



Vaya Bags Founder Interview



Just before the holidays someone brought a bag company that I was not familiar with to my attention: Vaya Bags.

I was immediately intrigued and started doing a little bit of research and, as is normally the case, there is a fascinating person behind any fascinating company!

Tianna Meilinger is the renaissance woman behind Vaya Bags. Environmental scientist, biker, bassist and up-cycling bag artiste. Not

exactly the combination that would lead one to a entrepreneurial enterprise. Sometimes though, necessity is the mother of invention.

Tianna's driving necessity was a need for a great messenger bag, but a limitation of capital. So, she made one for herself and a cottage industry was founded. After being drug into making bags for friends and family she started expanding her horizons. Incorporating found and salvaged materials added another level of interest to what she was doing.

So when I got the chance to interview her for the background on Vaya Bags came to be, I jumped at it.

So, where did the name for Vaya Bags come from?

Vaya means "go" in Spanish. Right before I started making bags I lived in Ecuador studying tropical ecology, and I wanted something with a Latin flare to it.

From an appearance standpoint, your bags are all striking with a definite predilection for stripes in your approach. How do you balance form and function, fashion and usability when you are designing a bag and what is most important to you?

I start out with the function of the bag – making the bag so that it is user friendly the way that I want it to be. In addition, this is also a form of art for me and I try to be as creative as possible. The ultimate goal is to make bags that are functional and aesthetically pleasing; also unique, something you haven't seen before.

So do you personally want a big open bag or lots of little segmented compartments?

I personally like something in between. I like a bag that has the ability to carry large items so big open spaces are a plus for that. But I also would like it to have a few small slots for cell phone, ipod, etc.

Since so many of your bags are transporting a computer does yours contain a Mac or PC?

Mac!

Ahh, so you care about form and function! I love that you are combining the disciplines of your various trades in what you do at Vaya Bags. I assume, perhaps wrongly, that you coined the word "upcycled". I am curious how you define that as different from recycling and where does your obvious passion for conservation and protection of the environment come from?

I didn't coin the term upcycling. It's a pretty widespread word used to describe the recreation of garbage and waste into more valuable products. I've always been passionate about the environment and by the time I reached college, majored in environmental science. Recycling actually runs in the family – my dad made a living making clothing from scrap leather that he found in the dumpster outside an old leather factory.

There seems to be more than a hint that you were inspired to make the leap to create Vaya Bags by your father and his exploits making clothing. How much of that drive and those acquired sewing skills are inherited from dear old dad?

Pretty much all of it. From the time I was born, I was traveling around the country with my parents who sold their handmade clothing at art and craft shows. Making clothes out of handmade material and selling it in person was something that I was always around. I never thought that I would go into the business, but it just sort of happened after I made myself a messenger bag out of necessity. My friends were impressed and wanted bags of their own. I started making bags before I found a "real" job while I was in college and I haven't stopped since.

I understand that you have some experience in clothing design as well. How do the aesthetics and function issues of making bags compare to that of making clothing?

To be honest, I'm pretty awful at making clothing. My pants usually turn out with one leg shorter than the other. But, luckily bag making and clothing making are very different (besides the sewing part). The great thing about making bags, is usually one size fits all.

If Barbara Walters were to ask you which of your bags you would want to be stranded with on a desert island, would you end the interview then and there? If not, after rolling your eyes, which one would you choose?

I would choose [our backpack](#) because it is waterproof and the most sturdy. It could act as a water bucket or to carry my crabs and caught fish.

You have roots in Boston and NYC...so, Yankees or Red Sox? Giants or Patriots?

I'm not a huge sports fan, but just so my husband isn't disappointed: Yankees and Giants.
It is good to see you are politically astute as well!

Are there any particular bag makers out there today that you admire what they are doing or working on?

I admire [Freitag bags](#) in Germany. Freitag seems like a company with a similar mind-set and vision to that of mine. Their bags are made from old truck tarps.

Other than Vaya Bags, what is the coolest company in Queens we should know about?

[Urban City Bike Shelves!](#)

Most of the materials you work with are outside of the realm of "normal" nylon driven bag designs. What are the technical challenges of working with materials like inner tubes and sail cloth?

One of the main challenges is obtaining the resources. You can't just call up a store and order supplies online. You really have to scrounge around and find the scraps that people are throwing out. The bike tubes are also pretty hard to work with. You have to use heavy-duty, industrial machines to sew them correctly.

Let's see...environmental science, bicycling, music...any other major influences on the creative process you would cite as you design bags?

That pretty much covers it. We listen to a lot of books on tape while we sew which may or may not influence our designs.

So, since you seem to subscribe to the "To do it right, do it yourself" mentality should we expect to see a Vaya Bag for Bass and Guitar in your future plans?

You never know. There is definitely a good possibility that I will end of making a guitar case for someone eventually!



I, for one, am curious to see where Vaya Bags journey leads. If you want to see some examples of Tia's work check out the [galleries over at Vaya Bags](#).

If you want something that is completely original, that no one else can claim you may also want to take a look at some of her [custom designs as well](#). She is always working with found and up-cycled materials so maybe there is something that you currently own that you want turned into a bag? A flag, a banner or maybe even your Superfriends twin sheets from 1973? Oh dear, I think I may have said too much!

Personally, I am waiting to see if those guitar and bass bags materialize!

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