

## Get to know Ray-Min Shoulderware

by Beth Martin [beth@someothermagazine.com](mailto:beth@someothermagazine.com)

Nestled in a corner studio in the SOWA building at 450 Harrison in South Boston, Raymond Morin and Minette Vaccariello spend a crisp October Friday night together, sewing. The couple, who started their small handbag business Ray-Min Shoulderware in 2003, enjoy an early evening cocktail while stitching away to create their unique collection of purses, messenger bags, and totes. "We're meeting friends at Deluxe later," says Minette, "But we thought we'd come by the studio and get some work done first."



In her hot pink sweater, sporting her curly mane in a hip up-do, Minette does not look like your average engineer. Raymond's laid back demeanor and gentle countenance are certainly that of a musician. An engineer and a musician, making one-of-a-kind handbags...does it work? Does it make sense? You bet.

**Beth:** So Minette, if Raymond was a purse or bag, what would he look like?

**Minette:** Oh dear...if Raymond was a bag...he'd be a stubborn bag. No, he would probably be a timeless piece...something classic and very deep...sometimes things would get lost in the bag... This is a hard one...actually, I think he'd be a messenger bag, one of our nicer messenger bags, that I could take with me anywhere... (to Raymond) I could dress you up, take you out...or take you on a hike.

**B:** What about Minette, Raymond? What kind of bag would she be?

**Raymond:** Minette's the kind of bag you have to iron and take special care of, and make sure you wear it with only the right stuff... She's definitely not the kind of bag you'd see every day, and if you find it, you've got to take care of it and be careful what you do with it.

**B:** So you two grew up in Putnam, CT, and left there moving in almost opposite directions-- how is it that you ended up starting a bag company in Boston?

**M:** Um...I don't know-- good question.

**R:** (laughing) Five words Beth-- Serendipity.

Actually Putnam didn't really have anything to do with now-- we each did our own thing, and Boston happened to be the closest cool place to home.

The bags were a project for an art gallery in Kansas-- originally Minette was going to do a print, and I was going to do a drawing or a painting, but we didn't get it done, we were doing other things-- the deadline was a weekend away, so Minette said we could make bags. I had never done it before. She gave me a crash course in sewing and left for the day and when she came back, the apartment was full of lousy looking bags.

**M:** They weren't lousy, they were earthy.

**R:** After that it was basically, (as Minette) "I've always wanted to do this".

**B:** So that's how the business started out?

**R:** Essentially...you can't always want to do something and not at least try to do it -- I said, "Well let's do it if you always wanted to do it."

**B:** Now Minette, you're an engineer and Raymond, you're a musician. Do these disciplines ever help you when you're designing bags?

**M:** It helps me a lot -- Right when we started doing this, work wasn't everything I wanted it to be. The work I do isn't creative, and that's really frustrating for me. Raymond had his music, so he always had a side project, but I didn't really have a project of my own. I had just graduated, and hadn't really started anything. When this all started, it was awesome. It really helped my creative side start working again. I've always been drawn to geometric shapes and 50s atomic designs...you know my dish collection, 50s types dishes. I've always loved that style. Even when I was little I had these pattern blocks of geometric shapes, and that was my favorite toy. I'd just make patterns all over the place, and stack them up, and it's funny because that's what I do now. When I come up with a design, I'm still using that sense of shapes and how they're interlocking and overlapping,! so I think I'm using both sides of my brain there.

**R:** Umm...my designs are kind of the same as my musical ideas, lingering on a subject that I'm interested in at the time. Last year I was into animals, writing a lot about animals and drawing a lot of animals so I was sewing a lot of animals into bags. This year I'm doing a lot of tape recording so I've got that imagery in my bags. So, basically I think it's easier to understand if you have another artistic discipline, it's easier to understand how to be productive when you take on a new one. With the internet and stuff, that's basically how I always market my music, so that's how we market the bags. Networking and little events, so yeah...the artistic side does inform it, but I'd say the business/art side is the real similarity

**B:** What else inspires you when making bags?

**M:** I love old fabrics, so whenever I come across any, the fabric itself kind of inspires me, then I branch my design off of that...or textures, we do a lot with that. Sometimes people come in and just feel the bags, like, they just walk up and have to feel it-- that inspires me too-- I like to use different textures and build them up, for an almost 3D effect. I look even more at patterns. The other day I was driving down in back of BU, where they're doing all that construction on Cummington, for the new bio building? There was this plastic that had been put up, with lights inside, but all that you could see were the beams, all these cross beams, and it made this really cool linear crossing pattern. That made me think of a bag. It ended up looking kind of like argyle, but that's where it stems from. We also get a lot of colors for the patterns from nature.

**R:** I'm really inspired by the idea that 99 out of 100 people probably carry a purse or bag or backpack, and most of those people just got that bag from the factory shelf, and it has no personality to it whatsoever, so even though there are bag designers out there, as far as artistic expression goes, it's pretty much wide open and pretty easy to create a very original looking bag. So we came up with the idea that it would be 'Shoulderware', and that kind of injected a functionality to it, but the bags are really more art. It's just very inspiring to know that anything that comes out of our heads is going to be totally different than what most people are going to have on their shoulders.

**B:** So what's the new Fall Line all about?

**M:** We had a different approach with the new Fall line-- past bags we've made we'd just get whatever fabric we liked that was eye catching and just make bags and they had no relation...and these bags, the designs don't have much relation...well, maybe Raymond's recording bags do, but we picked out a palate of colors, rust and orange and browns...some fall earthy tones with pinks in there, and built our bags around that, so they do have a bit of a

## MORE PEOPLE ARTICLES . . .



**Vietnam: Une Grande Tour** in which a humble traveler journeys to the land of cilantro and snake wine.



**Tempted by the Family of Another: Fishing Weekend 2004** A story of naked girls, wizard fish, and really, really terrific parents...by Eliza Randall



**The Future is Present...Are You?** It's the future: we live in the future. We're a couple slippery silver suits away from fitting the classic futuristic landscape provided by our favorite b-movies...by Ben Bellizzi



**The Adventures of Sarah Jane: From Ear to Eternity, Part Deux** The handsome young surgeon, Dr. Spaghetti, has introduced himself and Sarah Jane is doubting her hearing. Spaghetti? Did he say, Spaghetti? Has her panic distorted her hearing to such a degree that she thinks he's an Italian dish? by Ilie Ruby

## MORE SOM ARTICLES . . .

- Words
- Music
- Art
- Humor
- Sex
- Other Needs
- No Need

## OLDER People

**Get to know Ray-Min Shoulderware:** Raymond Morin and Minette Vaccariello use their sewing and design talent to brighten up this black coat town...by Beth Martin

**Kerry-oke, Anyone?** If this year's high-stakes presidential election is wreaking havoc on your nerves, singing into your PlayStation can help...by Evie Southwick

**Lori McKenna-- So Normal She's Eccentric:** Who cares if she drives a station wagon? What matters is that she writes the most honest, achingly lovely songs this side of Emmy Lou Harris...by Bruce Grover

**Scenes from the Square:** ...they were rough and ragged, but they all busted ass once the show started...by Paul McEvoy

**The Last Sideshow (Man)** Todd Robbins just ate your light bulbs...by Linda Rodriguez

**PEACE + JUSTICE = GOOD TIMES: The 72-Hour Journal of a Newborn Activist (Part Two)** In her pursuit for justice, one writer/activist also discovers a really good time...by lee lee thompson

**The Adventures of Sarah Jane: From Ear to Eternity, Part I** Could it be that the Family Derm—a man old enough to be her father, who has seen her through bouts of hives heat rash and poison ivy—is actually making a pass at her...by Ilie Ruby

**Peace + Justice = GOOD TIMES: The 72-Hour Journal of a Newborn Activist** In her pursuit for justice, one writer/activist also discovers a really good time...by lee lee thompson

**Kool-Aid Man Takes on Manhattan!** The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test has nothing on this story...by Joe Moscone

relationship when you see them all together.

**B:** Now I don't want to give away all your secrets, but where are some hot places to get fabric in Boston?

**M:** We get fabrics from all over-- all the vintage stuff I'll find in vintage shops and thrift stores...I've found some amazing stuff that people just want to get rid of at yard sales. Solos in Cambridge is good.

**R:** Solos is good for staple stuff...we wouldn't go to Solos to look for the next pattern, but we get a lot of solids there.

**B:** You are both enviable sewers, how did you learn?

**M:** Well my Mom sews, so I definitely learned from her-- she's given us a lot of tips. Same with Raymond's Mom- she's a seamstress too. So that's definitely helped. So that's how I learned, but we've learned a lot in the past year and a half



**R:** Trial and error...a lot of trial and error.

**M:** Yeah, and I've actually gone to a lot of tutorials online that have helped a lot. We're still learning.

**B:** Do you ever plan to venture into making any other accessories or clothing?

**M:** I've been thinking about that recently. I was thinking about belts...those could be really cool. I like belts. I've always thought about finding clothes and adding to them or adjusting them...just making them cooler, but, I've never sewn many clothes...so I don't know how far I'm going to get into that.

**R:** I want to get better at bags-- I'm very conscious about how long we've been doing this, which is not very long, so I really want to feel justified in charging people for it. My primary concern is just to get better at making bags. But I'll encourage any creative outlet she wants to pursue.

**M:** Waistware.

**R:** That sounds kind of more sinister...WAISTWEAR...for when you're WASTED...for when you wanna tie one on...

**B:** So are there any designers you look up to?

**M:** There are a lot of designers I like. I guess when I'm looking for color inspirations...I mean, we don't follow the fashion trends altogether, but if certain colors are really in for certain seasons, I don't think it hurts to make bags with similar colors. I really like BCBG a lot, and Marc Jacobs. I love Betsy Johnson too. She's been doing it forever and she really just comes up with really far out stuff, which I always have appreciated.

**R:** Yeah, we both like all of them a lot...

**B:** What advice would you give to someone your age that is starting up this type of small creative business?

**M:** Definitely talk to people. I think the reason why we went into a business more confidently was that my best friend has her own graphic design business, PinkerGreen (www.pinkergreen.com), and she took that first step and I talked to her a lot. She was a big inspiration to me, because without her I probably would have been so overwhelmed with the idea of owning a business that I wouldn't have taken that step. That and we had to cash some checks, so we had to become a business.

**R:** The thing I've noticed about being in business is that you only get out of it exactly what you put into it. And if your hearts not in it or your time is not in it, then you shouldn't expect a whole lot to come out. We've been most successful when we've worked the hardest.

**B:** Do you feel that you've been well-received in Boston, or do you feel that the size of the city restricts you?

**M:** I think what's helped us the most is getting a studio, and being in an area where a lot of people are into art, who appreciate artwork and craftsmanship. I think that has been the best thing we ever could have done. I mean, we were making bags in my one-bedroom apartment before, and no one saw us except the gallery in Kansas where we were selling stuff. But now that we have a gallery, people can walk right in and some love our stuff, or some just wouldn't wear it, but you know, that's fashion. There's a lot of things I don't wear out there, and for good reason.

**R:** I haven't felt particularly affected by Boston...Boston I think has a lot of stylish people, but the vast majority don't take any steps toward looking any different than anyone else. So that is kind of an inspiration in itself, because you just know that what you're doing is so different...it's like when everyone is wearing a black coat, it makes you want to wear a red coat. Boston is definitely a black coat kind of place.

**M:** You own a black coat.

**R:** I know. You own a red coat...and a black coat...

**M:** And a brown coat.

**B:** I have a blue coat.

**R:** I have this kind of charcoal grey coat...

**B:** So I know that your local circle of friends have a lot of creative projects going on-- do you think that this network of sorts has helped Ray-Min Shoulderware grow?



**M:** Totally. I think having a network of people who are really creative and are all doing really great things inspires us to do just as many things, and just see how we can all help each other out and vice versa...We're just a big support group...not for bad things but for positive things. And it's great, and the more people we meet, the more we can add to that. It's awesome...I think it's one of the best things we've got going...just a great group of friends that all really support each other.

**R:** We love our friends.

**M:** We love our friends...I'm going to marry them all.

**B:** (laughing) Oh, that will be fun. So what is the upcoming winter line all about?

**R:** (warning) You give it away...

**M:** (laughing) As far as colors, I'm thinking a lot of cool colors-- jades and whites, blacks and grays, with bright blues and hot pinks for warmth.

**R:** I think the main goal for the winter line is going to be to communicate that just because it's winter, it doesn't mean that things have stopped growing and being warm and alive...because people get depressed in the winter...

**M:** We need to counteract the black coat syndrome.

**B:** If you could make a bag for anyone, who would it be and what would the bag be like?

**M:** Hmm, who would get my special bag?

**R:** (whispers) If we say each other, people will think it's really sweeeet...

**M:** (silly voice) I would make a bag for Raymond.

**R:** (Silly voice) I was gonna say yooooou...

**M:** (to Raymond) You go, who would you make a bag for?

**R:** Liza Minnelli and Bette Midler...

**M:** Barbara Streisand...Maybe I should make a bag for Neil Diamond...he needs a bag.

**R:** He could carry sideburn grooming supplies in it...

**M:** Actually, Barry Manilow could probably use a bag more...

**R:** You think? But rhinestones are expensive...

**M:** We can get a Bedazzler...

*Look for the new Ray-Min Shoulderware line in early December at [ray-minshoulderware.com](http://ray-minshoulderware.com).*