

# Heaven in a handbag

## Moss Landing woman a hit in Hollywood with creative accessories

By KATHERINE MORRIS

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

MOSS LANDING — Celebrities like Selma Hayek, Jada Pinkett Smith and Maria Shriver may have never visited Moss Landing, but it's very likely that the high-end designer handbags they tote down the red carpet were made there.

Out of her well-lit, airy, 2,000-square-foot studio that backs up against the Monterey Bay Sanctuary in Moss Landing, Stella Page creates unique designer bags that for years have drawn the notice of Hollywood stars and retailers.

"I've got several people who collect my bags now," Page said as she clutched a striking bag decorated with a photo of famed Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, bordered with rhinestones and set against a backdrop of a tropical floral print. "I like to say that I add a contemporary touch to the classic Kelly bags."

Page, a Santa Cruz native, starts with a Lucite "Kelly-style" handbag of varying shape and size with a handle that's either Lucite or bamboo.

From there, she takes clippings of colorful pictures, patterns, maps, stamps or prints she's collected in her travels — from books, flyers, ticket stubs, etc. — and adheres them to the bag through a process called "decoupage," the French art of cutting out designs or illustrations from paper, foil, etc., and mounting them on another surface in a decorative arrangement.

Finally, she decorates the bag with rhinestones and covers it with a coat of clear liquid plastic that gives the handbag a glossy look while protecting it from wear, and, voilà, a Stella bag is born.

"I've got three main influences in my work — Asia, Frida Kahlo and Mexico, namely the work of Jesus Helguera," Page said. "I like to play with a mix of medias and images."

Some have an Asian look and feel, with delicate flowers and images, while others verge on the erotic side. Dazzling color and rich texture make each unique handbag gleam with vibrancy.

Page first got her start nearly four years ago while living and working as a waitress in Los An-



Tarmo Hannula/Registrar-Pajaronian

**Stella Page, owner of Stella Page Designs, works at her production room in Moss Landing on Tuesday surrounded by her original lines of handbags for women.**

geles.

"I really started working with decoupage when I was 16 or 17, finding pictures I liked, cutting them out and gluing them on lunch pails," she said. "I've always been an artist, but for 25 years, I was a waitress and an artist. After that long in the food service industry, I was really ready for something new."

For many years, Page practiced her craft by making bags for female friends and family members, which eventually helped launch her career.

"Things really took off about four years ago when my sister was out to dinner in San Francisco wearing one of the bags I'd made for her," she said. "A man came up to her in the restaurant and asked her where she had gotten that bag. When my sister said that I'd made it, he gave her his card and asked her to have me get in touch with him."

Within weeks, she found herself with a high-end sales representative who had gotten her bags into several trendy boutiques in LA, including a showroom in the



Tarmo Hannula/Registrar-Pajaronian

**A variety of sizes and shapes, blended with exotic images and themes, have made the Stella Page Designs handbags a hot item even in the world of movie stars and celebrities.**

illustrious CaliforniaMart where her handbags sell for roughly \$275 each.

"It's crazy how this all metamorphosed from gluing pictures on a few lunchboxes to this," said Page, who now has clients in the United Arab Emirates and London. She's also been featured in such publications as the London Financial Times.

For several years, she lived and

worked out of a studio in downtown LA, until last September, when she decided she wanted to return to her Central Coast roots and relocate to Moss Landing.

"I love Moss Landing so much," Page said. "I love it, love it, love it. My family is closer now, too. I really decided to move here for my health."