



Springbok skins are often seen as an unwanted by-product. Rather than throwing them away, they can be used to make beautiful bags and cushions.

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The deerest of designs

Designer Jo Kettle has spent a lot of time in Africa. After graduating from Oxford University, work took her to Malawi, South Africa and Uganda. It was during a visit to the African continent that she was inspired to set up a company producing high-quality bags, belts and cushions using locally produced skins. The idea came to her while she was passing through South Africa shortly after she had taken part in a riding safari in Botswana. During her travels her eye was drawn to the striking skins of the indigenous springboks, a medium-sized gazelle with distinctive

brown and white markings. This prompted her to start sketching some designs that would incorporate the natural beauty of the skins.

In 2009, Ms Kettle set up her company, pinki! and started making contact with suppliers and manufacturers in South Africa who would be able to take up her designs and bring them to life. She managed to find a workshop with World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO) status that understood her vision and was able to turn the spectacular springbok skins into a range of ladies' bags. Ms Kettle was so pleased with the way the handcrafted bags

turned out she decided to extend the collection to include springbok cushions and cowhide belts.

The belts come in black and white with silver oval buckles or in brown and white with brass oval buckles. Each belt features colourful stitching and a vibrant satin lining in a range of colours to complete the dramatic look. Ms Kettle chose to use Nguni cow hide rather than springbok skin for the belts because the hair is shorter and the markings work better within a smaller format.

"The cowhide comes in such beautiful tones and colourations which work better



Nguni cattle are characterised by their multicoloured and patterned skin, which can be used to make eye-catching accessories.

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for the belts,” she says. “The South African cowhide has more interesting markings than the hides that I have seen in the UK and Argentina which is what attracted me to them. Plus I was always taken by the spiritual significance of the Nguni cattle to the Zulu people.”

The cushions are made from a single hide panel containing the distinctive white spine and are backed in either chocolate brown suede or a bright satin lining. The bags share these unique markings and the Kilifi model, one of several in the line, features soft brown leather braided handles, interior pockets and a mobile phone holder. It is fastened with a leather strap complete with bone detailing and leather tassels. There are seven lining colour options including lime green, cherry red and hot pink.

Waste not want not

Apart from the aesthetic advantages of using the springbok skins, the young designer explains that they are an unwanted by-product as in South Africa the animals are farmed for their meat and the skins are usually cast aside. Another important point she makes is that the animals are not endangered, which she says was “an important ethical choice”, and means there are no problems when it comes to exporting the goods to the UK. “So in a way it is a form of eco-recycling and because the workshop has WFTO status the pink! collections are ethical and their production helps to support rural development in South Africa,” she says.

The workshop ensures that all of the skins used in the pink! range are sourced from socially and environmentally responsible suppliers in the Eastern Cape. It also guarantees that all of the hides are of the very highest grade. “This is particularly important as I endeavour to ensure that

each piece is a top quality luxury item,” Ms Kettle claims.

From a performance point of view, the springbok skins are very durable so work really well for these types of accessories. And Ms Kettle claims the hides are “beautifully soft and luxurious” with very distinctive markings. “The natural white ‘Mohican’ of the skin is eye-catching and helps to produce some striking designs,” she says. However, the material does offer one challenge, or drawback, and this is that the animals are fairly small, so the hides are also on the small side. The company founder says: “This means that I have to take this into account in my designs, particularly if I want the white Mohican spine to be prominent.”

Moving the goods

Although the design work takes place in London, the entire manufacturing process takes place in South Africa. Because the standards are strict when it comes to

importing skins into the UK, the company has to ensure all the relevant documentation accompanies the goods through UK customs. Before each shipment leaves Cape Town the goods are inspected by the state veterinarian to ensure it has complied with all the international standards. Export permits have to be obtained to accompany the shipment.

The collection is sold via the company website and through the wholesale business, which is currently focused on the UK market. It supplies a number of shooting schools and luxury country clothing outfitters and, according to Ms Kettle, the designs particularly appeal to “the fashion conscious and yummy mummy brigade who are looking for something a bit different and individual”. She says she hopes in the future to use other types of game that are unique to Africa as there is such an abundance to choose from. ☺



A single hide panel is used to make the cushions, the backings for which are made from soft suede or brightly coloured satin.

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