

A PASSION FOR PURSES

Finding a niche for exotic leather handbags, LANA MARKS is a bags to riches story.



Lana J. Marks, CEO and Designer of the LANA MARKS Brand

Successful entrepreneurs make their mark by recognizing a need, then filling it. For Lana Marks, a day without the right handbag was the start of something big. Really big. It was in 1984 when Marks was invited to go aboard her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's Royal Yacht Britannia.

"I had a purple and red suit, and at that stage I didn't own an exotic leather handbag. I looked at all the collections on Palm Beach's Worth Avenue," says Marks. "I couldn't find anything in bright red alligator."

Marks ended up carrying a crème lizard bag with the suit. "It was neutral and basic," she says. "I remember saying to my husband (psychiatrist Dr. Neville Marks), 'I think that there is a market niche to be filled in ultra-luxurious handbags. No one is covering that specifically and only.'"

In early 1988, she launched her LANA MARKS collection with a hot pink alligator lunchbox. "It is the handbag I never had," she says.

Purses soon became her passion. She delved into research and spent two years learning about the industry and creating a first collection of five handbags with the finest European artisans. She had a chance to do a small showing with the five handbags she created. "People came in and they bought and spent thousands of dollars over two days. I was completely unknown."

Today, Marks is an internationally known designer and has become the premier luxury exotic leather accessories designer to Hollywood's A-list, society, and royalty. The company that started with the lunchbox now consists of more than one hundred and fifty designs available in one hundred colors of alligator, ostrich, and lizard.

Her hands-on approach to her company certainly shows. In her collections, she creates fashion initiatives that combine architectural and sculptural lines to capture a woman's attention.

One handbag in particular has been known to bring its wearers good luck. Two actresses have won Academy Awards while carrying the LANA MARKS Cleopatra Clutch. Charlize Theron won the award in 2004 for her portrayal in "Monster," and Helen Mirren sported her signature purse right to the podium when she won the 2007 Best Actress Award for her portrayal of Queen Elizabeth II in "The Queen," even mentioning Marks in her acceptance speech.



"It's the handbag I never had," Marks says of the LANA MARKS Lunchbox

The LANA MARKS Cleopatra Clutch has become something special on the Academy Award Red Carpet. Because the demand for the purse is so great, only one actress has been granted permission to carry the clutch down the red carpet each year. The practice started in 2004 with Theron being the first, then Kate Winslet in 2005, Jennifer Aniston in 2006, Mirren in 2007, and Julie Christie in 2008.



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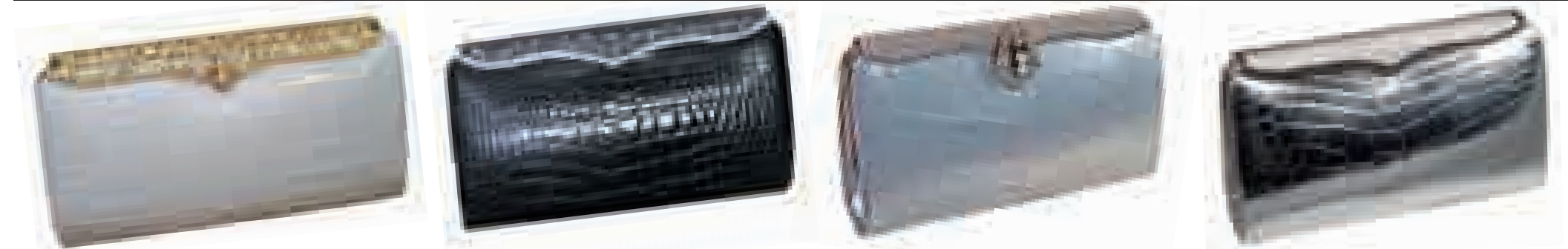
DAME HELEN MIRREN, 2007

JENNIFER ANISTON, 2006

KATE WINSLET, 2005

CHARLIZE THERON, 2004

Each year, a celebrity is granted permission to wear a bespoke LANA MARKS Cleopatra Clutch as they walk the Academy Awards Red Carpet.



"IT'S THESE BESPOKE CREATIONS THAT ALLOW PEOPLE TO REALLY GO TO TOWN AND CREATE SOMETHING ULTRA-LUXURIOUS AND ONE OF A KIND."

The LANA MARKS Cleopatra Clutch that Mirren wore to the 2007 Academy Awards was an Art Nouveau creation that had 776 individually cut and set diamonds on an 18-karat yellow gold frame. Inspired by a royal tiara, it incorporated scrolls, garlands, and collets with a coronation inspired crown -- a good luck charm for Mirren -- delicately placed in the front of the cream alligator handbag, and taking a month to produce in four countries.

But that's not to say anyone can't have her own Cleopatra Clutch. Marks creates the bespoke clutches upon request, and has been known to fly to a location personally to view the outfit the clutch will accessorize.

"It's these bespoke creations that allow people to really go to town and create something ultra-luxurious and one of a kind. Those bags won't be seen on anyone else, anywhere else," she says.

For those who aren't in need of something so entirely specific, there are plenty of premium items in Lana Marks' boutiques in the United States and across the globe. The West Coast flagship store on Rodeo Drive showcases all of the designer's collections. The expanding line also includes coordinating belts, small leather accessories, gold vermeil belt buckles, shoes, silk scarves, and ladies' ready-to-wear.

"We always keep the most extraordinary of assortments in our Rodeo Drive store," she says, promising that there is always "something new to see."

Marks says many people are drawn to the Rodeo Drive store to get a closer look at one of the most iconic handbags in the collection, one that the designer created especially for Princess Diana.

"I met Princess Diana through the wife of the then Brazilian ambassador to the United States. Lucia asked if I would design a handbag for Princess Diana," she says.

Marks spent more than six months creating the iconic treasure.

For Lana Marks, designing handbags for Hollywood movie stars, royalty and all the women who want "the best of the best" is a dream come true. What started off as a way to carry something that expressed her own personality has become an almost unbelievable bags to riches story.

"Sometimes I have to pinch myself. I am humbled by it," she says. Marks has plans to expand her products and continue her international reach, but wants to remain true to her brand. "I'm just glad my designs are well-liked." ✨

Visit the LANA MARKS Boutique at 465 North Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills. Call 310.274.5240, or www.lanamarks.com.