

International appetite for local fine-craft goods growing

Jan 29, 2012 | ADELE SHEVEL

When its eggshell tables were installed in the yacht of Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich, Cape Town design company Avoova became one of South Africa's few players in the international luxury goods arena.



ECO-SOUND: Ostrich shell champagne cooler PICTURE: ESA

ALEXANDER

This is despite the fact that SA is home to a significant portion of the resources used in luxury goods. It has nearly 80% of the world's platinum, is one of the world's biggest gold and diamond miners, and has excellent leather.

Avoova designs small, luxurious items for homes, yachts or hotels. Employing more than 40 artisans in the Karoo, it uses natural materials such as the ostrich egg shell, which undergoes at least 53 processes in its production.

The company has been operating since 2005 and opened its first gallery in Cape Town in 2010. It now has three, all of which target the luxury end of the market. Products range from everyday bangles at R350 to a champagne cooler for almost R25000.

Tom Goddard, CEO of Avoova, said "consistent quality and endorsements from the right kinds of people and places are crucial".

Cape Cobra Leathercraft, which has been around since 1972 and is in its third family generation, manufactures for glamorous fashion houses including Calvin Klein, Michael Kors and Marchesa. The crocodile and ostrich materials are locally sourced, and the products are manufactured in Cape Town.

A large bag in ostrich starts at R14000, a large crocodile bag starts at R40000, wallets start from R1500 and the most expensive bag will set you back up to R65000.

Cape Cobra bags, under international brand names, have been worn by the princess of Monaco, wives of presidents and by Jennifer Lopez, Sandra Bullock and Anne Hathaway.

Ardmore Ceramic Art is an internationally renowned studio in the Midlands of KwaZulu-Natal. Its works are auctioned at Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams in London.

Hanneli Rupert, daughter of Rlichemont CEO Johann Rupert, last year launched luxury handbag range Okapi, which has been featured in the international press.

Anpa Jewels, based in Kalk Bay in Cape Town, sells mostly handcrafted silver and gemstone pieces. Prices range from R1500 to R20000 for ready-made products, to hundreds of thousands for custom-made jewellery.

DV chocolates has moved from Hermanus to Paarl, sources cocoa from five countries and has been in the market for a year and a half. Bars range from about R40 and combination packs cost between R90 and R130.

Honest Chocolates in Cape Town has been operating for a year. Prices range from R42 to R50 for a slab, and truffles cost about R45 to R52 a box.

Silvana Bottega, CEO of the Southern Africa Luxury Association, said the international appetite for South African fine-craft goods is growing. With expanded demand, there is hope for more sustainable business models that will allow for margin, scale and ultimately employment opportunities.

"The ethical ethos underlying the new wave of local luxury brands in South Africa is seen in how they actively look at the bottom line: examples range from the diligent sourcing of leathers for exclusive handbags, the ethical re-investment into the community by Ardmere Ceramic Art through to eco-sound tourism."

~ o O o ~