



# Leather de Luxe

Sidestep Dong Khoi and put down that Burberry bag—whether it’s the real deal or a knockoff. There’s a new trend in Vietnamese leather accessories and it doesn’t involve paying an outrageous mark-up for a designer name or settling on a copy that will fall apart before you even get it home.

These savvy brands based in HCMC are seeking to change the image of Vietnam-made leather accessories by focusing on the attention to detail and one of a kind customisation that was previously only seen in European luxury houses.

## JR Rostaing: The French *Savoir Faire* in Vietnam

### The Brand Story

Maison Rostaing, a family-run leather manufacturer, set up shop in France back in 1789. But the company’s story in Vietnam began more recently when heir to the business Jacques Rostaing decided to bring his family’s knowledge, what the French call *savoir faire*, to HCMC by founding a tannery in 1994. Since then, the tannery has treated and crafted top of the line leather products for many elite French fashion brands. In September 2017, the company decided to launch their own product line called JR Rostaing.

Walk into the JR Rostaing boutique and you’ll be met with rows of perfectly crafted handbags and accessories. The leather ranges from the opulent—ostrich, stingray, snake and crocodile skins—to the eco-conscious, leather that is tanned using only tree bark and no chemicals.

Karine Rostaing, customer liaison, has been in Vietnam for 24 years. She interviewed with #iAMHCMC in French about how the market for luxury products has changed.

**Some people buy a bag just for the brand—they’ll buy a plastic bag if it’s made by a prestigious brand, Rostaing said.**

Other brands use leather that is not a good quality and then they spray paint it so that the leather looks perfect. But now more people are looking for a high-end bag that looks beautiful and lasts.

### The Leather

The animal skins used to make the products primarily come from Europe and are then transported to Vietnam where they are treated in the tannery. Every haute couture bag is lined with a one-of-a-kind French silk scarf and all crocodile skin handbags have an embossed serial number inside the bag, which is the international governmental customs method for proving the

origin of the leather. These exclusive touches lift the bag to status symbol level.

### Bespoke

Everything in the store can be customised and tailor made. A sunglasses case might set you back VND1 million, while a custom bag depends entirely on the type of leather and the details. The only limit is your imagination and of course your budget.

*100 Vo Thi Sau, D1*

## Cincinnati / Ne-Yuh: Vietnamese Brands for International Tastes

### The Brand Story

The doorway that leads into the Cincinnati and Ne-Yuh boutique in D1 feels like a secret passage into a vintage leather-working studio. Walk inside and the narrow storefront opens up into a bright shop where customers are met with an array of meticulously arranged handbags and accessories. From the M.O.O.N. bag, which is crafted into a zen circle to a mini bag called the Saigon Chic clutch, which could have been inspired by the iconic woven bags from Italian luxury house Bottega Veneta, each piece showcases the beauty of the leather.

As a child Huyen Nguyen, the brand’s founder and designer, had a prized possession: a backpack. At this time, backpacks were still scarce in Vietnam and Nguyen knew how special it was. With her line of meticulously-designed leather goods, Nguyen has brought to life that feeling of owning something rare.



*Ne-Yuh*

Nguyen began her family-run business in 2008, when she opened her first factory manufacturing leather bags. Every piece is entirely handmade by artisans.

Cincinnati was the first brand to be created and initially focused on a more masculine aesthetic. Ne-Yuh launched in 2014 and embraces femininity and innovative shapes. Nguyen's companies have risen to the top of Vietnam-made leather goods because of their ability to engage both domestic and international markets—50 percent of the business' products are exported—as well as being an ambassador for the fashion and lifestyle of a new generation of Vietnamese businesses.

### The Leather

Some brands use leather composite, which involves taking leather fibres and gluing them together then coating the sheet of leather with varnish. In contrast, Nguyen's factory uses only whole leather from India or Italy, which has a softer texture and also ages beautifully.

### Bespoke

"We are proud to say that all products are made in Vietnam", Ngon Huynh, export sales director said. "There are very talented artisans here. That's why all the foreign customers come in."

"However, the Vietnamese market is different. The Vietnamese people like things that are from abroad. You have to market things differently to them if you're a Vietnamese brand."

One of the ways that Cincinnati and Ne-Yuh do that is through customisation. In their D1 boutique,

there is a "Build a Bag" workshop. Clients can make an appointment with the store and come in to choose their leather, accessories and style. Initials can be added anywhere on the bag. One new concept is the his & her bags. A couple can select matching styles and then personalise the pieces with each other's initials.

*60-62 Mac Thi Bui, D1*

## Desino: Youthful Elegance

### The Brand Story

Ten years ago Huy Nguyen, general manager of Desino, had an idea. A technical engineer with a flair for fashion, Nguyen had a taste for quality, yet he had a hard time finding what he wanted. "Either the product was right but the price was too high or the price was right but the quality was low", Nguyen said.

Instead of waiting around for the market to change, Nguyen found a leather producer that was willing to create products to serve his vision, and Desino was thus born.

### The Leather

Using the overstock of the leather created for top luxury brands, Desino is able to make bags out of the highest quality leather but at a reasonable price. The products range from candy-coloured tote bags to buttery beige leather satchels.

"We are not aiming to be the artisanal brand."

"We are aiming for excellent quality with a more



commercial purpose", Nguyen said. "People who want to buy something for daily use can come to us. People who want identity come to us. We can add on all the personal touches."

### Bespoke

People can use a classic bag as a base and then add whatever details they desire. An in-house artist can custom paint any product to the client's specifications. According to Nguyen, Desino's clients go wild for a cross-body bag that can be customised with painted graffiti-like slogans, beaded skulls, birds or anything they can dream up.

"Right now luxury is all about identity", Nguyen said. "Everyone can have the same quality. Everyone can choose to say 'the more expensive the better'. But we give them something that they can create."

*10 Nguyen Thiep, D1* 📍

