



THE LOOK of LEATHER

The Cape fits for Hamburg couple

Young people have become inveterate and adventurous travellers; round-the-world fares with two-month stop-overs in New Zealand are the new inter-rail tickets and gap years are an integral part of the transition from school to university and from university to the world of work.

Travel certainly broadens the mind but—in some cases at least, among the more entrepreneurial—it can also spark serious business ideas.

Kapworks is a case in point. Enthused and inspired by a trip to Cape Town five years ago, Marcus Jonas and Anke Voelker went home to Hamburg and decided to launch a company, importing finished handbags in bovine and exotic leathers from the South Africa they had fallen in love with.

They had gone, partly, to visit a friend of theirs, Swiss designer Carmen Odermatt, who had been in Africa for quite some time, living in Botswana for four years before moving to Cape Town. Having chosen to stay and make her life there, she decided to use her skill and craftsmanship to make a living.

So Ms Odermatt started making

handbags from the material she had to hand, combining textiles with high-quality local bovine leather, from the Nguni breed of cattle, as well as leather from springbok, antelope and other animals. As well as running her own brand, Durch Zug, she is one of two suppliers to Kapworks.

Veg-tanned leather

The leather is veg-tanned and for the current range caramel, kiwi, raspberry, chocolate, black and aubergine are the main colours.

One of the most notable features of the springbok bags is that the leather retains a large quantity of the distinctive fine hair. "We like hair," Ms Voelker explains. "Women like to have something they can stroke; it's reassuring and comforting. Having a bag like this is like having a really easy-to-care-for pet."

The business has also begun working with a Cape Town social project called Mielie, bringing to Europe bags that local



< *The Kapworks Venga accessories bag in kiwi green.*

CREDIT: KAPWORKS.

craftspeople make—with, in this case, younger, floral patterned designs in the brightest reds, greens and blues—through this project. This second main supplier is the result of no low-cost labour push on the part of Kapworks; Anke Voelker insists that producing leathers in South Africa is not cheap. Instead, it's simply an effort to support local people.

Exotic tastes

She describes the partnerships Kapworks has in place now as strong, with a high level of quality assurance, and the bags from Mielie and Carmen Odermatt that arrive regularly now at the Port of Hamburg are the result. Everything comes with the correct animal protection or sites certification and export documents as appropriate, but this seems to do little to prevent every case with the Kapworks name on it from attracting the close attention of the customs guards at the port.

Ms Voelker shrugs her shoulders as she shares this detail; the exotic has always won widespread attention, which is not something she wants to change. It is precisely this quality in the Kapworks product offering that has allowed her company to win a string of high-end boutiques all over Europe as its client-base.

Encouraged by this initial small-scale success, Kapworks chose this autumn's GDS exhibition in Düsseldorf as a platform for announcing itself to the wider leathers market. And, because the bags have such a distinctive look and feel, it's no surprise that the company attracted a considerable amount of attention.

Its intention now is to try to grow slowly but steadily. The two partners have promised to "think again" about using South African ostrich-leather. Marcus Jonas explains that he initially felt ostrich-leather bags were

Bags made with springbok hair-on leather.

CREDIT: KAPWORKS.



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< Colourful bags with leather handles from the Mielie social project.

CREDIT: KAPWORKS/MIELIE.

exclusively for women of a certain age, while he was committed to keeping a young look for Kapworks. Others argue that a classy ostrich-leather bag says little about a woman's age, but everything about her taste, and now he and Ms Voelker say they are prepared to reconsider their view.

This is one possible route to further growth, but otherwise the Kapworks couple seem happy to continue their quest of bringing a little bit of the beauty of South Africa to as much of the rest of the world as possible. 🌍

The work of Cape Town-based Swiss designer Carmen Odermatt is at the heart of the Kapworks offering.

CREDIT: CARMEN ODERMATT/
DURCH ZUG/KAPWORKS.



The Venga accessories bag in raspberry. The colours in the collection are enhanced through veg-tanning.

CREDIT: KAPWORKS.