

# A new design for Somerset leather

Tea Green produces luxury handbags with simple designs and high quality. ELLIS TAYLOR talks to designer FRANCES BAYLISS about her love for design and how Somerset's craft scene is helping

PHOTOS: NICK RIGG



Somerset was once a hub for leather work and good quality crafting and over time these skills and production have been forgotten about to a degree.

But in recent years attention has turned to the skilled producers of the county as a desire for quality and locality has grown. Frances Bayliss, a local designer who owns Tea Green, not only designs beautiful handbags, but also utilises the craftspeople which Somerset has to offer.

Following years of teaching overseas, Frances returned to Somerset and decided to pursue her passion for textiles through an MA in fashion and textiles at Bath Spa University. During her time as a mature student Frances developed her designs into contemporary handbags and specialised in digital embroidery, a skill she frequently uses on her designs: "I tried to perfect the digital embroidery technique on leather, but then it was a case of simplifying it even more to work on the leather. It became a kind of process of getting the technique to work with what I had designed as a motif"

The simple details and designs make Tea Green bags modern but classic, "I want to make them very very simple and understated," says Frances.

Frances' inspiration frequently relies on straightforward objects and images. She says: "Lots of my previous textile work

came from incredibly simple motifs.

"Something really simple like a folded piece of paper or something from nature like a pattern on a shell or the lines from, say a vegetable cut in half, can inspire me, and then I take the very simple lines or the texture and doodle or abstract them and then repeat them."

Modern techniques are then used to develop the pattern into one of the designs which make Frances' bags so distinguishable.

**"I suppose my speciality if you like is adding that little bit of detail and texture in some of them."**

She says: "After I've played around with the lines and patterns in the sketchbook and have repeated it in there then I put it into Illustrator on the computer and then make it more 'graphic' if you like, and then repeat it using Illustrator until I get the size and the right colours and the sort of thing that I want.

"Once I've got the software set up with the motif and the repeat that I want it's then a very quick process, because the embroidery machine actually does it for me. So apart from choosing the threads,

threading it properly and loading the software in then it does it for you!"

But Frances' designs go beyond embroidery and motifs, colour and texture are also prevalent in the Tea Green bags. "On the Ceylon off white handbag it has just got embroidery on the tab that goes around the side, but it's got a digital printed lining so it does have some detail when you open the bag up. So there's a little bit of pattern and detail in some of the linings, but not all the linings. I suppose my speciality if you like is adding that little bit of detail and texture in some of them.

"Some have some wadding underneath, which allows the leather or the wool fabric then to become textured."

"I love working with colour, with the embroidery that I do on the leather and wool I use very similar colour or tonal colour because then you're bringing out the structure and the texture as opposed to a really obvious pattern."

By focussing on detail, structure and simplicity, Frances has created a range of bags which are beautiful as well as functional, whilst also making use of her talents. From initial design to the final stitching, Tea Green handbags are a creation of and attention to detail.

"In the leather industry and handbags in general you have to think of something different, mine, because of the process



**Left:** The Ceylon collection  
**Below:** The Ceylon handbag has detail on the sides



involved, has to be quite high end really so I've had to develop this technique so that they are more unusual."

Once the designs are complete and the embroidery has been stitched, the high quality bags have to be put together, and this is where Frances has discovered the craftspeople which Somerset has to offer. "In the two years I spent training I knew I wouldn't be able to perfect the technique and the skills used when actually making the bag up because that wasn't my speciality, but I knew that there was a great deal of talent in Somerset, so I wanted to find a way to utilise that."

Frances uses a range of Somerset companies to help her finish off her bags. C.A. Cornish, based in Street, manufactures a

range of leather bindings and has made some of the leather zip pulls for Tea Green.

Frances says she will be using C.A. Cornish more in the future for various trimmings.

Frances also often uses Pittards in Yeovil and A.W. Midgley & Son in Cheddar for the leather used to create the bags.

It is clear that locality is important for Frances in maintaining the high quality products she creates, and keeping this link with Somerset is a something she wishes to keep as Tea Green develops.

"Locally I'd like to do Somerset Arts Week and keep up with local sales such as craft fairs," she says.

Craft fairs and a closeness to the customer is something Frances wishes to keep.

"I want to stay small scale because then you can offer more individuality," she explains, "I'm willing to do collaborations and commissioned work, and bespoke one-off orders, as long as my manufacturer is prepared to do that for me!" ■



**Below:** English breakfast ipad sleeves



**Below:** The Oolong handbag and laptop bag



**Below:** The English breakfast clutch