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Local Designer Has Business in the Bag

By Moya Stone



The Cass Clutch purses will be available online soon after Debra Szidon's Kickstarter campaign ends. Photo provided by the inset handles. It's big enough to be a tote or used as a chic briefcase.

"I've even used it for groceries," says Szidon, who made it her daily go-to purse. "Every time I used this bag everyone - young and old - loved it." All the compliments she received inspired Szidon to recreate the handbag.

Having grown up in New Jersey with a father who restored 1950s and '60s cars, Szidon appreciates the idea of what she calls "restoration from old to new." She imagined a new life for the vintage styling of her favored bag.

Still, there were many daunting tasks ahead. Szidon had to learn the business of purse manufacturing and fashion marketing.

"I had to teach myself about leather," she says. She started with cobblers and then a friend who makes her own handbags made the first prototypes for Szidon and introduced her to local companies that deal in tanned hides. From there she found SVEN, a leather handbag design company in Berkeley. They created the main pattern and are ready to manufacture her line locally, which is important to Szidon.

Now it's time to market the bag Szidon is calling The Cass Clutch and raise funds to start production. Enter Kickstarter, the popular crowdsourcing platform that raises not only funds, but also awareness. Although there is already a waiting list for The Cass Clutch, the Kickstarter campaign will get the word out as well as confirm for Szidon the extent of interest in her product.

Starting just last December, Szidon quickly learned how Kickstarter works. "It's like a whole other business," she says. As a marketing tool, part of Kickstarter is to have a polished video that tells a story. Even though she knew the story she wanted to tell, she needed help. Szidon hired a video team that had Kickstarter experience. "It wasn't just about the film - I needed guidance in building the campaign."

Lafayette resident Debra Szidon says that she didn't know a thing about the fashion business or marketing. But that wasn't going to stop the interior designer and mother of three from launching her own line of handbags.

Starting with a vintage purse for inspiration, Szidon began learning a new business over a year ago and now is unveiling a Kickstarter campaign to help fund the first in a series of vintage-style handbags.

It started several years ago when Szidon, who has "always had a thing for vintage items," bought a 1970s clutch handbag from a San Francisco consignment shop.

What attracted her to this particular bag was its shape, versatility, and the patina of age. Brown suede with a leather trim, the rectangle handbag folds over and can be sported as a clutch or carried by the inset handles. It's big enough to be a tote or used as a chic briefcase.

Local friends helped too, volunteering for the video the use of a mid-century home and a classic convertible car from the late 60s, all contributing to the retro-California vibe Szidon wanted.

Szidon says that she doesn't think she'd come this far with the project if she were not in California. "People here are really supportive with networking and collaboration. It's so present and welcoming ... California definitely has that spirit."

The Kickstarter campaign launched in March and runs until April 18. After that, Szidon will go into production with The Cass Clutch and sell initially online.

For information on the Kickstarter program for The Cass Clutch, visit <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1432071361/the-cass-clutch-a-vintage-inspired-handbag>.

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