



The Fire and Hide Duffel Bag, made from Burberry leather offcuts and repurposed hoses.

ALL CREDITS: ELVIS & KRESSE



Elvis & Kresse was launched to transform old London Fire Brigade hosepipes into accessories and has now taken on the challenge of repurposing leather, teaming up with the UK-based luxury group to make a dent in the global waste problem.

Burberry offcuts find new lease of life

“I fell in love with an old hose” is an unusual prompt to start a business but, for Elvis & Kresse founder Kresse Wesling, a chance meeting with the London Fire Brigade started a collaboration that has seen the accessories company transform hundreds of tonnes of waste and donate more than £100,000 to charity partners over the past 10 years.

Kresse learnt that the hoses were sent to landfill at the end of their useful life, but realised the “illustrious stacks of rich red material” could be used again, and created a special machine to clean and repurpose them.

The project ignited a spark in Kresse and partner James Henrit to find other material deemed useless, simultaneously tackling a waste problem and creating valuable new products. “The joy and the

challenge come from transforming materials that would otherwise go to landfill into high value, hand-crafted goods,” she tells *World Leather*.

With no background in luxury goods or accessories, the founders think their lack of preconceptions proved an asset in the early days. “We feel that helped,” confirms Kresse, a Canadian who moved to the UK in 2005. They discovered parachute silk with minute flaws and huge banners as



used by auction houses could be utilised to make bag linings, while old tea sacks were suitable for packaging and coffee sacks can be broken down into string for swing tags. Discarded shoe boxes are flattened and used for labels and packaging, while blankets used by the printing industry are cleaned and used as fresh material.

However, it wasn't until a saddle-maker called, asking if the company could use his offcuts, that they turned their attention to leather. "We always ask the same questions: What is the scale of the problem, are there viable alternatives and might we be the ones to sort this out?" says Kresse. "We start with problems, maximising the value of waste materials to ensure that they have a long second life. We knew that our approach could work for leather and when we perfected the modular system, first for rugs and then for accessories, we knew that we were the right fit for this issue."

Responsibility Agenda

Meetings with the Burberry Foundation began in 2014 when the luxury group was nearing the end of a five-year social and environmental programme and planning the next one, due to start in autumn 2017. Burberry quotes a United Nations figure that 800,000 tonnes of leather waste is produced by the global leather industry

annually; this is a fairly misleading statistic as it was based on the fact that tanners only turn 30% of the raw hide by weight into leather, not taking into account that much of this weight could be salt or liquid, and that byproducts are used by other industries (plus, the figure is 17 years old). Nonetheless, it does highlight that not every part of the tanned hide is used in the

The Fire and Hide Clutch; the company makes a wide range of accessories including tablet holders, wallets and cufflinks.



finished product, and that even when the patterns are carefully planned, the process inevitably creates small offcuts. This is the problem the two companies wanted to go a small way towards solving and, over the next five years, at least 120 tonnes of Burberry leather will go into Elvis & Kresse creations.

"The Burberry Foundation was aware of our commitment to materials rescue and charitable donations and we started to discuss how we might collaborate," says Kresse. "As you can imagine, it took quite a while to develop a plan capable of saving significant material and worthy of both our businesses. We are now implementing that plan."

Leather tapestry

The offcuts are collected from Burberry's workshops and tanneries across Europe and taken to Elvis & Kresse's headquarters in Kent where they are hand cut into interlocking shapes. The components are then woven into bags, small leathersgoods and homeware such as rugs.



The homeware range includes rugs, candle holders and decorative leather cubes.



Transforming waste into a workable material



Elvis & Kresse, helped by funding from the Burberry Foundation, collects the offcuts from Burberry's factories and tannery partners.



The leather is dyed and cut into uniform shapes to maximise the hide. These tiles form the basis of all the end products.



The shapes are woven by hand into a material that is strong and supple. "Leather is forever," says Kresse.



The patterns are hand cut and stitched, and other reclaimed items such as hose and parachute silk are added.

"This solution works for leather off-cuts and other self-edging textile wastes," says Kresse. "We have tested it with fleece, felt and wool, for example. We also feel that it is more than this specific method that should inspire people; it is the concept of modular construction, of designing for deconstruction."

As with its other collections, half of the profit from the Burberry tie-up will be donated to charitable causes, in this case those focused on renewable energy (the Fire Fighters Charity receives half the profit from the hose-based products; WWF, Help for Heroes, Comic Relief and the British

Forces Foundation are also beneficiaries). The rest of the profit is reinvested to expand their work in reducing and reusing waste and inspiring craftspeople.

The partnership will also generate apprenticeship and work experience opportunities and pay for promotional events. The company held a DIY clutch bag event in its workshop in October and a 'Crowd Assembled Rug' event at Oxford University to showcase an example of the circular economy in action.

Christopher Bailey, president of Burberry Group, said of the partnership: "Leather is a precious material, yet many

of the offcuts generated by the design process are seen as worthless. We believe that this can change, and we are proud to lead the way in showing how creativity and craftsmanship can play a part in solving this issue."

The next steps involve potentially more collaborations to "really make a dent in this [leather waste] problem," says Kresse. "This will involve the genuine mix of challenge and adventure that seems endemic in our workshop. This is the kind of work we are made for and this is the kind of partnership that will change the future of luxury." 🌱