



Photo by Scotty Peek

HAND MADE

SEWING WITH SALLY

Local Designer Creates
One-of-a-Kind Handbag Line

By Mindy Lucas

Sally Peek sits behind a table overflowing with odds and ends, projects in progress and paper patterns so light they look like they could float away. Behind her is a set of shelves piled high with fabrics in a myriad of colors and patterns.

To her right is a \$200 Janome brand sewing machine — the second of its kind in so many months. Peek broke the first one, but later had it repaired as a fail-safe measure. She says she works odd hours so if

something were to go wrong, she wouldn't be able to call the repairman late at night.

"But this is where it all takes place," she says, waving her hand around the dining room of her home in Forest Acres.

Peek is the creator of Nana Bags — an at-home, custom-order, handbag business named for Peek's "Nana," or great-grandmother, who Peek describes as being a funny, witty and stubborn woman. "She was very sweet but could definitely be strong-willed," she says. "But loved by everyone."

As Peek tells it, the launching of Nana bags was something of an accident. After looking around for something creative to do one night last summer,

she decided to try and make some curtains for her 21-month-old daughter's room. But then husband, Scotty, told her about a sewing class being offered through the Columbia Museum of Art — how to make a handbag.

Though many of the women in her family sewed, Peek herself had not had that much experience with it. "I could sew on a button but that was about it," she says. But Peek took the class anyway, made one bag and took it to work. The response was immediate. "People began asking if I would make them one," she says.

Sensing she might be on to something, Peek made a few more, then sent out an email to some friends. In less than two weeks, she had orders for 30 more handbags.

"It all happened so fast. I mean this one I didn't even think would sell," she says, holding up a pink and green clutch with a magnetic closure. Peek currently makes four styles — all named for members of her family — but the Sophie clutch, named for her daughter, has been a strong seller among college-age women. "I can't make them fast enough. It's out of control," she says.

The bags are made of upholstery or other heavy-


weight material that Peek finds at independent fabric stores, or "out-of-the-way" shops. She also shops online and has received donated fabric from friends and relatives. Peek says people seem to be drawn to them. "They have a certain feel or quality to them. They remind you of your grandmother." And to add to Nana's distinctive look, she pairs opposing patterns or colors that might normally clash to create new or unusual color combinations.

"When your handbag doesn't necessarily match what you're wearing, that's when things seem to really work. And, I think it's fun to have a little surprise inside too." For example, one tote, swathed in a yellow and orange floral pattern on the outside, opens to reveal a lime green polka-dotted liner on the inside.

Peek also ensures her customers receive only one-of-a-kind handbags by buying fabric in small portions. "That's because I don't want someone walking around town and seeing three more of their bag," she says.

And the formula seems to be working. Through her online store at nanabags.com, customers as far

away as Washington have custom-ordered a Nana bag. Peek also sells her wares at house parties and at craft and merchandise shows, such as the Junior League's annual Holiday Market. And while she hasn't quite made the leap to retail stores as of yet, Peek says that might be a possibility for 2008.

"It's a matter of keeping things going and having something to work toward. The biggest challenge has been finding the time to do everything I want to do," she says. Quite often, she's up well past midnight sewing or thinking up new designs such as the reversible baby bibs she's been experimenting with lately. "I'm tired a lot but I'm tired in a good way." 



"The Sophie" clutch, one of Nana Bags' best sellers. Photo by Scotty Peek



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