



CARRYING THE TORCH —Carcassonne

Preface

The usability of workwear coupled with craft expertise from one of France's oldest trunk makers was the inspiration for L/Uniform, a new luggage range start-up aiming to prove that practical can also be beautiful.

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Jeanne Signoles was a maths and economics student specialising in the aerospace sector. But that was more than a decade ago before she married Alex Signoles, son of the owner of Goyard, one of the oldest trunk makers. After that her destiny changed. She started working with her husband and father-in-law in Carcassonne, where Goyard's leather goods are made.

It led to the decision, two years ago, to embark on another new adventure. "We wanted to create our own business," says Jeanne. "Something simple, something that we could control from A to Z, not necessarily bags but something new. For sure we didn't want to revive an old brand like the family did so well for Goyard. Thousands of ideas occurred that ranged from olive oil to wine, until we realised that actually we should do what we know how to do really well: bags."

The idea for L/Uniform came together on a plane journey. "I mapped out the whole project on a sick bag," says the entrepreneur, laughing. "My husband and I travel a lot. We obviously travel for work but Alex also travels by himself for pleasure. He's an adventurer, he loves animals and travels all around the world to explore."

Jeanne says that with three young kids it was unimaginable to do all that travelling with luxurious labelled brands

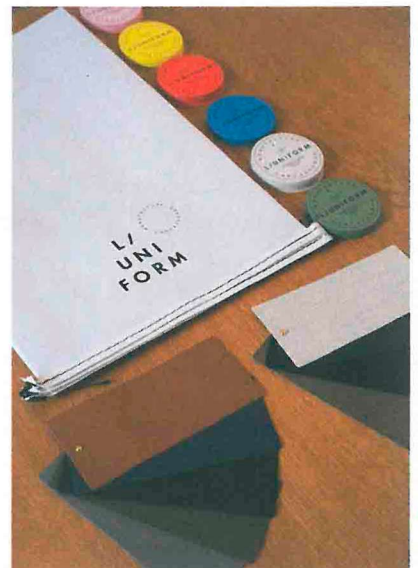


- 01 Jeanne Signoles
- 02 Swatches for colours and fabrics
- 03 L/Uniform showroom
- 04 Zip detail on N°9 travel bag
- 05 Small toiletry bag N°19 and pencil case N°14
- 06 Luggage tag of the N°9 travel bag
- 07 N°6 large backpack

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in tow. "We noticed that everywhere we were going we travelled with ordinary nylon bags bought in Au Vieux Campeur [a popular outdoor store in France] for €30: very cheap and very convenient but absurd for the luggage manufacturers that we were. We needed to create luggage to meet our needs."

Useful, solid and comfortable: these are the principles of L/Uniform, which launched earlier this year. In the search for the perfect bag, Jeanne studied the arts of making woven canvas and leather tanning, and investigated the subtle differentiations between zips and trimmings. She rediscovered the joy of the utilitarian bag: practical, simple and always elegant. "I've always loved workwear. The first present my husband gave me was a pair of overalls."



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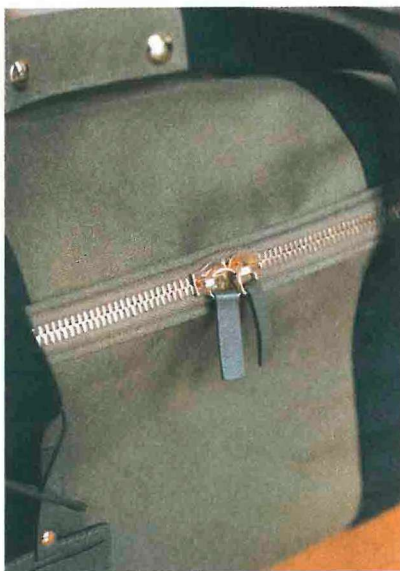
Production is based in Carcassonne where L/Uniform was born and it now has its own atelier there surrounded by fields. Backpacks, school bags, sailor bags, travel bags, carry-all totes and pencil cases are all made here. The collection reduces each piece down to its most functional form.

The simplicity and rigour of the designs leaves space for taking care of the smaller details. There are 32 possible colour combinations to choose from and each bag comes with the option to personalise your purchase with a monogram. Everything is sold through the brand's website rather than shops in order to reduce margins and keep the selection affordable: prices range from €45 to €560.

While Jeanne is now solely working on L/Uniform, Alex still helps run the family firm. Every day in Carcassonne the two of them have lunch in order to discuss the next step of their adventure: bags are just the beginning. In the future it's likely they will move into producing sandals and bottles of olive oil have also been mooted; anything essential and born of good values.

"We wanted to create bags for everyday lives," says Jeanne. "These are bags you won't be scared to take out. If they get stolen, it won't be the end of the world. Bags to live a life with." — (M)

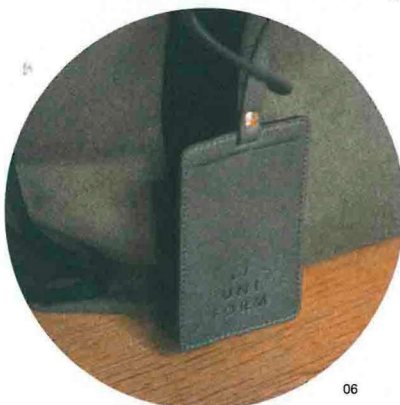
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