

Into the Woods

A local design duo creates one-of-a-kind handbags out of the unlikeliest of materials.

You expect to see couture walking down the Paris runway or hugging the body of an award-winning starlet as she walks down a red carpet. You don't, however, expect to see one-of-a-kind handcrafted fashions coming out of a woodshop—yet that is exactly what one Atlanta-based design duo has done. BowensBergeron is a new luxury handbag brand that is crafted entirely out of wood. The innovators behind the concept are Tamara S. Bowens and A. Ray Bergeron, a marketing executive and custom furniture builder respectively, who met on an interior design project. Bowens was helping a friend revamp her penthouse, and when she saw Bergeron's custom cabinetry work, she knew immediately she wanted to partner together on a progressive new concept. The pair envisioned a line of handcrafted, wooden handbags, and, with Bowens designing the bags and Bergeron meticulously crafting each of her concepts, a true collaboration was born.

Bergeron says he “never in a million years” imagined he'd be a member of the fashion set, yet his talent and artistry make him the perfect addition to the meticulous world. It takes him an average of four days to create just one of the wooden couture bags, and each one is numbered and “signed” with the BowensBergeron name, just like a piece of art—because as any fashion-lover knows, real fashion, like art, is collectible, and these handbags are nothing if not functional-yet-collectible pieces of art.

Despite the beautiful colors and patterns in the wood grain of the BowensBergeron handbags, no staining or painting is used; each feature of the wood occurs naturally, and the bags are specifically designed to bring out this natural beauty. The brand is also environmentally conscious in that all the wood used, such as zebrawood, purpleheart and sapele, are salvaged “scraps” that are too small to use on traditional wood projects and would typically be thrown away. But it's not just the colors, such as rich purple or deep black, that make the bags so striking, Bergeron also employs wood-



One-of-a-kind creations by BowensBergeron



working techniques such as a “weaving process” to create an alluring aesthetic design to the bags. But don't expect the craftsman to get into specifics about his handiwork. “I can't give away all my tricks,” he quips.

The line's launch collection is comprised of 20 bags, and the duo plans to focus on two major collections each year. And with no more than 25 of each style made, the exclusivity of carrying a BowensBergeron bag is only one more draw to this innovative line.

Bowens says whenever she carries one of the bags, the response is always wildly positive, and she typically receives the same questions. “People always say they love my bag, and then ask if it's wood,” she explains. The next question? “They ask if they can touch it,” she laughs. Another common question is about the weight, because, let's face it, typically, wood is not a lightweight material! But even though many of us are willing to sacrifice physical comfort for fashion, with these bags, you don't have to, as they are surprisingly lightweight and quite easy to carry around throughout the day or night.

So you may think you know high-end fashion, but maybe it's time to let BowensBergeron teach you a thing or two about couture.

Prices of the first collection range from \$2,000 to \$6,000 and can be purchased at bowensbergeron.com. —EMILY L. FOLEY