

D Punchline not making joke

JENSEN LA VENDE THURSDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2019



Leather pouches in several colours, made by Gabrielle Punch. Photo by Ayanna Kinsale

IMAGINE owning something that no one else has. A gift, conceived, designed and crafted, just for you.

This is not a joke, it's D Punchline, a small business with a big heart behind it. Gabrielle Punch, visionary/founder/owner/sole trader, began her business two decades ago but recently entered a new phase of handmade leather creations. Her tagline, simple, functional and fashionable, falls short of fully describing the uniqueness of her creations.

Punch, 42, allowed Business Day into her Maraval home and workspace on Tuesday and explained that her desire is to let every customer know that whatever they buy from her, is a genuine, unique piece of art.



A display of handmade leather bags by Gabrielle Punch. Photo by Ayanna Kinsale

“There is a special feeling knowing that if I buy a bag from D Punchline, I am the only one. It gives it a sense of worth, of value, of meaning. It’s kind of like, ‘Gabrielle made this bag just for me.’ Knowing the kind of work and effort and love that I take to make these pieces, I love for my clients to feel like they are really special, having gotten this one-of-a-kind piece. There is also the constant challenge to keep creative.

Mass-producing gets boring, I lose interest when I have to do 20 of something” Punch said.

A former visual diplomacy assistant with the US Embassy, Punch left her comfortable, steady job eight months ago to pursue her entrepreneurial calling. Ironically, it was while at work, taking part of a training course for self-development, that she realised her job wasn’t for her anymore.

She wanted – and needed – more. And now, she feels happier and fulfilled.

After close to 18 years of making paper-based journals and personalised greeting cards, Punch was introduced to leather and began crafting leather covered journals. Her supplier-turned-mentor, Herlene Tyson, encouraged her to do more than just journals. With no training, Punch fiddled with a sewing machine and YouTube videos and taught herself to make wallets, purses, handbag, laptop bags, travel bags, document pouches, make-up bags and now, fanny packs. All leather, all original designs. To date, she boasts of crafting 400 plus creations.



Gabrielle Punch explains to Business Day the creation process for her hand crafted leather items. Photo by Ayanna Kinsale

The self-admitting perfectionist said she will never achieve perfection, but any creation with a flaw is not sold. Those flawed pieces shown to Business Day will easily be overlooked by any customer, but her pride in her work does not allow them to be sold.

Asked about expanding and possibly mass producing, Punch said: “Being a perfectionist, I will not be easy to work with. None of my work is perfect, handmade work is never perfect, there will be errors. I can’t say I will get there. The love for making pieces is very personal. I can’t imagine not being the hands-on person. This is my baby! This brings me immense joy. I have had days where I sit and look at a piece and break

out in tears because I can't believe I did this. I probably will teach one day. When you have something, you should share it.”



Gabrielle Punch proudly shows Business Day one of her hand crafted leather bags.
Photo by Ayanna Kinsale

Punch said her move from the corporate world to becoming self-employed wasn't a hasty decision. She sought and received advice from friends and family, already had a good clientele and was developing as an artist working with new material. She had close to two years' experience fashioning cow's skin before the day she stopped working for the US Embassy and pursued her passion.

“It was a secure and cushy job and I was happy there, but when I realised the other talent that I had, it took me about a year and a half to prepare myself to walk away from something secure. It was a very difficult decision. I always knew I had an entrepreneurial spirit. I had tried other things in the past but this one stuck with me. It got to the point where I had to choose between two full-time jobs and I had to choose between which one was more fulfilling,” Punch said.



A leather fanny

pack made by Gabrielle Punch. Photo by Ayanna Kinsale

She recalled days of leaving her job and coming home to work on pieces, taking her well into the next day, only to get a few hours' sleep, to be back at her job for 7 am. Her working hours are longer now, one time sitting for 24 hours to craft a bag, another four hours working on a wallet. But, she believes, it's definitely worth it.

For now, Punch's creations can be found online, on Instagram, @DPunchlinett and on Facebook D Punchline. While mass-production is not in her "headspace" at the moment, she envisions one day having a working store front, where customers can watch her create while shopping for their own unique pieces. As for shoes and belts, she asks that customers give her another decade but, she thinks luggage is the next evolution of her craft.