

SPOTLIGHT: LESLIE POZEN OF ELLU

A designer's journey inspires her to create for a cause

It is often said that traveling helps us gain greater understanding of the world; it changes us personally and expands our horizons. A journey to Peru—Machu Picchu, specifically—changed Leslie Pozen in more ways than one.

Leslie found herself inspired by the natural beauty and peacefulness she discovered in Peru; she was also moved when she saw the extreme poverty that many native Peruvians experience daily. Leslie's travels motivated her to follow her creative intuition and begin designing beautiful objects for a living. The handbags she creates through her Chicago-based company hold special meaning, and some of them directly help the people of Peru.

Leslie founded Ellu (773/307-5519 or www.ellubags.com) out of the desire to make something uniquely for women; she had always admired the beauty and utility of handbags, and she saw them as a means of empowerment.

During her trip, Leslie came across the word "ellu" in a book. "It is an ancient Babylonian word meaning 'the shining one,'" says Leslie. "I was at a point in my life where I needed to allow myself and my talents to shine. The word really stuck with me,

and eventually, when I started designing, I knew it was a perfect fit for the company's concept."

Ellu bags come in a variety of sizes, including Macro, Micro, Boho, Clutch, and Wristlet. Leslie creates them out of reused material such as clothing from vintage shops. "Right now, I'm getting shipments from an upholstery company in Michigan that does furniture for healthcare centers," says Leslie. "A lot of them are green-certified and environmentally friendly, which gives them an added bonus."

Leslie experiments with different colors and textures to create individualistic pieces that respect the unique nature of the fabrics. Each aspect of an Ellu bag has significance. Leslie frequently uses circles because of the shape's natural energy and historical importance. The bags' silver hardware reflects female energy and self-esteem.

One of Leslie's newest developments is the Ellu.5 collection, which got its start in March. She designs one bag a month for the collection and creates just five bags total. Fifty percent of the proceeds from the limited-edition bags go to Spirits Of The Earth, an organization that helps Peruvian families in need. Vera Lopez, who owns the organization and who was also Leslie's tour guide, uses the money to purchase food, medicine, and essentials for poor Peruvians.

"Vera always brings her tour groups to beautiful areas of Peru that are also sometimes very improv-



erished," says Leslie. "When I was researching the number five, I found that it was often associated with compassion and making a difference in the world."

In the years to come, Leslie hopes to expand her collection and also create a handbag recycling program for local needy women. Overall, she aims to maintain her company's eco-friendly efforts while helping others. "The whole green movement isn't just about taking care of the planet, but about taking care of the people in the planet, too."



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