

SPREADING THE LOVE

YVETTE JENKINS HELPS COMMUNITIES NEAR AND FAR WITH HER WORLDLY BOUTIQUE

Yvette Jenkins' passion for her work is indisputable. When talking to the visionary, curator and founder of Detroit's premier artisan shop, Love Travels Imports, it paints a vivid picture in her customers' minds of the grassy plains of South Africa. One might envision the women crafting beautiful and one-of-a-kind handbags, silk bracelets or decorative pillows.

Jenkins saw the likes of a similar scene in 2012 when she traveled to Khayelitsha, a township in South Africa, to meet the women whose work she had been marketing and selling since 2010. During her visit, Jenkins met Adri Schutz – the founder of Mielie – and the company's weavers. Zanele, the first weaver to start working for Mielie, was a bona fide talent who Jenkins took a liking to after seeing her intricate designs on jewelry and handbags. Juxtaposed with the beautiful crafts was something Jenkins could not ignore – the plaguing 80 percent unemployment rate in the area.

"When I met the women behind Mielie, they were just about to stop production and close up business because of so many hardships," Jenkins says. It was in that moment of Mielie's bleak desperation that a light bulb went off, and Jenkins realized she could help the Khayelitsha community in more ways than one.

LOVE IS AMBULANT AND BUILT INTO ITS FIBERS IS THE INSATIABLE NEED TO GROW, TO EXPAND, AND TO REACH. LOVE EXPLORES. LOVE GOES ABROAD. LOVE MOVES. LOVE CROSSES OVER. LOVE TRAVELS.

Jenkins envisioned taking the beautiful creations of jewelry, home décor and handbags back to the United States to sell. It would be a win-win for everyone. Mielie could stay open for business, weavers who worked for Mielie like Zanele could continue doing what they loved, the profits made in the states could financially help Khayelitsha's economy and unemployment rate, and Jenkins could manage a business whose core beliefs resided in bringing beautiful South African pieces to the doorstep of her hometown in Detroit.

Love Travels Imports is located in Detroit's historical enclave of fashion and art on Livernois Avenue between Outer Drive and 8 Mile Road. The shop is an artsy oasis sharing a space with Art in Motion, another Detroit-founded company. The main level Jenkins describes as a "teaser," serving as a pre-embellishment to the actual shop just up the stairs.

The store's shelves and walls showcase work from both near and far. Jenkins proudly dubs herself as having acquired pieces from Madagascar to Mount Clemens, Mich. The store is filled with an array of merchandise including vibrant handbags, beaded and silk jewelry, and custom-made plush pillows and rugs. No matter its origin or miles traveled, every piece represents the deep devotion Mielie and Jenkins both hold for the products – all of which contribute to the tapestry of the unique boutique, emphasizing the point even more that love does in fact travel.



Looking ahead, Jenkins is working with Schutz to create, manufacture and distribute handbags with a rainbow teardrops design inspired by Nelson Mandela and his gift of uniting people. Their thought is to have Zanele train the other weavers in a new skill: to make the hand block-print and the rainbow bags. Jenkins plans to do the distributing, establishing the sales channel partnerships – including partnering with the Unstoppable Foundation, a California-based nonprofit that does work in developing nations – to support educational products. But above all else, whatever Jenkins does each day, she does it with compassion and love.

For more information about Love Travel Imports or to shop online, visit lovetravelsimports.com.  — Cieara Wilson