

Signature Style



In my opinion, a handbag is so much more than a portable space for my wallet, breath mints and car keys. It's a personal fashion statement and a clue as to how I'm feeling on any given day. But with certain designer bags ringing up at \$400 or more, a girl has to be careful about how much "statement" she makes. How do you get your handbag cravings met and feed your retirement fund? Maeva Design to the rescue – a hip new handbag company that brings together great craftsmanship and free-spirited design elements – at a reasonable price.

But don't expect the usual shopping experience. Maeva is something entirely different. You will actually customize your own bag – the fabric, the shape, the size – everything to your specification. Talk about making a statement. Here's how it works: You attend a "design social" – an informal girl party where you ooh and ah over hundreds of design options. You ask the opinions of the other fifteen or twenty women who drop by to design their own bags. You place an order with a Mademoiselle (the stylish, black-clad women who are exclusive purveyors of the goods); and finally, you sit back and sip tea (or in the case of a private design social I attended, Mojitos) and gloat over your previously untapped creative abilities. Oh, and you make new friends.

This very cool, self-design, direct-sales approach to handbag crafting is the brainchild of the über stylish Eve (She prefers to be known by first name only – like Cher and Madonna), a French Canadian transplant who's quirky, but chic bags are quickly becoming the talk of the town.

My initial encounter with Eve was at a public design social at Cornerstone Café. The first thing that struck me about the young entrepreneur was her own astute sense of style. Her thin frame was slipped perfectly into a flirty little floral dress with a bustier feel (the criss-cross laced-up back was so beautiful). She paired it with a seriously posh pair of heels. And of course, one of her own bags. Her look was very Gautier meets Stella McCarthy.

Eve was flittering about welcoming guests and recommending fabrics when I walked up to introduce myself. "Glad to meet you," she said in the cutest French accent. "Please grab a complimentary tea or coffee and browse the tables. Then ask me whatever you like." This is Eve's approach to sales. Browse the

tables and ask whatever you like. She doesn't hover over her customers or give lengthy presentations on the company. Eve allows her unique idea and the quality of the bags to sell themselves. It's a refreshing approach.

The closest café tables were covered with an eclectic blend of fabrics – from bright, bold swirls to demure little polka dots – about 100 choices in all.

Two long tables pushed against the wall showcased handles, ribbons and hand-made jewels. And a few completed items that Eve brought along as inspiration for her guests – hand bags, diaper bags, cell phone holders, gym bags and bible covers. There were women everywhere – talking, laughing and shopping. I picked up several bags and swung them over my shoulder. "Pride", a slouchy, gathered, lightweight bag with slivers of sheered fabric was my favorite. Eve shared that most of her clients don't like that one. "People don't get it so much," she said in a playful tone, but then added that it's her favorite bag as well. She invited me to personalize it. Her version was white linen with a touch of black. No way. I can't do white bags. I'm far too messy. So I chose a loud, crazy floral print (not a sweet, country floral) with a black background.

By the time I finished deciding on "hand-made jewels or plain," "ribbon or zipper," "reversible or one-sided," and so on, I felt like I was designing the "it" bag for fashion week. Two days later, I attended a home-based design social where twenty or so women dropped by to design their own bags. Several of the women, like me, had been to other design socials and loved the experience. The host of the event, Courtney Chapman, a marketing expert who works at CBS, said her friends love attending the socials so she decided to host one in her brand new home. As a host, Courtney received a free Maeva bag. Several customers spoke with Eve about hosting an event once they learned about the fringe benefits. I've seen several Maeva bags slung along arms in downtown Harrisburg. My bag arrived just today. It's beautiful.

For a company that started just two years ago and "by accident" as Eve puts it, Maeva is doing fantastic. "I made a few bags for friends and family and then other people started asking for them," Eve says. "Before I knew it, I had a thriving business." Indeed she does. **HBG**



Eve, the creative mind behind Maeva Design