



THE
QUILL
OF ALPHA XI DELTA SUMMER 2006

Julie Lazarus
Eta Chapter, Syracuse

Fashion Statement

Sisters make it big in handbag and apparel design.

“People always ask me how I started my own handbag line, that it must have been scary. It was, but I just sort of shrugged my shoulders and knew that not doing it was out of the question.” —Julie Lazarus, Syracuse '91

Success.

It's in the Bag

By Ruth Goodman
Northern Iowa '80

It can improve your mood, increase your confidence, and help you look polished and pulled together. It can set you apart, help you fit in and let you lead a more organized life. Ah, the power of the purse!

No one understands this power more than up-and-coming New York handbag designer Julie Lazarus, *Syracuse '91*, who created the Elezar line of bags in February 2005 with longtime friend Esther Barron. The Elezar line was designed for women between the ages of 25 and 50 who like high-end luxury bags with unique shapes, as well as traditional-shaped bags with a bit of a twist.

"Our bags offer something unique that you won't see in every style magazine you open or on every woman's shoulder," said Julie. That "something unique" ranges from a traditional barrel-shaped bag made from richly textured cork all the way to a casual hobo-style bag made from blue python-print patent leather. Elezar also offers tote bags, evening bags, clutches, wristlets and reversible beach bags—everything today's active woman needs to sail through her day with style and ease.

"I imagine every bag as a piece of art," said Julie, "and every woman can make it her own when she carries it, depending on her other accessories and what clothing she's wearing. I think that's interesting."

What's also interesting is how a young woman from a small Midwestern town became a rising star in the handbag design industry.

From Small Town to Big Apple

On any given Saturday in the early 1970s, Julie Lazarus and her mom, Elaine, could be found drawing and painting in the basement of their Cincinnati, Ohio, home. Julie loved to paint and draw and seemed to have a natural propensity for them. Julie's kindergarten art teacher had noticed something special in her young pupil and was quick to tell Julie's parents that their daughter was artistically talented. Julie's parents embraced that talent and enrolled their daughter in private painting lessons, which Julie took off and on for six years.

After graduating from high school, Julie moved to New York to enter the graphic design program at Syracuse University. Upon graduation in 1994, Julie spent five years working as a graphic designer at *Smart Money* magazine in New York City. For a year after that, she lived in Europe, working as a designer for British Airways. While liv-

ing in London, Julie took advantage of her proximity to the Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design and took classes in handbag and footwear design. When she returned to New York in 2001, Julie took a class in pattern-making at the Jewish Community Center on the Upper West Side.

Julie knew that if she could design a handbag on a piece of paper, she could design a three-dimensional bag. And she was right. Julie's first design was a hobo bag that she called the Boskin, which she anxiously sent to her friends to get their opinion.

Because of the enthusiasm shown by her friends and family, Julie moved forward with creating a handbag design business. She began looking for a manufacturer, and then concentrated on getting a company name, logo and website. Once all of these things were in place, Julie began ordering leathers and interior fabrics, all the while continuing to create new handbag designs. Twelve months later, Julie and friend Esther Barron launched the Elezar line of bags with the Boskin, the Nathan tote, the Rigsby wristlet and the Highbury barrel bag. Elezar has five other styles with three more in prototype mode.

As Elezar gains momentum, Julie continues to work as an art director for Niche Media in New York City where she lends her design expertise to luxury fashion magazines *Capitol File* and *Hamptons*. "I still love the challenges of graphic design," she said, "but I enjoy the freedom of fashion."



Julie's favorite bag is the first one she designed: the Boskin. It's also the most popular bag in the Elezar line. Elezar bags are named after family members as well as characters in classic literature. For example, Boskin is the maiden name of Julie's maternal grandmother. The Fairfax evening bag is named after the kindly housekeeper in Jane Eyre.

Partners and Friends

Julie's business partner, Esther Barron, is a Chicago-based corporate attorney who also teaches at the Northwestern University School of Law. "Esther is a childhood friend and one of my best friends," said Julie, who lived down the street from Esther in Amberley Village in the greater Cincinnati area. "Esther takes care of the legal side of things, I take care of the design side and we both work on the business," said Julie. "I'm much more easily caught up in the passion of it while Esther has the lawyer point of view and is always even-keeled. She's really smart and I love working with her."

Esther's business and fashion know-how came at an early age. By the time she was 10, Esther had created a hair barrette business and sold these accessories to several Cincinnati stores for many years. Although the two friends chose different universities (Julie chose Syracuse while Esther went to Brandeis University near Boston and law school at Northwestern) the two friends stayed in touch with frequent phone calls and trips back home to Ohio to see their families.

Julie and Esther employ 10 energetic young men and women who talk up their bags, help them determine the next fashion trend, and connect Julie with the movers, shakers and decision-makers in the fashion industry. In early 2006, Julie hired a New York City public relations firm to help spread the word about Elezar, which allows Julie more time to come up with the next big idea.

To generate ideas, Julie combs the pages of *Women's Wear Daily* and other fashion magazines. She also strolls through stores to look at hardware and shapes, and visits art galleries in Chelsea for design inspiration. Afterward, she sits down with what she calls "this glob in my head" and draws several versions of a bag, eventually narrowing it down to one that she really loves. Other times, Julie emails Esther and her core group of fashionista friends and tells them to pick the design.

"It's actually quite challenging to make something you love that you think other people will love as well—something that can be mass-produced yet still be unique and beautiful," said Julie.

A new design is added to the Elezar line every four months, which is how long it takes to get a prototype completed. After a handbag is designed, Julie shows the sketches to her manufacturer in New York. It usually takes a couple of weeks for the manufacturer to make a sample of the bag from inexpensive leather, which is used just so Julie can see how the final bag will look.

While the manufacturer is crafting the bag, Julie goes to leather and fabric shows throughout the City to meet with leather manufacturers and see what they have to offer. "Sometimes I ignore what I'm being shown and pick around and say, 'Hey, what about this?' That's how we ended up with cork bags, which no one was doing at the time."

Once a sample handbag is returned to Julie, she works with the manufacturer and makes changes until the bag is just right. If she loves it and thinks others will too, Julie has 10 bags made in three different colors. If she thinks the bag might be too "out there," Julie has just a sample or two made to test it out.

"Our Highbury cork bag with gold leather trim is an example of that. I made only one for our launch party but had to take orders right away because people went gaga for it. I thought it was a weird fabrication that only I would like. Was I wrong!"



Julie teamed up with her childhood friend, Esther Barron, to launch the Elezar line of bags.



"I'm always going to leather shows, fabric shows and meeting with leather manufacturers to see what's new. It's fun and exhausting, and I love every second of it," said Julie Lazarus.



"I wear this handbag the most because it carries a ton and everything is so accessible," said Julie of her Highbury cork barrel bag, named after the English town in *Emma* by novelist Jane Austen. "The thing I love is the four outside pockets that make things like my lip gloss, phone and subway card so accessible."



Positive Affirmation

Can you imagine how it must feel to walk down the street and see a woman proudly carrying something you've created? Julie knows what that's like and she says it's amazing.

"I almost stopped a woman on the street but I controlled myself," she laughed. "It's like, 'Oh, my God. I made that!' You want to say, 'Hey, come have lunch with me. I want to find out who you are. Why did you buy this bag? What appealed to you?' The real high, though, is when people buy a bag. It's like they're approving of me. A woman I've never met wants something I created. Pretty rewarding, if you ask me."

And the accolades kept coming. Two months after Elezar was launched, Julie's bags were featured on the Mother's Day gift segment of the *Today* show. (Watch the clip at www.elezar.com.) After receiving this coveted media attention, things really began snowballing. Dari, a trendy LA store that receives a lot of celebrity traffic, began carrying the Elezar line and sold bags to such well-known women as Demi Moore, Fergie, Jessica Simpson, Hillary Duff and Marissa Tomei. These ladies were even pictured in national magazines sporting their new bags.

Women have also been introduced to Elezar by Julie's legion of friends in the fashion, design and entertainment industries who have supported Julie and Esther from the very beginning, including Jen Lowitz, public relations maven for Fredrick's of Hollywood, and fashion designer Rachel Pally. "They're constantly out on the town wearing our bags and passing our name on to celebrities," said Julie. "And I always carry one of my own handbags. People love finding out about the industry because it's different and they're intrigued."

Next came a coveted trunk show at one of the premier luxury specialty retailers in the United States, Henri Bendel, where store personnel and customers were introduced to the Elezar line. Julie also has her bags displayed and for sale at Item Showroom on Fifth Avenue in New York City. At this megamar-ketplace, buyers can see and learn more

For one of her college art projects, Julie was asked to enlarge something found in nature. She chose butterfly wings because of their amazing patterns. "I took these patterns to watercolors, to oils, then back to watercolors. The patterns weren't getting out of my system, so I used them on the bags." she said.

Support sister Julie Lazarus and purchase your Elezar bag online at www.elezar.com or at one of these retailers:

- California
- Dari - Studio City
- Colorado
- Bandana Kids - Aspen
- Georgia
- Whose Whoaa - Albany
- Louisiana
- Mimi - New Orleans
- New York
- Superdeluxe - Lower East Side
- Yamak - Greenwich Village
- Sag Harbor Pilates - Sag Harbor
- Ohio
- 2700 Erie - Hyde Park
- Bellini - Cincinnati
- New Jersey
- Blush - Cherry Hill



about Julie's bags, as well as accessories from dozens of other designers, in individual designer showrooms prior to purchasing items to sell in their own retail stores.

The showroom provides a welcome reprieve for Julie after the grueling months of flying across the country to present her bags to boutique owners to win their business.

Although she found that buyers were skittish about carrying a handbag line from a designer they had never heard of, Julie's batting average was actually quite good. For every four shops she visited, she received orders from three.

Online orders from Julie's website continue to increase as more and more women and accessory buyers learn of the Elezar line. "Esther and I have already met with venture capitalists," said Julie. "If the business really takes off, Esther and I will both have to quit our day jobs, which would be great!"

For the remainder of the year, Julie and Esther hope to increase sales by 20 percent over last year and to have their bags in boutiques in all major cities. "Our goal is to grow into a fashion brand that includes clothing and footwear for fashionable women throughout the world carrying Elezar." So far so good. Sales have already increased 34 percent over last year.

Why is it that millions of women from every part of the country, from every age group and from every socio-economic level find handbags so captivating? To Julie Lazarus, it's really quite simple. "It doesn't matter what you look like that day, whether you ate too much the night before, or if you didn't get enough sleep. Your bag can always look great. It will always fit." Now that's the power of the purse!

Connect with Julie at Julie@elezar.com.

Learn more about her bags at www.elezar.com.

Functional Fashion

Kim Glathar
Nebraska Omaha '87



When we met Kim Glathar in the summer 2001 issue of *The Quill*, she was the lead designer at Wave Rave in Denver, Colorado, a snowboarding apparel company that pioneered this type of clothing. Since then she has moved on to become a designer at Sport Obermeyer, a fashion skiwear design and merchandising company headquartered in Aspen.

Kim mostly designs garments that can be layered, such as sweaters and fleecewear, for men, women, boys, girls and preschoolers. Kim designed a special ladies collection that will debut this fall called Dynasty (right) that has an intricate imperial dragon embroidered over the shoulder. This collection was inspired by Kim's many business trips to Hong Kong, Taipei and Seoul.

Sport Obermeyer skiwear can be found at department stores, sports stores and ski shops throughout the United States.

Connect with Kim at kimglathar@yahoo.com.

Learn more about Sport Obermeyer at www.obermeyer.com.

