

## **A Bag of One's Own: The Story of *z becky brown* Handbags**

*By Jane Singleton*



For Carolyn Whiting, growing up was infused with Labs to love and country air to breathe. In those years, Carolyn said, it was easy to find a freshly plowed field to walk through. “My father—the ultimate lover of Labrador Retrievers—early in life, managed a large plantation and had Labs for hunting. He often told the story about the time his Labs saved my tiny brother from falling into the lake. So growing up, we always had Labs, always had puppies, and always cried when we had to give them up.”

“I was born and raised in South Carolina in a tiny town called Hartsville,” Carolyn said. “And my goal in life was to leave South Carolina. I thought that’s what everybody did—thought that’s what was expected. So I tried it for a while.”

Carolyn met Dick, her future husband, at Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina. They married and moved to Miami. But when ready to raise a family, the couple wanted to be back in South Carolina.

“We moved to Columbia, Dick went back to school for a law degree (at the age of 33), and immediately, I found out I was pregnant with twins who would join our two-year-old son,” Carolyn told us. “Our son turned two in June, I gave birth to the twins in August, and my husband started law school the next week.”

But in no time at all, as they say, Carolyn’s children were grown and gone from home. After years of a life so full and fast paced, Carolyn began looking for a new challenge. That’s how *z becky brown, inc.*, came into being.

It was 2004 when Carolyn began to toss around the idea of making a clear handbag that would display a woman’s favorite photographs, or for that matter, display any design she wanted.

Being an independent sort, Carolyn said, she set out to make her own prototype. “I got a sheet of plastic material, made the box, then faced a series of how-to questions.” And finally, with glued-on hinges and an I-hook screwed to the lid, Carolyn inserted photos and tested her unique design at a family reunion. They loved it! “People even stopped me in the airport to ask about the handbag,” Carolyn said. “And I said to myself, wow, I think I’ll start a little business and just make these and sell them!”

But the prototype handbag broke. “If you dropped it, the handbag just shattered,” Carolyn said. Carolyn got in touch with a friend experienced in product development. He advised Carolyn to research the patent possibilities, to get manufacturers lined up, and to forget the handmade product because it would fail and would come right back to her.

Carolyn rose to the challenge and learned about injection molding, about tooling, about manufacturing, about resins, and about patents, which took months and months and months. “But it didn’t take long to learn that it’s very hard to be taken seriously when you haven’t done anything,” Carolyn said. “Some of the bigger tooling companies practically scoffed when I held up my little handbag.” So, in other words, Carolyn had to pay her dues.

Soon after, Carolyn’s business venture began to take shape. The new eco-friendly resin handbags had a good solid feel, were crystal-clear and guaranteed to not break. “It was a long hard road, but I made the journey,” Carolyn said.



*This gorgeous bag is one of at least 60 designs created by Carolyn Whiting.*

It was late 2005 before the first handbag went on the market. And hit the market it did! Looking at the z **becky brown** color-packed floor display of handbags would make any woman feel like a little girl in a candy store.

The resin, a natural polymer, is of the highest quality with brilliance. Carolyn's handbags are lined and cushioned inside to protect the contents. But the most irresistible feature of the handbags are the designer inserts that allow women to create and recreate their handbags. There are sixty insert designs in the categories of Basic in Black, Neutrals & Wovens, The Wild Side, and Special Collection. All can be monogrammed; all can be embroidered; and many inserts provide the perfect background for a display of favorite photos.



*Most of the designer inserts form a stunning background for monogramming.*

You can choose from several stylish options including bamboo and beaded handles. Carolyn's best seller is the black lid with the solid black handle and the nickel hardware. Lids come in brown, black, and white; hardware in nickel or brass.



*Scrap booking techniques make an impressive layout for favorite photo inserts.*

The designer inserts are easy to slide in place between the liner and the handbag—the sides and front are one piece, the back is a separate piece. Carolyn says some of her customers design their own inserts from scratch, usually making them in four separate pieces, which works well also. z **becky brown** handbags come with a template that takes the guesswork out of designing from scratch.



*The eco-friendly handbags had a good solid feel,  
were crystal-clear and guaranteed.*

Carolyn is most proud to say that *z becky brown, inc.*, is 100-percent Made in the USA. Manufacturing of the handbags is out of Irwin, Tennessee, in the Great Smoky Mountains; the inserts are made in Twin City, Georgia. “The people I work with are wonderful and are so happy to have the jobs.”

“My favorite thing in the whole world is talking,” Carolyn said. “Talking to the ladies who love this handbag is so much fun. I can guarantee that when a customer carries one of our handbags, unless they are in the most unfriendly place in the world, people are going to come up to them and say, ‘That’s the cutest handbag! Where did you get that?’ ” And the appeal of the handbags is across-the-board with no age barriers. Carolyn says college sorority sisters love the handbag, as do women in their fifties and up. It’s the ultimate design.



All Labs is proud to carry *z becky brown* handbags in our store. [Follow this link](#) to handbags that “thrill the fashion savvy woman.”