



• Creativity • Collaboration • Continuity • Community

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FEATURE STORY

HANDMADE GIFTS: A QUESTION OF QUALITY OF LIFE

There are different ways to show someone we care. Spending quality time with friends and loved ones is in itself a gift and luxury. Most of the year, long working days and short weekends keeps us apart. The so-called social media provides us with a weak excuse not to make actual visits - nor even actual phone calls - to our friends, and lulls us into a false sense of security. So the holidays are the time to make up for this.

Now gifts are a sensitive issue. In the weeks preceding the holidays, advertisers and retailers bombard us with "special promotions", "must-have products", "limited discounts" and other marketing ploys to clear their overstocked warehouses and issue more credit cards. Their message is simply: Buy more, and the more expensive the gifts, the better. "Giving presents" becomes "buying stuff" and ticking names off "shopping lists."

What if there were smart, original and high-quality items that were also easy on the wallet? Well, there are. We're talking about **handmade gifts**. There are literally hundreds of interesting handmade gift ideas to choose from locally; from clothes, accessories, jewelry and artwork to artisanal foods, desserts, *mouneh* (dried herbs, jams, pickles, etc.) and liquors. It might seem unrealistic for some of us to shift our shopping habits so radically, but if we look at the options around us and consider their advantages, the idea suddenly becomes quite attractive.

If you type "**reasons to buy handmade**" in your search engine, you'll find thousands of results. Handmade products are more than just a product. There is love, creativity and uniqueness. First, handmade items come with a **story** and have personality and character. They are **environment-friendly**, since they aren't mass-produced and shipped halfway around the world (some handmade items actually **reuse** or **upcycle** materials). Artisans and artists handpick their materials and spend a lot of time and passion into creating something beautiful that is useful and lasts. More importantly, they are doing **something they like**, not something they have to do. The practical advantage of buying from local artisans is how easy repairs or exchanges are - no more waiting in line in crowded stores. Plus, you get to **customize** your gifts very easily!

For all these reasons, this year at **SOILS** we have taken the **Handmade Pledge** and invite others to join us in this initiative. What's more, we're making our own gifts and working with artisans and the women in the village of Saidoun to create a line of products (see Page 2).

Which brings us to another advantage of handmade gifts; when we buy handmade, we are contributing to establishing a **new economic model** and *becoming* part of the dream of **freedom, financial independence** and **being in charge of our own moral compass**.

Continued on Page 2



Continued from Page 1

THE HOLIDAYS COLLECTION - 2014: HANDMADE AND RECYCLED GIFTS BY SOILS & THE PEOPLE OF SAIDOUN

We have been working hard behind the scenes with our family in Saidoun and our friends in Beirut to create a selection of handmade (and upcycled) gift items.

We will hold a **holiday sale** in Beirut this December to present to you our collection in a brand new and exciting **Crafts Café** in Beirut.

Stay tuned to our [Facebook page](#) or join our mailing list to find when the exhibition will take place.

For now, enjoy this sneak peek!

We have dedicated this issue of L.E.T.S. Lebanon, to **handmade and recycled/upcycled gifts** by Lebanese craftspeople (see Pages 3-5).

And check out the handmade fairs and exhibitions in the **UPCOMING EVENTS** section (below).

Happy holidays to one and all!

From the Editorial Team



Rita's handmade lavender bags (upcycled fabric)



Ghada and Sr. Lina's ceramic jewelry and ornaments



Hoda's handmade shopping bags (upcycled fabric)

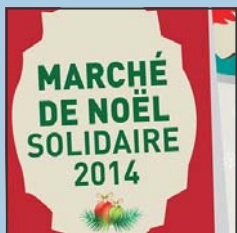


Alexis' meta-birds (upcycled metal)

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UPCOMING EVENTS - HOLIDAYS SPECIAL

"MARCHÉ DE NOËL SOLIDAIRE" HANDMADE CRAFTS/FOODS EXHIBITION



DECEMBER 3-5, 2014
11:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
DECEMBER 6, 2014
10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Institut Français, Damascus street

Handmade crafts and foods by Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian artists and associations.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/813463605379034/>

"THINK INSIDE DABOX - CHRISTMAS EDITION" RECYCLED ART EXHIBITION



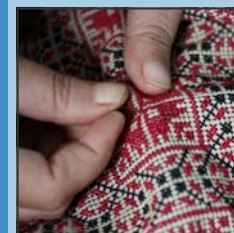
DECEMBER 4, 2014 - JANUARY 8, 2015
6:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Le Gray Hotel, Downtown Beirut

Exhibition of recycled packages and boxes turned into hand painted characters, by Joelle Jammal.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/502764893196651/>

"CULINARY AND ARTISANAL FAIR: PARTNERSHIPS WOVEN IN TRADITION"



DECEMBER 4, 2014
4:00 - 6:00 p.m.
DECEMBER 5, 2014
11:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
DECEMBER 6, 2014
11:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Rural Delights House, Gemmayze (next to Paul)

Foods and handicrafts from Lebanon, Iraq, Syria.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/733430640071311/>

"BRUT L'ATELIER" - OPENING HANDMADE AND RECYCLED ART EXHIBITION



DECEMBER 5, 2014
6:00 - 9:00 p.m.
DECEMBER 6, 2014
10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Mar Mikhael-Rif Street

Exhibition of hand and recycled crafts by Lebanese artists.

https://www.facebook.com/events/340758519437998/?ref=2&ref_dashboard_filter=upcoming&sid_reminder=1823692686394130432

"GRAPEVINE PRESENTS A GARAGE SALE" SECOND HAND AND HANDMADE PRODUCTS



DECEMBER 7, 2014
11:00 A.M. - 10:00 p.m.

Metro Al Madina, Sarolla Building - Minus 2, Hamra

Vintage and handmade products.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/399067910242202/>

"STATION XMAS MARKET" HANDCRAFTS & FOOD PRODUCTS EXHIBITION



DECEMBER 12-14, 2014
4:00 - 10:00 p.m.

Station Beirut, Jisr El Wati (next to Beirut Art Center)

Handcrafts and food products.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/308045562727843/>

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LET'S FOCUS

MAKE FASHION, NOT LANDFILLS: VEA MAKES BAGS AND ACCESSORIES FROM TIRE TUBES

*Can discarded tires be fashionable? Yes they can. In fact, our friend **Patrick Zoghbi** has even succeeded in making them fashionably responsible. Last year, Patrick's idea to turn old tire tubes into bags and accessories was among the 15 winning social entrepreneurship projects (which included SOILS) selected by the "nabad" competition (organized by the Arcenciel NGO) to benefit from mentorship and startup funding. Patrick unveiled the first collection by his new company **VEA™** at the Beirut Souks on November 8, 2014, and it was well worth the wait.*

Re-using materials and upcycling them had always been a passion of mine and I practiced it as a hobby whenever I could. This year I was given the chance to take it one step further and venture into a full-fledged business by founding **VEA™**. The outcome of this adventure was a line of elegant, functional and sturdy bags and accessories that is still growing. And the added bonus was that they were upcycled from used tires.

Upcycling consists of finding a new form or purpose for old products and materials to create something useful and pleasing to the eyes. Rubber tires are non-biodegradable and recycling them isn't readily feasible. So they usually end up in landfills, or worse, discarded into our forests and riverbeds. Burning tires is just as bad for the environment as it releases hazardous pollutants into the air. So the logical and responsible thing to do with old tires seemed to be finding a new purpose for them and reusing them smartly.

The material used for inner tubes of tires is rubber. You would think it is a common enough material but it does not come in a manageable form like other fabrics that are available in rolls and in the desired thickness. Tires are round and curved, and their rubber comes in different thicknesses. When our designers and tailors were tasked with transforming this material into fashion items, they had to rethink the entire process of making handbags and deploy efforts of imagination and inventiveness with each design to exploit the advantages of this unusual material. Each item is unique and carries its own story because its rubber has been subjected to road heat and pressure, resulting in different patterns, thicknesses and features in the material. The rubber is treated scientifically and handcrafted by skilled tailors who incorporate natural fabrics and high-quality buckles, buttons, zippers and other finishing touches in their production. We try to use as many locally-made materials as possible, in keeping with our vision. We ended up with a precise method of picking different rubber samples from trucks, cars, motorcycles and bicycles, and aesthetically combining them to create beautiful, sturdy and environmentally-responsible handcrafted bags, wallets, laptop cases, belts and jewelry that stand the test of time.

We also propose customizable items with branding for companies' corporate events and special giveaways such as bookmarks, memory stick holders, coasters and much more. As a next step, we plan to expand our product range by developing a line of home deco accessories.

We are happy to be doing our part for the environment. With every new item we create, we help make our environment cleaner. We have partnered with **Bridgestone Lebanon** and leading bike shops (**Bike Generation, Cyclo Sport, La Bicyclette**, etc.) to collect old tires and inner tubes "at the source" for our products. A counter on our website <http://veawear.com/> measures our social contribution by adding up the kilograms of rubber that go into our products instead of ending up in landfills or burned.

In addition to our regular products, we are proud to feature our signature line of women's bags and accessories **Paula by VEA™**. **Paula Yacoubian** is a very well-respected journalist and a passionate advocate for the preservation of the environment. She had already championed several environmental initiatives before she discovered VEA™. Right from the start, she fell in love with the concept and decided to become part of our story. Her strong credentials and status as a successful professional woman were instrumental in our communication strategy and awareness efforts, and helped establish VEA™ as a strong brand. What's more, Paula will donate the profits from her signature line to causes in Lebanon.

Shared by Patrick Zoghbi

The VEA™ boutique is located in Beirut Souks (Souk Ayass street)

Some items are available at the **Bayrut Express concept store in Sassine Square (see Page 5)*

You can also order online from the website <http://veawear.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VeaWear> **Instagram:** <http://instagram.com/veawear>



Photos by Pascal Khattar

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LET'S FOCUS

GET YOUR URBAN GEAR ON WITH WASTE® BAGS AND ACCESSORIES

*Waste® has become a household name since 2006 when founders **Waleed Jad** and **Stephanie Dadour** decided to take a stand against the excessive consumption of plastic bags in Lebanon. The result of their vision and combined efforts was the line of grocery bags made from repurposed advertising banners that has now achieved iconic status. In the following years, Waste® has successfully established itself as a fashion brand in Lebanon and the region, and the company has developed a solid sustainable business model thanks to new partners and collaborators, including **Marc Metni** who officially came on board in 2012. Its collection continues to grow.*

Like any new product that is made of unconventional materials, the relationship of Waste® bags and accessories with the public changed over the years. In the early years, Waste® bags were described in different ways: as recycled, upcycled, reused, environmental, fashionable, etc. Now, more people are starting to consider us as a full-fledged brand of handmade bags and luggage - with an environment-friendly approach, of course.

It's safe to say there's no question in anyone's mind about our contribution to reducing waste. After all, we are keeping the non-biodegradable flex (a composite plastic) of advertising banners out of our landfills and incinerators. But Waste® products are more than an environmental statement; a lot of thought goes into their design and production process (handmade, of course). We work hard to make bags and accessories that are smart, functional, durable and aesthetic, and which people can use and enjoy in their daily lives - not a promotional item you feel you need to buy out of a sense of duty or solidarity with the environment.

We have expanded our line to include different **bag** models (courier, technical, sports, etc.), **accessories** such as iPad cases, wallets and passport holders, **furniture** such as beanbags and poufs, and **planters** that come with full instructions for taking care of your plants.

By far the toughest challenge we face at Waste® is also the one we enjoy the most. Getting our hands on workable advertising banners is hard enough, but you can't begin to imagine how complicated it is to find the right patches of colors and mix and match them by tones and patterns to make them eye-pleasing. This "design-by-inspiration" process means every single item is an original creation and you are assured that no 2 items will ever look the same.

The last challenge is up to you when you decide which models and color combinations you like best. Go to our website <http://www.waste-lb.com> to find out where our products are sold.

Shared by Marc Metni

This holiday season don't miss the special pop-up stores by Waste® LIMITED TIME ONLY

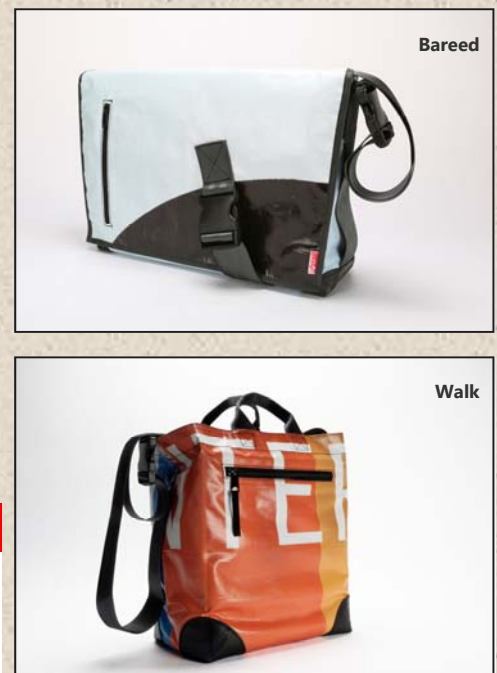
- November 27, 2014 until January 4, 2015 @ ABC mall in Ashrafieh
- During December @ Diane Ferjane store in Mar Mikhael (next to Papercup bookstore)

Stay up to date with Waste® on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/wastelb>

FROM THE CLASSICS COLLECTION



NEWEST PRODUCTS



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MORE GIFT IDEAS FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

GREEN GLASS RECYCLING INITIATIVE LEBANON (GGRIL)

Donate to the GGRIL crowdfunding campaign and choose your gift from the new collection.

Only 6 days left!

Hurry up and make your donation by following the link below:



<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/green-glass-recycling-initiative-lebanon-ggril>

5 A DAY® GIFT VOUCHERS

Buy 5 a day® gift vouchers for your friends and family before **December 15, 2014** to benefit from a **10% discount**.

5 a day® offer delicious natural fruit and vegetable mixes

<https://www.facebook.com/my5aday>



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LET'S FOCUS

BAYRUT EXPRESS: THE ONE-STOP ECO-FRIENDLY STORE

It's about time there was a boutique entirely dedicated to eco-friendly and recycled products for the more eco-conscious shoppers - and the rest. Bayrut Express aims at becoming just that: a one-stop shop for a variety of eco-friendly, handmade, upcycled and ethical products from Lebanon and around the world. Ziad Dagher was bitten by the Do-It-Yourself upcycling bug since the nineties and 3 years ago he started giving serious thought to opening a store. He channeled his passion into designing and building the entire store furniture himself and hunting for stylish and funky products that promote the concept behind Bayrut Express.

Bayrut Express (yup, we spell it like we say it) is an idea whose time has come. More than just a concept, it is a reality you have to experience and share. All the products in our selection promote the cause of the environment and advocate a fairer treatment of artists and people who practice crafts - both modern and traditional.

Right now I can safely say we are the only shop in the Middle East entirely dedicated to eco-friendly and upcycled products but I am sure this will change soon - in fact, I want it to change. A few stores are dedicated to niche natural and upcycled products or brands, and some retailers feature a section for eco-friendly products but that is not enough. We need more to encourage environmentally-responsible products and evolve consumer mentalities beyond limited "trends".

Environmental responsibility entails more than a one-time purchase of "novelty" handmade gift items. It concerns how we think about consuming in all its aspects: the way we dress, the way we eat... basically how we conceive everyday objects and connect with them and with the world at large. At Bayrut Express, we propose a handpicked selection of clothing, shoes, accessories, kitchenware and furniture, many of them exclusive for our store. We also have a small section for natural juices and snacks.

We look for originality, beauty and social and environmental impact in all the products we bring to Beirut Express. Most of our clothes and shoes are imported from unaffiliated manufacturers or independent labels that encourage communities or artisans. The most recent additions to our collection are the colorful **Boatilus** rain boots made from fruit(!) and other recycled and biodegradable materials. Our other star products include the beautiful shoes by the **Inkkas** company that has pledged to plant a tree with every pair of shoes sold.

On the local level, we support the bags and furniture by **WASTE**, (see Page 4) the traditional blown glass products by **Green Glass Recycling Initiative - Lebanon (GGRIL)**, and - just in - the bags and accessories by **VEA** (see Page 3). Follow us on Facebook to check out our full collection: <https://www.facebook.com/TheBayrutExpress>

And by the way, our commitment to a better way of life doesn't stop at the counter; we ourselves try to be responsible consumers every day. For instance, we carefully sort our waste and order food from local caterers who use natural ingredients and minimal packaging.

Visit us anytime between 10:00 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. from Monday to Saturday. We are located behind the **LibanPost** offices in **Sassine Square, Ashrafieh**.

Shared by Ziad Dagher

CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS WITH BAYRUT EXPRESS

SNEAK PEAK HOLIDAY POP-UP SALE

Every holiday season, Bayrut Express announces a surprise pop-up sale on a **Mystery Day** to give more people a chance to get special gifts for their friends and family.

SPECIAL TASTING EVENTS 5 A DAY NATURAL JUICES

A chance to discover and sample great natural juices and detox cures made from delicious fruit and vegetable combinations by **5 a day®**

To be the first to know about the Holiday Sale and Tasting Events, follow Bayrut Express on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TheBayrutExpress>
Instagram: <http://instagram.com/bayrutexpress>



Photos by Christina Aoun

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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

DISCOVER THE ECOLOGICAL EARTHBAGS "SUPERADOBE" CONSTRUCTIONS

With a couple of rolls of barbed wire, a bale of bags and a shovel you can build a magnificent ecological home and shelter using nothing more than the earth beneath your feet!

This is the premise that inspired the visionary architect *Nader Khalili* when he conceived the idea of **Sandbag Architecture** (also called "superadobe" or Earthbag constructions).

In his quest to seek solutions to social issues like affordable housing and environmental degradation, Khalili drew on his skills as a contemporary architect and allied it to the ingenuity of **monolithic constructions** which were part of his Persian cultural heritage. This construction method relies on a know-how that dates back over a thousand years ago, when people discovered and utilized the principles of **arches** and **domes** in their construction.

By applying this ancient structural technology to a few modern day materials, Khalili has cultivated a dynamic contemporary form of earthen architecture from which he coined the simple name: **Earthbag buildings**.

Originally developed for self-help housing, Earthbag homes have now spread throughout the world thanks to Khalili's **Cal-Earth Institute** (www.calearth.org); which provides training programs for architects, ecological construction experts and aficionados interested in this form of ecological construction. Earthbag buildings are considered as the most resistant (able to withstand floods, winds, fires and earthquakes), the most affordable (low-cost) and the most accessible (easy to learn and do for novices) "Do-It-Yourself" eco-constructions out there.

I recently had the chance to live in an Earthbag home during my stay in **Vilcabamba, Ecuador** last September. There, I also visited several sites that have adopted this type of eco-construction, and I had the chance to meet the eco-living enthusiasts that adopted this technique to build their homes.

What struck me most was the fact that these were people of all ages, backgrounds and professions who had - in most cases - built their beautiful Earthbag homes for the very first time!

This inspired me to explore the possibility of reapplying this type of construction in **Lebanon**. I spent a lot of time discussing with the people I met in Ecuador the possibility of applying the Earthbag technique to Lebanon's climate, especially in mountainous regions where we have to contend with snow. In summary, the feedback I received was that, with a good "hat" (roof) and "boots" (foundations), Earthbag constructions could actually be successfully adapted to Lebanon's climate, as various projects around the world have demonstrated. Another interesting characteristic of Earthbag construction is its flexibility to be adapted to a wide array of climates and regions.

If this revolutionary way of building your eco-home has triggered your curiosity and you would like to start exploring it, here is the ultimate book reference that can help you do that:
<http://www.rivendellvillage.org/Earthbag-Building-The-Tools-Tricks-and-Techniques.pdf>

Shared by Joey Khoury



Check out more photos in our album:
<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.709518599116616.1073741855.221288951272919&type=3>



GREEN RESOURCES

TREES OF LEBANON - BOOK



Beautifully hand-illustrated reference guide to trees (bilingual: English and Arabic)

Available at the **AUB Nature Conservation Center**
<http://www.aub.edu.lb/UNITS/NATURECONSERVATION/PRODUCTS/Pages/books.aspx>

GREEN AREA - WEBSITE



News website to promote environmental causes in Lebanon

http://www.greenarea.me/about_us.php?lan=En



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PHOTO OF THE MONTH

You sent us your submissions and you voted for your favorites. Here it is, the PHOTO OF THE MONTH:
To send us your photos, email us on contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com



Mediterranean chameleon (Chamaeleo chamaeleon) in Saidoun - Jezzine, South Lebanon
Photo by Alexis Baghdadi

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GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED


Do you enjoy reading this newsletter?


Send us your feedback and suggestions, share your news, photos, tips or thoughts, or find out more.


Email us at: contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com


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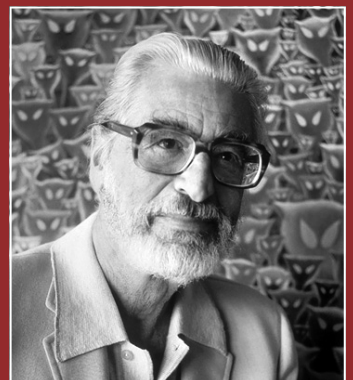
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A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

**"Maybe Christmas, the
Grinch thought, doesn't
come from a store"**



**–Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel) (1904-1991)
*How the Grinch Stole Christmas***

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