

LIFE

A CAPE Town fashion company is making bags from locally sourced recycled seatbelts, reused upholstery, and more – all made by people with disabilities. Designer and entrepreneur Zaid Philander spoke about his quest to change the world one stitch at a time.

Where did your inspiration come from?

As a child in high school, I would save R2.50 a day by walking from the city to home in Woodstock (instead of taking a minibus). At the end of the week I would then dive into a reject fabric bundle to make my next item, which was often an outfit inspired by the legends. The feeling of achievement after creating something that was functional, beautiful, and allowed me to escape to a place where I felt empowered, is what motivated me.

What's the story behind the name?

As a kid, I never enjoyed ice cream. In fact, I always opted for something else like chips, while my siblings would be chowing down their cones with frozen cream that made no sense to me. At the same time, my favourite colour has always been red. So the name was to remind me of the bad things that could happen (like ice cream that I never enjoyed) and to remind me of the good things (red being my favourite colour). It's only until much later that Ice Cream & Red changed to I Scream & Red because of domain name availability.

Who do you employ?

Our typical makers are people from disadvantaged communities who are disabled. They are given lessons and set up with their own sewing stations, which are small and non-intrusive. All makers are taught within their homes. This eliminates travel time and allows each maker to work on a flexitime basis in a pressure-free environment that ensures all our products are made with 100 per cent love.

Why is it important for you to employ people with disabilities?

There is a great injustice toward people with disabilities. When one is born with a physical disability, parents are encouraged to place their child in a special needs school that also caters for children with learning disabilities. This does not allow your child to learn.

What products do you make and sell?

We have a range of customised products, from laptop bags and messengers to backpacks and tog bags.

We also offer our services to customers who would like clothing made such as T-shirts, pants, crewnecks, hoodies, and even homeware. With this, customers are able to have their products made by people with disabilities.

Where do you source your raw materials?

Most of our materials are sourced from local car pounds where vehicles have been written off. It's as if we're giving those raw materials a new life all over again. We also source all our up-cycled upholstery and rejected sample books from upholsterers and interior decorators around Cape Town.

What's been challenging for you?

When I started this initiative, there was a disappointing incident where one of my first makers was burgled in his shack and the perpetrators took our sewing machines and beat him up. This was upsetting and for a long time I had to sit back and ask myself if I was prepared for the kind of social work that can risk the lives of the people involved.

I continued the work nonetheless and held my head high.



SEW IT GOES: I Scream & Red, founded by Cape Town-born designer Zaid Philander, below, produces a range of customised products, from laptops to tog bags.

Designer has it in the bag

Disabled show they're able in Zaid's business, writes Eugene Yiga

What would someone find surprising about the work you do?

Often people from the city are most surprised that I teach in townships, am comfortable being in vulnerable situations, and am dedicated to the people I teach. Some people are also surprised that I have learned sign language to work with deaf members of the community.

How has your work changed and grown over the years?

Our focus has changed toward the interest of our makers as opposed to concentrating solely on design and aesthetics. We have

developed a stronger hold on our classes, offer basic sewing workshops to the public, and raise awareness around environmental issues and disabilities.

What plans do you have for future growth?

There are a few great things happening in the pipeline that may be too early to mention, but we are fundraising to develop a sewing centre to get more disabled makers on board and to use as a collective space for developing designers that need their items made at a sample level; a centre for true incubation of young designers and change makers. We also are focusing on growing our footprint in South Africa, because how can we claim to be a South African-made product if we are not providing our services to South Africa?

● Scream & Red has a collective designer store called Threads at 349 Albert Road, Woodstock. The company also sells in I Love Coffee in Draper St, Claremont (inside X Body Fitness Gym), a coffee shop that employs people from the deaf community and raises awareness about forms of disabilities. Learn more at www.iscreamandred.co.za.

