

SPREADING THE LOVE

YVETTE JENKINS HELPS COMMUNITIES NEAR AND FAR WITH HER WORLDLY BOUTIQUE

Jenkins' passion for her work is indisputable. When talking to the proprietor and founder of Detroit's premier artisan shop, Love Travels Imports, she paints a vivid picture in her customers' minds of the grassy plains of Khayelitsha. One might envision the women crafting beautiful and one-of-a-kind handbags, silk bracelets or decorative pillows.

Jenkins saw the likes of a similar scene in 2012 when she traveled to Khayelitsha, a township in South Africa, to meet the women whose work she had been marketing and selling since 2010. During her visit, Jenkins met Zanele — the founder of Mielie — and the company's weavers. Zanele, who never to start working for Mielie, was a bona fide talent who Jenkins was looking to after seeing her intricate designs on jewelry and handbags. Zanele's passion for the beautiful crafts was something Jenkins could not ignore. "I was plagues with the beautiful crafts was something Jenkins could not ignore. When I met the women behind Mielie, they were just about ready to shut down production and close up business because of so many hardships," she says. "It was in that moment of Mielie's bleak desperation that she came to me. I went off, and Jenkins realized she could help the Khayelitsha women in more ways than one.

LOVE IS AMBULANT AND BUILT INTO ITS DNA. THERE IS THE INSATIABLE NEED TO GROW, EXPLORE, SPREAD, PAND, AND TO REACH. LOVE EXPLORES. LOVE GOES ABROAD. LOVE MOVES. LOVE CROSSES OVER. LOVE TRAVELS.

Jenkins envisioned taking the beautiful creations of jewelry, home decor, and handbags back to the United States to sell. It would be a win-win-win. Mielie could stay open for business, weavers who worked for Zanele could continue doing what they loved, the profits made from the sales could financially help Khayelitsha's economy and unemployment, and Jenkins could manage a business whose core beliefs resided in spreading beautiful South African pieces to the doorstep of her hometown.

Love Travels Imports is located in Detroit's historical enclave of Midtown on Livernois Avenue between Outer Drive and 8 Mile Road. It's an artsy oasis sharing a space with Art in Motion, another Detroit-based company. The main level Jenkins describes as a "teaser," serves as a preview to the actual shop just up the stairs.

The store's shelves and walls showcase work from both near and far, and she proudly dubs herself as having acquired pieces from Madagascar, Peru, and Zambia, Mich. The store is filled with an array of merchandise including handbags, beaded and silk jewelry, and custom-made plush pillows. No matter its origin or miles traveled, every piece represents a devotion Mielie and Jenkins both hold for the products — all contribute to the tapestry of the unique boutique, emphasizing that love more than just love does in fact travel.



Looking ahead, Jenkins is working with Schutz to create, manufacture and distribute handbags with a rainbow teardrops design inspired by Nelson Mandela and his gift of uniting people. Their thought is to have Zanele train the other weavers in a new skill: to make the hand block-print and the rainbow bags. Jenkins plans to do the distributing, establishing the sales channel partnerships — including partnering with the Unstoppable Foundation, a California-based nonprofit that does work in developing nations — to support educational products. But above all else, whatever Jenkins does each day, she does it with compassion and love.

For more information about Love Travel Imports or to shop online, visit lovetravelsimports.com. — Ciera Wilson