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# retail therapy Verve



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Shopping bags from Give-It-Bag are made from old bags used to ship foodstuffs such as salt, sugar and rice all around the world. They are pricey – the large classic bag shown here costs R440 – but they are unique.

**Noor-Jehan Yoro Badat** reports on the growing popularity of "green" reusable shopping bags.

**S**OUTH Africa's "national flower", the thin plastic bag that took root in every veld and on every verge, is virtually extinct. Now major retailers are pushing customers to eschew even the legal, thicker plastic bags when shopping, especially grocery buying. Though many of these bags are now "green" by virtue of being made with a significant amount of recycled plastic, it is in the area of reusable bags – the ones you can use year after year – that the most creativity and style is being displayed.

Made either from natural fabrics or thicker recycled synthetics, many of these bags are also manufactured by the previously unemployed, so benefiting the environment and people. Scores of corporate or promotional gift companies are also selling stylish reusable bags.

For Pick a Pay, "green is the new black". According to CEO Nick Badminton, the retail giant has sold more than 11 million green bags to date.

But Badminton says they have found that more and more of their shoppers are switching to the alternative, the "bag for life".

In a bid to reduce the use of plastic bags, the company late last year launched a web-based design competition for a more durable and stylish alternative. Customers were asked not only to provide innovative designs for the eco bags, but also to vote for their favourite designs.

"The competition proved an enormous success," said Badminton, "with 386 designs being submitted and 54 689 votes registered on the site."

An expert panel, which included fashion designer David Tiale, earlier this year chose a winner and two

## SHOP LIKE YOU GIVE A DAMN B.Y.O.B. \* BRING YOUR OWN BAG

runners-up from 10 of the most popular designs.

Their bags are now being made, from locally sourced natural fibres, by Township Patterns, which offers previously disadvantaged women the opportunity to create their own jobs. Justin Smith, Woolworths Good Business Journey manager, says the company is committed to reducing plastic bag usage.

Its colourful fabric shopping bags are the most popular with their customers. They are locally made by two suppliers, one of which is Gusco, an amalgamation of three informal community sewing groups, says Smith. Gusco produces 200 000 reusable bags for Woolworths each year.

Woolworths also stocks reusable plastic art bags which showcase local artists' designs, says Smith.

Retailers aren't the only ones who've jumped on the eco-conscious trend. Regina Borth, co-owner of the Cape Town-based Give-It-Bag company, says its trendy, handcrafted bags are made from woven polypropylene sacks that were once used to ship foodstuffs such as rice, beans, sugar and

flour. The materials come from all over the world – Brazil, China and Bali – and the printed text on them make for stunning and unique designs. "We never know how many bags we will make from one print," says Borth. "The fabrics are cut, washed and varnished so the print stays. And each piece is cut with a heat cutter to keep the edges from fraying. All the bags are lined."

The concept of Give-It-Bag, she adds, was to have a green product that had a "pay-it-forward" element. Not only did they want to share the environmental load by keeping polypropylene bags out of dumping sites, but 20 percent of the profits go to charity.

Each bag, she says, is tagged with a unique number. And bag owners are encouraged to do a good deed of their own and post it on the Give-It-Bag website. Any acts of kindness, says Borth, can make a difference and inspire people to do good.

The Give-It-Bag website is geared to online shoppers in Europe, with prices given in Euros, but the website does list local stockists.

Although the bags are pricey –

R180 for the simple bag, R380 for the small classic bag and R440 for the large classic bag – Borth says the company has received enormous positive feedback. "Our clients are people who are looking for cool bags to use everyday and not only for grocery shopping," she says.

Envirosax is another range of reusable shopping bags made from lightweight polyester. Waterproof, they weigh almost nothing, about 40g each, but can hold 20kg in weight.

They fold up into a pocket-size bundle, secured with snap tables, that fit easily into handbags. Available in a variety of colours and designs, Envirosax are designed in Australia.

They are sold locally by among others, NetFlorist, an online flower and gift delivery company and The Green Shop, an online eco store.

"These bags are a huge hit with customers," says Greg Walton of The Green Shop. "People use them not only for shopping, but for the odd bit of carrying things, so they are convenient and multi-useful."

"Many people prefer not to use the plastic bags and don't like the look of the ones on offer in supermarkets as they are not really 'designer,'" says Walton.

NetFlorist's Sue Morris agrees that going green doesn't have to mean sacrificing style by using standard-issue canvas bags. Instead, "you can be stylish, fanciful and kind to the earth by using these eco-friendly bags".

She adds: "Every conscious choice made can make a difference. We hope to play our part in encouraging consumers to make good choices with the environmentally friendly gift options available."

**CONTACTS**  
Give-It-Bag: Tel: 021 455 9952; e-mail: [capetown@give-it-bag.com](mailto:capetown@give-it-bag.com) or go to [www.give-it-bag.com](http://www.give-it-bag.com)

The Green Shop: E-mail: [greg@thegreenshop.co.za](mailto:greg@thegreenshop.co.za); see the website [www.thegreenshop.co.za](http://www.thegreenshop.co.za) or for G.A.berg sales call Katy at: 072 219 7216

NetFlorist: Call 0861 300 600 or see [www.netflorist.co.za](http://www.netflorist.co.za)



Two Pick a Pay eco bags, R31 99. The one on the left is designed by Charlotte Coetzee, 24, and took top honours in the design contest, and the one on the right is by Jaci Rudling, 44.

Besides its green food bags, made from 45 percent recycled material, Woolworths has two ranges of reusable shopping bags – a plastic art bag and the brightly coloured fabric bags.



Envirosax bags from The Green Shop, top, for R79 each, and a set of five Envirosax bags from NetFlorist, left, for R399 excluding delivery.

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Jacques Kallis

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