



Kate Mara
with Small Tote in Black Crocodile



Jessica Alba
with Medium Tote in Slate Ostrich

ART & SOUL

Created from necessity, Leni Penn's luxe faux-leather totes shoulder more than your essentials

Words by Vanessa Pascale

Everyone from Tina Fey and Jessica Alba, executives to students are carrying Leni Penn totes. The totes that started out being sold solely in South Florida- and New York-street markets and on the company website, are preparing to make their U.S. retail store debut, and South Floridians Susie and Brit Ankari, the mother-daughter team, respectively, (who easily pass as sisters) at the helm of Leni Penn, are beyond excited about the expansion.

As a student at the University of Miami, Brit couldn't find a presentable-enough-bag (the oversized blue plastic IKEA bag had to go) to haul around her film equipment in. Naturally, the skilled artist took some of her mother's heavy-duty fabric remnants (used in Susie's interior design projects) and crafted a bag from it that could accommodate all her gear. Problem solved. When the compliments on her creation quickly came rolling in, she soon realized that there was something special here. Brit fused the Latin root words for Gentle Feather ("though the totes are anything but gentle," says Brit), as they captured

the energy and core purpose of the brand, and established Leni Penn.

Crafted from industrial grade vegan leather, totes easily transform, with a snap (literally) into a more compact triangular design. I use my LP tote incessantly --as a gym bag, to tote my homemade lunch, heels, laptop... to the office, and I always bring it along as my carry-on (eye mask, snacks, ear buds, all tuck away nicely in their convenient, multiple pockets inside.) when traveling, especially to a tropical locale as it doubles as my beach bag. But Leni Penn gives us more than a chic animal-friendly tote to carry our goodies around in, they make us feel good, because for every tote we purchase, they donate one to a person in need. Compassionate fashion is something we can all jump onboard with and one of the reasons we're huge Leni Penn fans.

Tell us the latest Leni Penn news.

Brit Ankari: New things are happening every day! We are launching a new website, a new campaign highlighting our actual customers and

their everyday lives. New styles are coming soon as well and we'll be in select stores in the fall!

Susie Ankari: We are also experimenting with different fabrics and incorporating different textures along with our core crocodile, snake, and ostrich materials. We have new styles of bags that are launching soon as well as an incredibly beautiful Embroidered Collection, which are rarely seen on faux leather.

What stores can we look forward to seeing LP in?

B.A.: The select U.S.-based stores will be announced on our website in the coming months. From the very beginning, we've been contacted by boutiques and department stores and told everyone no for a while, which was hard to do! The Tote was created out of necessity. Leni Penn basically created itself in a very non-traditional and organic way, which was super cool, but it also meant that we had research to do. All of our Totes are hand-cut and hand-sewn privately in South Florida by local female artisans. Finding a factory

in America that has the skill set to produce at the level that we do has not been easy, which is one of the main reasons why we held off going into stores.

S.A.: We have cultivated a strong and devoted following across the U.S. as well as internationally, with a following in Paris and Brazil. LP Totes are currently in the boutique of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Aruba, and will soon be in boutiques in St. Barths and St. Martin. In the meantime, shop with us at LeniPenn.com or email our customer service with ANY and ALL questions. We pride ourselves on having a personal connection to our customers.

Celebrities like Kate and Rooney Mara and Jessica Alba have been spotted with their Leni Penns -- who else is wearing your fab bags? Is there a story behind these celebs being Leni Penn fans?

S.A.: Yes! Kate and Rooney Mara, Jessica Alba, Tina Fey, Tara Lipinski, and recently Michelle Pfeiffer. It has honestly all been from word of mouth, which I absolutely love. To have our brand reach these incredible women from the recommendation of customers of ours that know them or work with them, and to have someone like Kate Mara or Jessica Alba respond to it is really great. It's a Tote that fits their lifestyle. Rooney was seen traveling with her Slate Ostrich Tote because it's the best travel tote. Jessica used hers while traveling to Cabo with her kids; the Tote is an awesome alternative diaper bag! Kate was seen on her way to yoga. It's truly the perfect Everything Tote.

B.A.: Seeing these women spotted with their Leni Penn Tote is so exciting. They're women that we all look up to. But it's just as exciting to get photos from all of our wonderful customers, who are just as inspiring! Seeing them on the street with their Tote hanging on their stroller or on the subway coming home from work -- our customers are an incredibly diverse group of both women and men, ranging from 15-years-old to 85-years-young, who are mothers, travelers, architects, students, teachers, artists, lawyers, yogis, the list goes on. About 60% of our customers have more than one LP Tote, many having 5+ Totes in their Leni Penn Collection. Different sizes and fabric styles are used for different purposes. There really is something for everyone!

Which is your favorite bag for summer?

B.A.: I'm really into our Metal Python. It's a fantastic combination of both silver and gold and has a disco ball-like shimmer that I'm obsessed with. It's perfect for summer or if you're from Florida, like us, then all-year round!

S.A.: I love the White Ostrich and Mandarin Crocodile. Summer is about travel, the beach, BBQs,



Susie and Brit Ankar

etc. With the LP Tote, you don't have to sacrifice style for functionality.

Brit, you came up with the LP tote when you were in college lugging around massive equipment, what are you carrying in your LP these days?

B.A.: I'm still lugging around my life! This all started while I was in school at the University of Miami studying Film, Painting, and Photography. My supplies were extraordinary and I couldn't find a bag that met my needs. I'm also a person that likes to travel with my entire life, whether it's to lunch or to Europe. The multiple layers of compartments allow you to be as organized or disorganized as you like. I have my keys and my phone in the mini phone pocket, my wallet in the larger pocket in front of that. I have my sunglasses, my lip gloss, my tissues, my iPad, all in their respective pockets. Everything has its place and the contents change from person to person, depending what you use your LP Tote for.

S.A.: I'm not nearly as organized! My bag is overflowing with fabric samples and receipts. For me, it's about durability and size. These Totes can take a beating. And you just wipe it down with a sponge and soap at the end of the day! As an interior designer, my supplies were extraordinary, going to my clients with 4 different smaller bags while kicking one through the door. I looked for a great Tote bag everywhere, from Walmart to Chanel. Brit came home one day with her laundry in her XLarge Tote and I flipped. From there, everywhere we went we were hounded, "Where did you get that bag?!" We started with our XLarge Size and grew into 4 sizes: Small, Medium, Large, XLarge -- that way there is something for everyone.

For every bag sold, you donate a bag/backpack to a woman or child in need, tell us why this continues to be an important aspect of business for you?

B.A.: I was raised by two incredibly giving parents. My older sister and I started a charity in high school collecting books and clothing to donate to local schools in need in our area in South Florida, something our younger brother went on to continue. This was all at the guidance of my mother. She's the woman that has dog and cat food in her trunk for when she sees strays. We have worked with local schools and organizations like Women and Kids in Distress for many years so when Leni Penn came together we instinctively tied a giveback program to it. The Leni Penn Tote is a lifestyle Tote and giving back to our community and to those in need was part of our lifestyle. It was only natural for us to continue that with our business.

S.A.: I got involved in working with these charities and schools in need when my family moved to South Florida from New York 13 years ago. In addition to our Buy/Give program, we have partnered with and donated to various organizations including, Women and Kids in Distress, The Ronald McDonald House, Crohn's and Colitis Foundation, Boys Town, The ALS Association, Gimme Shelter Animal Rescue in Southampton, and are continuing to expand our philanthropic outreach.

Anything else you'd like to add?

The feedback and the love that we get from our customers is unbelievable. Most recently one our customer's purchased her 11th LP Tote and is a self-proclaimed "Leni Penn addict." That's what keeps us going. **ML**



"All Totes have the same layers of interior pockets for ultimate organization!"

Pricing: \$230-\$290, Small-XLarge
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