

## Let's Get the Party Started

Seasonal Aromas and Bouquets

Grade Exportation with Gigi Do

"Man of the Forest"

Borneo: Peeking at Peaks

The Ultimate in Frisbee and Handbags: Judy Le

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Black dress by Umi Train of London.  
Metallic blue collar by Giavanna Imperia, Real Gallery.  
Glass ring by Orlan Giavanna, Real Gallery.  
Charmings by Yvonne Clouet.  
Cognac by Hennessy X.O.

Photographer: Debbie Porter | Stylist: Sumaira Talah | Hair & Makeup: Grace Lin

FASHION

## The Ultimate Judy Le

by LEO SIPRAS

**As a child, did you always dream of becoming a handbag designer?**

Absolutely not. I've always had a creative streak, doing things a bit out of the box and knowing what I like and what I don't.

**Did you attend design school or are you self-taught?**  
I'm self-taught and still learning. It seems as if my whole life is all about on-the-job training...which solidifies my notion that learning how to learn is one of the most important skills to acquire.

**After being at sea for 21 days following their fleeing Vietnam in 1978, Judy Le's family was rescued by a US Naval ship – but her travels haven't stopped since then. After settling in Houston, Judy graduated from Rice and began traveling 100% of the time working for Deloitte Consulting. Even after returning to school to get a Masters degree in Higher Education Administration with a focus on Leadership Education, Judy never slowed down. In addition to being a purse designer, Judy is also a writer, photographer, and competitive frisbee player – traveling around the world with her husband to compete in Ultimate Frisbee tournaments.**

**How did you get into designing handbags?**

After years in business consulting and grad school I was starting to feel too confined and restrained. I wanted to tap into my creative side while connecting with my homeland of Vietnam. I also value freedom and flexibility so I knew I needed to be my own boss. During a trip to Vietnam, I spoke with a few manufacturers, drew up some designs and hit the ground running.

**Where do you get your design inspirations?**

Culture and nature are huge inspirations for me. I love to immerse myself in different cultures and get lost in the beauty of nature. There's nothing more moving than a pristine rainforest, a soothing beach, or a majestic mountain. The sounds, smells, and rituals of different cultures always make me reevaluate my life and see the world through different lenses. Culture and travel renew me and inspire me.

**Since you only use fabrics in your designs, do you think you will expand to include leather or other materials?**

A large proportion of the handbag industry is leather. I want to set myself apart from others and find my own niche – why do what everyone else is doing? I also wanted to include fabrics that give a sense of femininity and elegance. I won't ever make entirely leather handbags, but I do want to start incorporating different materials in my bags, which will include leather. I love the contrast between silk and leather in a handbag.

**It's interesting that you talk about femininity since I understand you're a bit of a tomboy and play Ultimate Frisbee competitively. Tell us more about that and how it influences your handbags.**

I've played sports all my life. I've been playing Ultimate Frisbee competitively for about nine years. I currently play on a Texas women's club team called "Showdown." We're vying to be one of the top ranked teams in the nation. I have met some of the most amazing people in the world through this sport. I've also been fortunate enough to travel the country and the world to compete. In November, I am going to Australia to compete in the World Championships. Since I've still got that tomboy in me, handbags help me express my feminine side. Similar to contrasting fabrics, bruises and scrapes on a lady can also be sexy.

**How long does it take to make a Jaylay handbag – from conception to the finished product?**

Ahh...the challenges of having an overseas manufacturer! I first start with a drawing and designate specs for the handbag. From there it will take anywhere from 6 weeks to 3 months.



**What would you say is the signature "It" bag from Jaylay?**

Right now, it's the Arpi bag – a bold shape with a simple embellished raindrop design. However, I just switched my 'everyday' handbag to one of my chocolate brown corduroy bags. I'm sending a message to mother nature that I'm ready for crisp cool fall weather!

**Portions of the proceeds benefit the Orchid Foundation. Tell us about the Orchid Foundation and how you got involved with it?**

The Orchid Foundation was started in 2000 to support orphanages and education in Vietnam. The Foundation has supported over seven orphanages by providing food, books, teacher salaries, school uniforms, medical supplies and scholarships to orphans and children living in poverty. They've also built numerous classrooms and schools and have improved living conditions in many orphanages. This is a fantastic organization because it doesn't just support the children in the short-term, but focuses on education so that the children can strive towards a brighter future. I wanted to do something to give back to Vietnam because I was born there and I manufacture there, as well. I believe it is important to give back and it makes the business side of my work much more gratifying.

**What does the future hold for you?**

Some people don't like change, but I thrive on the challenge. I'm constantly reevaluating where I am in my life and making sure that I'm doing what makes me happy. It's hard to say for sure what the future holds, but I am envisioning opening up a boutique and expanding my line to include other accessories and apparel.

**Who do you think is the Jaylay customer?**

The Jaylay customer is someone who is looking for something a bit different. She doesn't feel the need to be trendy to be beautiful. Like my handbags, the Jaylay customer can be anything from understated yet sophisticated to whimsical and quirky.

**The big question, of course, is where can someone buy your bags?**

Over 45 boutiques across the nation carry my line. In Houston, you can find my bags at Jewel Boutique (2402-A Rice Boulevard) and online at [www.jaylaycollection.com](http://www.jaylaycollection.com).

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