



PRESS RELEASE: Ferris alumna Jacki Easlick launches successful high -end handbag line

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Here is a press release about Ferris State University alumna Jacki Easlick, who has launched a successful high-end handbag line in New York City. She is a Saginaw native and former designer with several industry-leading companies in West Michigan. Any questions about this release can be directed to Sandy Gholston, News Services and Social Media Manager.



Jacki Easlick.doc

Here is a photo of Jacki with her designs:



JackiEaslickPhoto1.jpg

Here is the link to the story online:

<http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/archive/2012/june/easlick.htm>



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Ferris alumna Jacki Easlick launches successful high-end handbag line in New York City

Jacki Easlick found early success in the corporate world, and now the Ferris State University alumna has ventured off on her own to become an acclaimed handbag designer based in New York City.

After she graduated in 1990 with a bachelor's degree in Advertising and an associate's

degree in Visual Communications, Easlick spent six years as senior creative services designer at Gerber in Fremont, helping to design packaging and advertising for the baby food maker's popular Graduates line of products.

From 1996 to 1998, the Saginaw native was senior art director for make-up and fragrances from Artistry (a division of Amway in Grand Rapids), overseeing and designing communications for the \$1 billion line. And from 1998 to 2002, she was design manager for Steelcase Wood and Stow & Davis, also in Grand Rapids.

Not bad for someone whose first Visual Communications professor told her she should really consider some other area of study.

Then in 2002, in the economic fallout from the World Trade Center attack, Steelcase laid off thousands of workers — Easlick among them. At the time she had personal offices in Grand Rapids and Manhattan, where she was living, and where she was headed when she had her epiphany.

"I remember being in the Gerald R. Ford Airport on my way back to New York," Easlick said. "There was this Sikh wearing a turban, dressed all in white. He asked me where I was going and what I was doing. I said I was flying to New York, but I'd just lost my job. He told me I needed to figure out my direction or that when I got to Manhattan I would be forever lost."

That was the beginning of her eponymous line of high-quality handbags.

Back home in New York, Easlick told her husband about her change in plans. The two had met at a conference when she was with Steelcase and he was giving a talk about branding as the vice president for product development for Nickelodeon.

"I joke with my husband that if he ever wants to get romantic, he just needs to find those Nickelodeon branding slides," Easlick said.

She contacted a recruiter who said he could get her a job but she would have to scale back her level of employment. She would be a designer, not a manager. In a week, she was on a new path, designing for an accessories company that worked with many different licensed brands.

"I worked on the Mary-Kate and Ashley line," Easlick said. "I worked on Nike designer backpacks and totes, stuff that was cobranded with the Yankees. I did all the sports — the Red Wings, the Mets, the Lakers, the Giants, the Jets, you name it. I also worked on Lucky and Levis, so I got really good experience."

Easlick took that experience and moved back into the role of managing, although also still designing products — including for such well-known "tween" brands as Hello Kitty, Hillary Duff and Hannah Montana. By then it was 2006. With four years of fashion experience she wanted to work with the kind of industry-leading companies she had in West Michigan.

She took a position with Kenneth Cole, which included being in charge of its Reaction line, and then with Vera Bradley, where she opened and ran its Manhattan design studio.

Easlick said it was at Vera Bradley that she felt like all her skills and experience really came together.

"I was managing a budget. I was managing a team of people. I was traveling to China,

Taiwan, Hong Kong and Tokyo. It was a big job.”

It was also grueling. After a trip that started out in Tokyo with an itinerary that included Oksaka, Hong Kong, Taiwan and China, Easlick returned to Michigan to visit family and found herself in intensive care with a bleeding ulcer. That ended up being her last trip for Vera Bradley.

While she was recuperating, she began sketching with pencil and paper, trying to sooth her mind and her body. Those sketches formed the basis for her handbag collection. While launching a product line is never easy, Easlick’s corporate years gave her advantages over someone fresh to the industry.

“When I began healing I took those sketches to a factory in Manhattan and said, ‘Look, I’m starting my own line. Can you make prototypes for me?’ And they were like, ‘Who are you?’ As soon as I said I was a former design director for Kenneth Cole and had managed a multi-million dollar business, they were like, ‘When do you need them by?’”

In addition to her own line, since 2010 she also has been an independent designer working for such companies as Nine West and Victoria’s Secret. Besides using her full range of experience to make her company a success, she also is sharing that experience with others.

“I’ve been a speaker at the Cooper-Hewitt design event for two years in a row,” Easlick said. “The event is held by (fashion consultant and television personality) Tim Gunn, who is the main speaker. The audience is young adults looking to get into design. I always get one student who asks me, ‘What if you can’t sketch very well, or what if you’re not very good?’ I always tell them I got a D in my first design class at Ferris State University, but that I learned.”

Despite her success, Easlick said she is still learning what it takes to run her own business.

“It’s a lot different going in, sitting at a desk and collecting a paycheck from someone else, versus waking up every day and forcing yourself to keep moving forward,” Easlick said. “I’ve learned that to think out of the box, you really shouldn’t be sitting in a box.”

For more information and to check out Easlick’s work, visit jackieaslick.com.

Easlick was featured in the Spring 2012 edition of Ferris Magazine in a series of stories about entrepreneurship:

<http://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/alumni/ferrismagazine/Ferris-magazine-2012/HTML/files/Ferris-magazine-2012.pdf>

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