



AMBER JENSEN AND HER PARTNER BRAD WILSON CUTTING FABRIC IN HER STUDIO

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

LOCAL LEATHER

Stylish handmade satchels, backpacks and bike bags

BY DANTE ZUÑIGA-WEST

Tucked away in the sleepy corner of a west Eugene neighborhood is the workspace and studio of leatherworker Amber Jensen. The entire place is militantly organized — an arts bunker — with waxed canvas, rivets, bags, production tables and tools at the ready.

You could compare Jensen’s meticulously structured workspace to a homestyle assembly line if it weren’t for the tedious personal attention that her handmade leather bags and backpacks require — there is no factory that could mass-

produce this type of quality work. And the number of (wo) man-hours put into each bag is a point of pride for Jensen.

“I’m trying to make stuff that people can have forever,” she says. “It’s an old-timey idea, but instead of buying a bunch of things, I want people to buy quality things and take care of them for a while.”

Jensen came to Eugene by way of Milwaukee, Wis., and began leatherwork after working on a sheep farm in New Zealand several years ago. She plunged herself into the world of art and design in spite of a stern parental caveat: Her mother, an artist and interior designer in Milwaukee, warned Jensen against going into the arts.

“My mom told me, ‘Don’t go into the arts; you won’t be able to make a living,’” Jensen says. “But art school was the only thing that made sense, and that sort of led to this.”

Not only is Jensen cranking out stylish and practical satchels and backpacks, perfect for a book-laden biker or anyone with wanderlust, she is doing so on a national and international scale. “I sent things to Europe, then I sent things to Australia,” Jensen says. “Then I realized one day that I had bags out there all over the world, and people were buying them.”

Although customers from Portland to Sydney are buying up bags, she is somewhat skeptical of her product’s ability to sell in Eugene. “I’d love to sell my stuff in Eugene,” Jensen says, “but I’m not sure the market is here. Everywhere I go here I feel like people are underselling their goods.”

But Jensen isn’t discouraged, and she makes a point to mention exactly why she chose Eugene as a location. “Eugene is off the beaten path, it has awesome art, there’s no traffic, no rushing and that really fosters a creative environment,” she says. After stopping mid-conversation to assist intern Abi Chase with the assembly of a bag, Jensen says she believes the fashion scene in Eugene could be huge. “The right people just have to keep going for it and setting an example,” she says.

With high demand for the unique and sturdy products, Jensen and Chase are always hard at work. What was once an artistic hobby became a full-time gig, and Jensen foresees the operation growing. “I want this to get bigger and be able to hire employees,” she says. “I love the process of making this work, I like the materials and I love what happens when a design or an idea progresses.”

For more information about Jensen’s products, go to www.amberjensen.com

THE WAYFARER BACKPACK (WOOL, WAXED CANVAS, LEATHER) **\$285**

CUSTOM WOOL CASES FOR WOOLMARK COMPANY IN PRATO, ITALY (SCOTTISH TARTAN PLAID WOOL) **NOT FOR SALE**

THE CAMPER SATCHEL (RED WAXED CANVAS, HAND VEGETABLE-DYED LEATHER) **\$230**



PRODUCT PHOTOS COURTESY OF AMBER JENSEN

