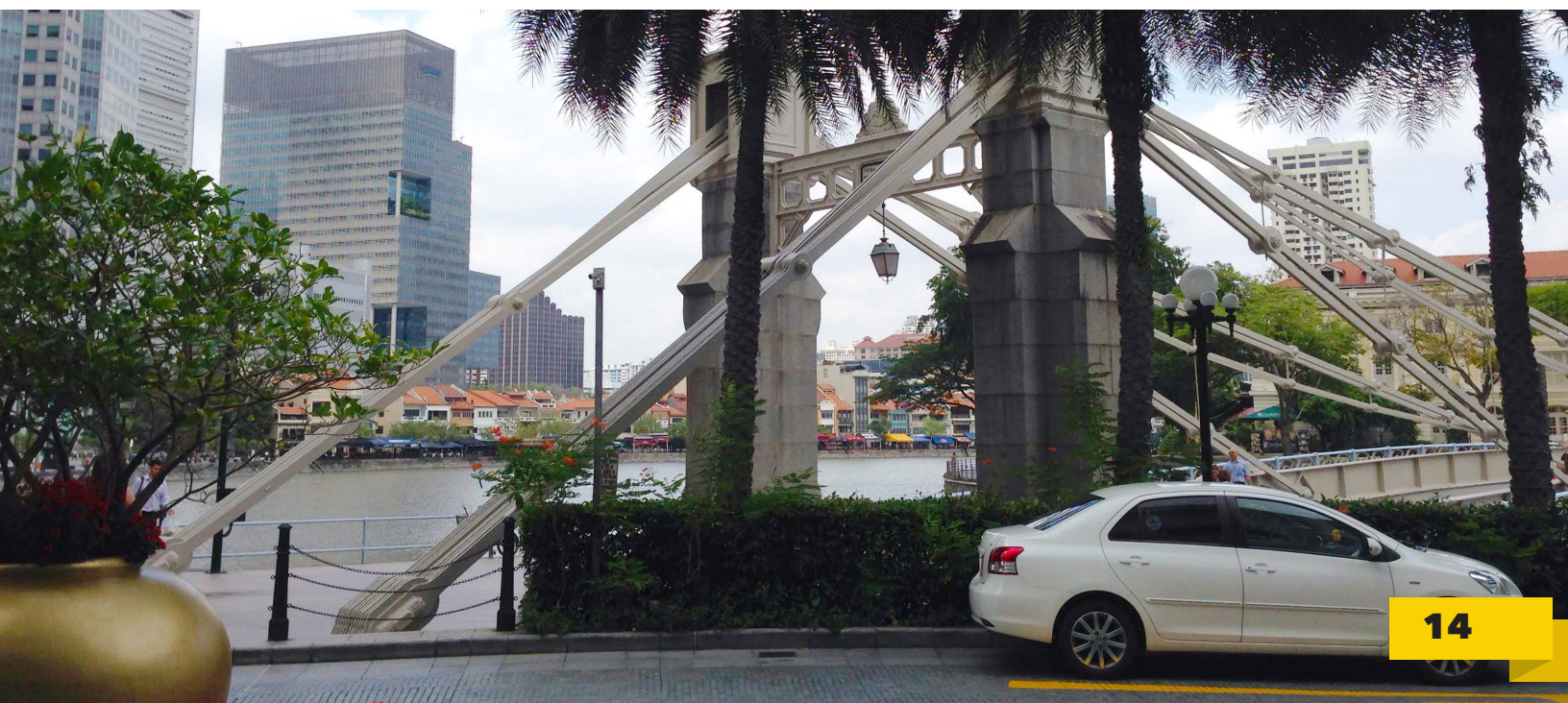
Singapore Changi Airport is also rated as one of the best in the world, though since I fly over 150,000 miles every year I am rather numb about airports. Here are a few snapshots of the airport (am usually too exhausted to take out my camera or have too many bags filled with notes and brochures to be able to also hold a camera while in an airport).



Singapore is a multi-national country. English is one of the official languages, so it's easy to communicate. The other official languages are Malay, Chinese, and Tamil. Ironical that Wikipedia does not indicate whether it means Mandarin or Cantonese, I assume they mean Mandarin. The staff of Sam Ink are multi-national: English, Mandarin, and I estimate other local languages as well.



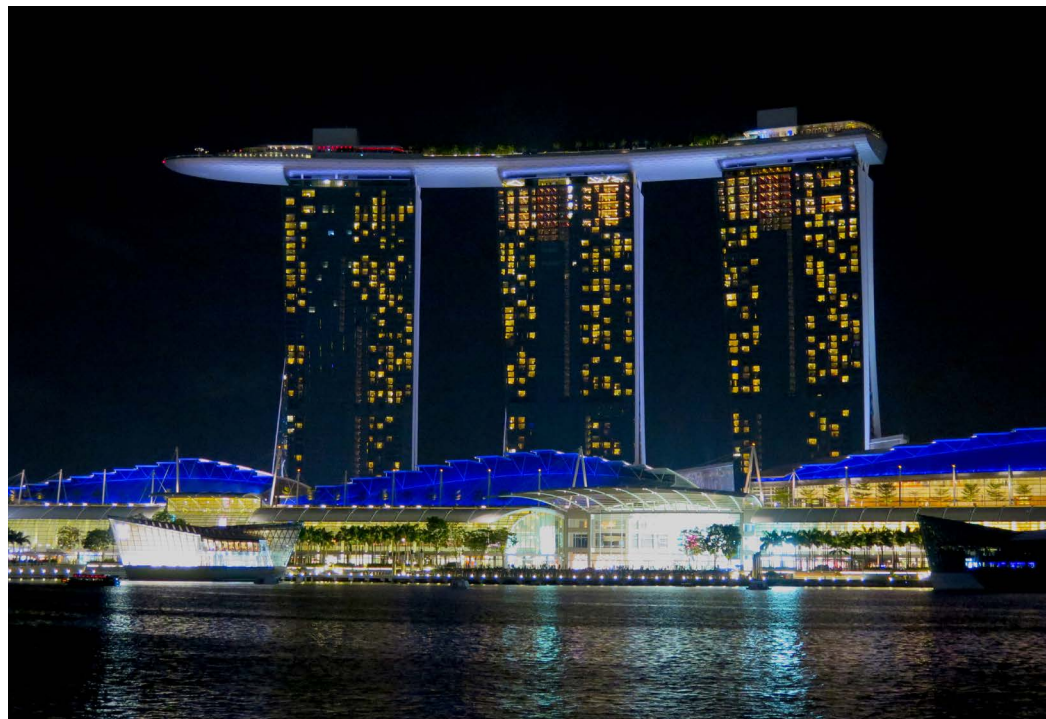
Hotels are not cheap; and meals within the hotels are not cheap either. So be realistic with your travel budget. Naturally the top tier hotels: Sands, Ritz Carlton, and others like the nice and conveniently located Fullerton Hotel are at international prices. But at least for this price you get a larger room in a 5-star Singapore hotel than the remarkably tiny rooms in 3-star Swiss hotels (only in Japan are hotel rooms smaller).



Singapore is clean, safe, and pleasant. Just realize it is a tropical climate and dress accordingly (and bring extra clothing to change into if you perspire a lot).

You are within driving distance of Malaysia, which I have not yet had time to visit.

A good time to visit Sam-Ink is before or after a trade show in China. Just be sure you make your appointment well in advance.



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