



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Stella Page creates her custom handbags in her Moss Landing studio with four part-time employees.

Stella Page Design

HANDBAG AND COMPACT DESIGNER

OWNER: Stella Page.

WHAT: A wholesaler and an e-commerce business selling limited-edition, high-end *découpage* handbags and compacts.

WHERE: 8022-A Moss Landing Road, Moss Landing.

HOURS: Retail sales are available at the warehouse, but by appointment only.

INFORMATION: Phone and fax: (831) 633-5503; stellapagedesign@aol.com; www.stellapage.com

UPCOMING EVENT: Page's designs will be featured during the AT&T Pro-Am week at a wine and cheese reception at Gallery Elite, an art gallery located on San Carlos between 5th and 6th streets in Carmel. A 10 percent discount will apply to all sales. 5:30-8:30 p.m. Feb. 9-10. Call 625-2233.

These handbags carry some serious flair

Moss Landing resident fulfills artistic passion with creative business

By **KIRSTEN FAIRCHILDS**
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

Stella Page made the leap from waiting tables to designing high-end handbags look like a single baby step.

MOSS LANDING In fact, the Moss Landing resident said she has her 25-year career as a waitress to thank for preparing her for her second career as an accessories designer.

Shortly after waiting on her final table in 1999, Page founded Stella Page Design. Her limited-edition, customized handbags and compacts are carried in high-end retail stores, spas and resorts in several countries as well as in Pacific Grove, Carmel Valley, Santa Barbara and Beverly Hills.

"I have a strong work ethic," said Page, a Palo Alto native whose family moved to Santa Cruz when she was a child. "From being a waitress for so long, I know how to get up and go in the morning."

"I don't lay in bed thinking about how things aren't working out. I just get up and go make them happen."

Page, now 50, waited tables locally at the Catalyst and at the now defunct Bea's Koffee Kup. She said in a single moment she realized she was tired of working as a waitress and walked out

in the middle of a shift at Langer's Deli in MacArthur Park in Los Angeles.

She borrowed \$300 from her older sister Rebecca and bought 25 purses made out of Lucite and began *découpage* them. She tried selling them to stores as well as holding court at flea markets, but didn't get a break until a sales representative offered to represent her after seeing one of her bags.

Just 12 months after leaving the restaurant business, Page was flown out for a thank you party at the prestigious Henri Bendel store on Fifth Avenue in New York.

"They were selling more of my bags per day in their accessories department than any other item," Page said. "So they threw me a party. That happened because I had a rep."

Growing up, Page loved to draw in pen and ink. She attended Harbor High School and began teaching herself the art of *découpage* using both candy and cigarette-pack wrappers at the age of 17.

Interested in pursuing a career as an artist, a 19-year-old Page enrolled at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in San Francisco, but things didn't turn out the way she expected.

"My teacher didn't encourage me at all," Page said. "She literally told me to go marry a rich guy."

"So I did."

Page's marriage ended 10 years later. She moved to Southern California to attend FIDM's Los Angeles branch, and although waitressing always paid the bills, she continued to *découpage* daily.

Although she was now making a living as an artist, Page said she began burning out on the Los Angeles scene. She was producing 1,600 bags a year with very little help. In addition to Henri Bendel in New York, the trendy Fred Segal store in Santa Monica also carried her lines.

Page moved Stella Page Design to Moss Landing on Sept. 3, 2003. One reason was to get out of Los Angeles; the other was to be closer to her mother.

She no longer has a sales rep and has cut production back to 800 bags a year. She has four part-time employees who work alongside her in the 2,020-square-foot warehouse that houses Stella Page Design.

She creates four lines a year, one for each season. The bags come in six or seven sizes and are produced to Page's specifications at a factory in China.

Page and her workers take the bags, which are made out of leather and marbled Lucite, and *découpage* one side of them with coated glossy paper made in Los Angeles that she said is a bit thicker than magazine paper.

Various coats of polyurethane are

then applied. Beads are also added; each bag is also numbered — only 50 are made from each design.

Page said Asian, African-American, African-Parisian and Latina influences are some of the common motifs she uses. She also produces bags with erotica themes, which most often consist of 17th century Chinese erotic designs. These bags were featured in a 2003 weekend-fashion issue of the *London Financial Times*.

"Stella Page bags are like nothing you've ever seen before," said Camille Boren, the supervisor of the luxury boutique at the Bacara Resort and Spa in Santa Barbara.

"For at least the past three years, they are consistently one of our best-selling handbags."

As for Page herself, she said her handbags have it pretty good after they leave her care.

"My handbags have the best life," said Page, who described a typical customer as a well-traveled, 50-plus woman. "Their owners are usually very fit. They have beautiful skin. They drive around in a nice car. They travel the world and go to great parties."

"It's a charmed life they have."

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