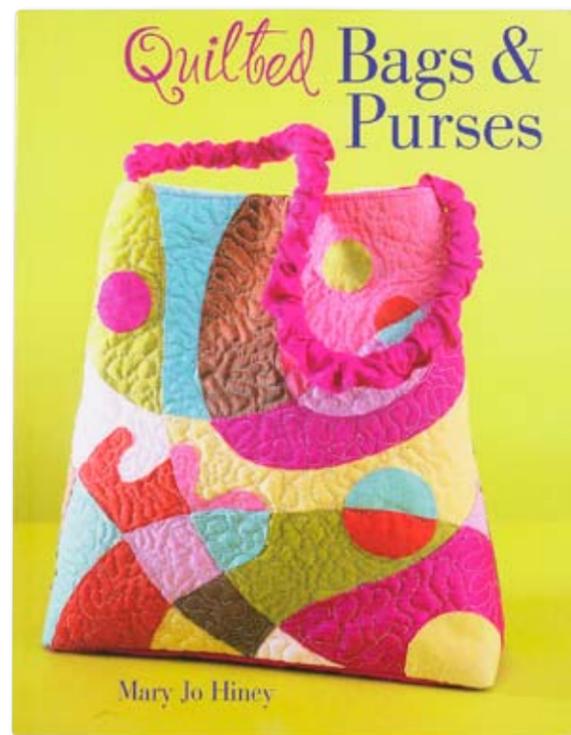
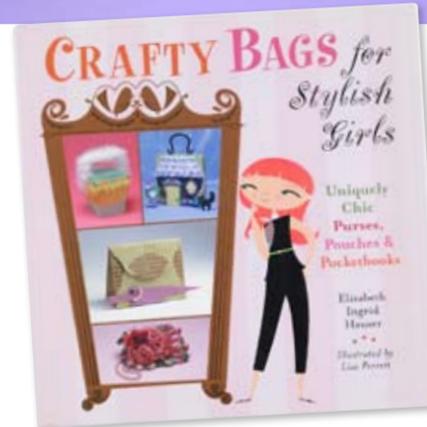


The craze for handmade bags has been growing over the last 10 years but the calibre, variety and creative nature of bags in the marketplace now is nothing less than marvellous. Throughout the world people from various craft fields are applying their skills to this popular product, selling via shops and galleries, over the internet, via markets and even showcasing their works in new books on the subject.

bag ladies



Mary Jo Hiney's book



Clockwise from top left: Elizabeth's Haunted Dollhouse bag; You've Got Style Crocodile; Elizabeth; Gothic Romance Book bag; her book.

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Mary Jo Hiney is the author of 'Quilted Bags and Purses' along with numerous other books. She's described as a fabric and sewing enthusiast and has often appeared on US craft TV programs. After studying at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising, Mary Jo worked in the garment industry but eventually moved on to the costume department of NBC studios in Burbank, California. Today, with her family, she lives in the "beautiful Central Coast of California" and it is here her work designing and manufacturing handmade items, sold to gift stores, first came into being. Today, among many other things, the artist is known for her one-of-a-kind art quilts and "couture handbags".

"Eventually, this original artisan market dried up, replaced by mass-produced 'handmade' items and I began to create one-of-a-kind pieces for very unique specialty stores," says Mary Jo. "It was at this point that my work was discovered by Jo Packham, who at the time was a producer of

books for Sterling Publishing. I began to write how-to books for her and did so for quite some time. My newest release is titled 'Simply Silk' and is published by Krause Books."

When offered the chance to author 'Quilted Bags and Purses' Mary Jo says she jumped at the chance "to create lots of wonderful handbags". Projects in the book are described as both "useful" and "fabulous" and the inspirations, according to the designer, are varied.

"'Sweet Simplicity', for instance, is my homage to the dressmaker of bygone days," she says. "The appliques represent the dreamy scene of a skilled, hard-working seamstress or tailor and the unrealistic view that one could actually 'open late' and 'close early'. 'Familiarity' is a wonderful, large bag made from home decorator weight fabrics that I intended to look great in a home as décor while also being perfectly useful. For 'Sweet Simplicity', the size of the bag needed to be large enough for the scene to 'read' and I just love pink, green, black and white together. For 'Familiarity', the bag needed to be large enough to transport a quilting, sewing or knitting project along on excursions. I usually take my design

cues from current trends. Keeping up with what's happening in the world, both in terms of the news and fashion, home decor or sewing trends is key."

With amateurs taking to the field with gusto, particularly in bag making, Mary Jo says she personally still looks for good workmanship and says that, while some people may have wildly creative ideas, their execution is weak.

"I don't buy into the quick and easy world - that's for people who are lazy or don't want to work hard. I believe in skill first and creativity second. When you learn the right way to do things, you will also come to know which rules can be broken and which ones must be kept."

To buy from Mary Jo: In Australia and New Zealand one can purchase Mary Jo's Silk Adaptation products (a collection of silk fabrics in an inspiring array of colours) from Cotton On Creations, NSW (Ph: 02 4787 6588) or via her website. If ever in the USA, visit her store, ArtEffects, at 435 Morro Bay Boulevard, Morro Bay, California.

Elizabeth Ingrid Hauser
www.elizabethingrid.com

Elizabeth Ingrid Hauser, author of 'Crafty Bags for Stylish Girls' has a personal philosophy that is "Make every day sparkle!" and one look at her website, her New York apartment, the things she designs and sells not to mention the creations in her book would attest to this.

She is a toy designer, craft book writer and inventor who says that, when she was little, her mother remembers her making accessories and environments for her toys and costumes for the cats.

"When I went away to college, I became involved in theatre so these playful environments grew to encompass set design and art installations where people would walk into a room and interact with themed props, hats and toys," says Elizabeth. "After graduating, I had a magical opportunity to teach art in Chiang Mai, Thailand, so I did just that for a year and then went back to school for toy design in New York."

Before her new book, published by Sterling, she had already written 'Princess Crafts' for the company.

"They asked if I would be interested in doing a book about bags for 'twens and, being an avid collector of vintage purses and handbags (like those of Enid Collins), I excitedly agreed," she says.

The new publication is described as an "extraordinary" collection and contains designs with names such as 'Gothic Romance Book' and 'Hat Bag'. Elizabeth loves "all things cute 'n' spooky" which explains the inspiration behind that and other bags - namely 'Haunted Dollhouse Bag' and 'Agent Scarlett's Attaché Case'.

"I seem to recall bags made out of books when I was little, in the 1970s," says Elizabeth. "This memory must have just stuck with me so I made one for the book, themed so that you may slip in a spine-chilling novella and be on your blustery way! As for the hat bag, that was pure serendipity. That particular hat happened to be very itchy, so I never wore it. One day I turned it upside-down and said, 'Voilà ...better as a bag!'"

When designing a new bag or craft Elizabeth's first priority is always creativity. "I like my crafts fanciful so that they provide an escape from reality," she explains. "I find theatre

and beautiful films such as 'Moulin Rouge' and 'Priscilla Queen of the Desert' (go Australia!) very inspiring because the visuals are so lush and over-the-top. This might not be typical of most crafters but it works for me. The function falls into place after the theme or concept has been determined."

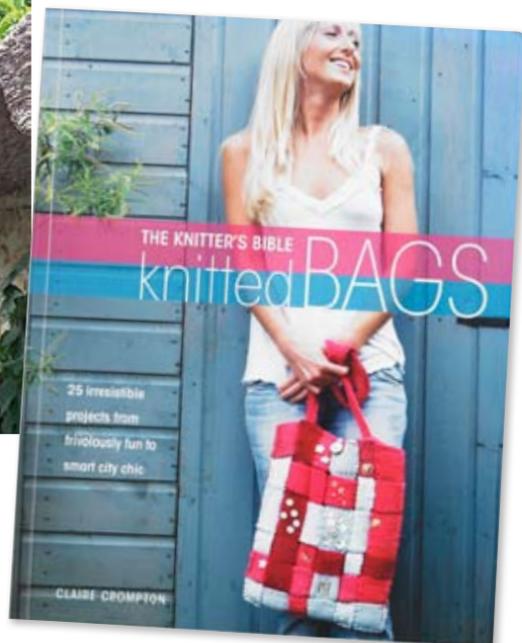
Because originality and creativity are the hallmarks of her own work - she is, after all the woman who put sparkly pink, false eyelashes on her 'Flirty Bunny Bag' and red fishnet tights on one called 'Lady Pirate' - it is not surprising that copying other people's styles is one of the most common pitfalls she sees amateur bag makers falling into.

"It's okay to get inspiration this way, but DIY is all about self-expression," Elizabeth advises. "And if you think you don't have any flair you're wrong! Finding it just takes a little introspection. Hasty craftsmanship is something else to watch out for."

Stay tuned for a new edition of Princess Crafts for a 2009 release. Elizabeth also hopes to have an etsy.com shop up and running soon. Keep an eye on her website for updates.



Left: one of Claire's knitted bags.
Above: Claire Crompton.
Right: Claire's book.



Left: Kim's Black & Red Set.
Above left: Ditsy Lavender bag.
Above: Cornflower Country apron.

follow your passion

win! ALL THREE BOOKS

Thanks to Australian distributor, Capricorn Link Australia, we are offering one person the chance to win 'Crafty Bags for Stylish Girls' by Elizabeth Ingrid Hauser (\$21.99), 'Quilted Bags and Purses' by Mary Jo Hinley (\$19.99) and 'The Knitter's Bible Knitted Bags' by Claire Crompton (\$29.99).

To enter simply write your name and address on the back of an envelope and send it to **Bag/Book Competition @ Get Creative, Locked Bag 4321, South Melbourne VIC 3205**. Competition closes Friday 28 November 08. The winners will be contacted directly and their names will be printed in the March 09 issue of the magazine.

United Kingdom

Claire Crompton
www.clairecrompton.co.uk

Claire Crompton's book, 'The Knitter's Bible: Knitted Bags' is only one of seven books written by this knit designer. A specialist from an early age, Claire has a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Knitwear Design from Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham, but says that, even as a child, she was always interested in knitting and embroidery.

'The Knitter's Bible: Knitted Bags' is published by David & Charles. Claire says that knitted bags have always been popular but interest has really increased over the last couple of years with a new generation of knitters. "I was really pleased to be asked to do this book because I love bags," she says. "Designing them was no challenge at all, in fact I left out as many ideas as I put in. I included simple shapes to encourage knitters to experiment with yarns but added some more challenging bag shapes too. I think the range of designs is the thing I'm most pleased about plus I now have a knitted bag for every occasion. The cow print bag is the one I use to carry things to my workshops and it always raises a laugh - a great ice-breaker!"

In the UK, currently, Claire says young women are embracing the idea of creating something unique ... "I think it's linked to the idea of being 'green' and recycling and trying to move away from wasteful consumerism. There's a real buzz around organic yarns at the moment and many knitters are seeking out wool spun from locally reared sheep," she adds.

For her own bag designs Claire says practical use often inspires the design. "So I make a tote that's hardwearing or an every day bag that's easy to open and carry. But often I'll design a bag that uses colours creatively or around an unusual knitting technique or I'll buy a skein of expensive yarn and design a bag that uses just that one skein and no more," she says. One bag in the book is called 'Patching it up'. This came from an idea the designer had of mixing yarns together into a patchwork ... "I made a small sample of narrow strips to begin with; the edges rolled up and it looked awful until I added the embellishments to hold the whole thing together. So, not only is the bag useful for using up your yarn stash, it's great for using up your button and bead stash too."

Aside from the mass of commissioned work on her plate Claire loves spinning which she took up a few years ago and which she plans to pursue by attending some workshops on spinning different textures. "I'd love to be able to produce my own 'unique' handspun yarn, I'm really interested in combining colours with textures in one yarn. Also I want to be able to spin enough yarn for a whole sweater, not just scarf quantities. I also have an interest in dyeing ... I went to an exhibition of indigo dyeing techniques from around the world and it was fascinating."

Studying with Claire: If you're in the UK towards the end of this year, keep an eye on Claire's website as she often teaches workshops such as the upcoming one in Devon at a store with the charming name of Spin A Yarn (www.spinayarndevon.co.uk). She also plans to attend three fibre festivals in 2009: Wonderwool, Woolfest and Fibrefest. (www.wonderwoolwales.co.uk, www.woolfest.co.uk, www.fibrefest.co.uk).

Australia

Kim Webber
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She has a Degree in Maths and used to work in the world of high finance but Kim Webber traded it all in for a house in the country, complete with a home studio, where she could concentrate on her sewing and her new business, Vintage Inspirations.

Kim's living the dream for many crafters having turned her knack for making bags, aprons and other items into a healthy small business that finally gives her a tax deductible reason to continue hoarding vintage fabrics. "My mum and sister don't sew but I picked up a sewing machine about six years ago and started making pillow cases and quilt covers. It was just a hobby. I love the colours and the patterns and I love textiles, especially vintage stuff. I started making bags for myself and just loved it," she says.

This initial casual love seems to have become an all consuming passion which led Kim to start selling her

bags at craft markets - something she thought she would never do - and giving her the confidence, by watching living, breathing customers in action, that she could take this endeavour further.

"I think I've always been a country girl at heart and moving here to Creswick (picturesque and historic town located on Victoria's Midlands Highway, fifteen minutes north of Ballarat) I can have the outdoors, the dogs can go wild and I work in beautiful surroundings." Her studio is in a self contained bungalow where, alongside high benches designed for cutting, sits her one industrial and two domestic sewing machines. The love of the country influences Kim's work too. She has a penchant for the English country look and began collecting pretty, feminine vintage fabrics long before the business was launched.

"What I do is not flavour of the month," she points out. "These fabrics and products remind us of other times, perhaps they bring back memories of childhood. People will often buy my bags and so forth as gifts but, just as often, they're buying for themselves or, they buy for a friend, then come back and get something personal."

Bags make up 50 per cent of Kim's business. She began by making small, simple totes then made them bigger and started using chenille. "I didn't have a pattern. I just folded and played with the fabric, researched handle lengths and spacings, poor old Mum has loads of these experimental bags. She was my guinea pig."

Such attention to detail continues with Kim's marketing messages honing in on hand made quality, wearability and washability, as practical strengths of her products. "Part of the appeal of fabric bags is that, through washing and time, they change," she says.

New Vintage Inspirations products on sale as of this month: laptop satchel, 'baby bag' and a new peg bag. Kim also sells bag making supplies. Check her website for updates on markets where she's selling or buy online. She's taking 10 per cent off website orders that are ordered and paid for between 1- 30, Nov 2008. [g](http://www.vintageinspirations.com.au)