

Handcrafted handbags with heart from WeAllShareRoots

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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South African handbag brand WeAllShareRoots (WASR) was created with sustainable development and poverty alleviation in mind. Intent on providing income and employment to underprivileged communities, the production of the company's products is carried out by a small network of local craftsmen, NGOs and small and medium-sized businesses.



Each WASR item is unique, and with designs inspired by the continent, you'll find that vibrant African wax prints and shweshwe combined with local genuine leather are recurring themes.

These fashion accessories are sewn and assembled by a tiny CMT based near Lavender Hill on the Cape Flats, and WASR makes a point of collaborating with family-owned SMEs in Cape Town.

"WeAllShareRoots' bags are original fashion pieces which bring together African colours, modern designs and respect for our planet and its inhabitants," states the company.

Vegan range

In 2018, WASR launched its first 100% vegan range of handbags made from Piñatex, an animal-friendly alternative to leather made using pineapple waste.

Because of the reduced amount of water used to produce it, the lack of harmful chemicals utilised in the production process, and the fact that it's made using an agricultural by-product, Pinatex is pegged as a more sustainable alternative to the mass production of leather.

The company was formed by Elise Sormani, a former Parisian now living in South Africa, and Capetonian Rudi Scholtz.

While Sormani is the coordinator of WASR, Scholtz lends his knowledge of the local business environment and laws to the project.

Guiding principles

According to WASR, the main tenets guiding the brand's commitment to local production are:

- Promotion of local resources
- Small-scale production process
- Long-term partnerships with family-owned SMEs, handcrafters and seamstresses in precarious situations
- Individual and personal relationship with each of their suppliers
- Support for local employment and skills development in a country where 1 in 4 people is unemployed

WASR is thus focused on placing human beings at its core, researching suppliers out of the mainstream, ensuring active involvement in the construction of a self-sufficient workshop for their seamstresses in the townships, and adherence to slow fashion principles like responsible production and waste reduction and recycling.



Elise Sormani



The label was named after a graffiti piece that used to appear with the words 'We All Share Roots' within the former District Six neighbourhood in Cape Town – a district symbolic of the injustices suffered during Apartheid. Produced by the Boa Mistura collective, the piece struck a chord with Sormani, serving as "a reminder that we all have roots that lead us back to Africa".

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

Managing editor and retail editor at Bizcommunity.com Cape Town apologist. Dog mom. Get in touch: lauren@bizcommunity.com

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