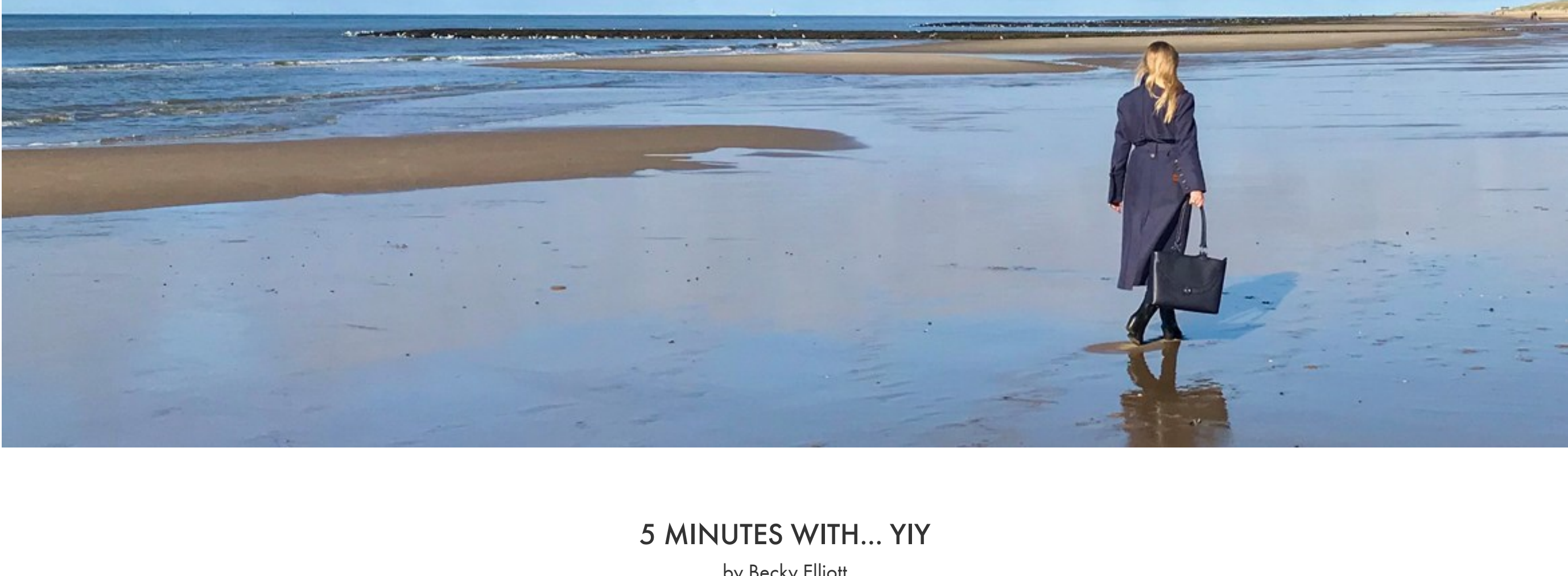


MAGAZINE



5 MINUTES WITH... YIY

by Becky Elliott

YIY makes sustainable, luxury and functional accessories that breathe conscious living. Conscious from the outside by making sustainably and ethically responsible products. Conscious from the inside, by connecting back to (your) nature, to Your Inner You. The Amsterdam-born brand that's making handbags truly yours, founder Felicienne Bloemers talks to us about her nature-inspired pieces

How did you get into handbag design?

After leaving a career in consulting and finance, I stepped into the creative world working with several product and fashion designers. That was the moment that a hidden longing to create was awakened in me. I didn't know by then what to do with it and how to shape it. Not until I started a path filled with yoga and meditation was I able to truly connect with the inner me. This growing consciousness helped me to let go of stress and get in touch with my strength and creativity. I wanted to make something that was beautiful and meaningful, not only in form but also in spirit. Products that could connect the inner with the outer world and tell this story. Handbags turned out to be the perfect carrier: they are a woman's true soulmate, accompanying her on her journey through life and carrying all she cares for.



What inspired you to start YIY?

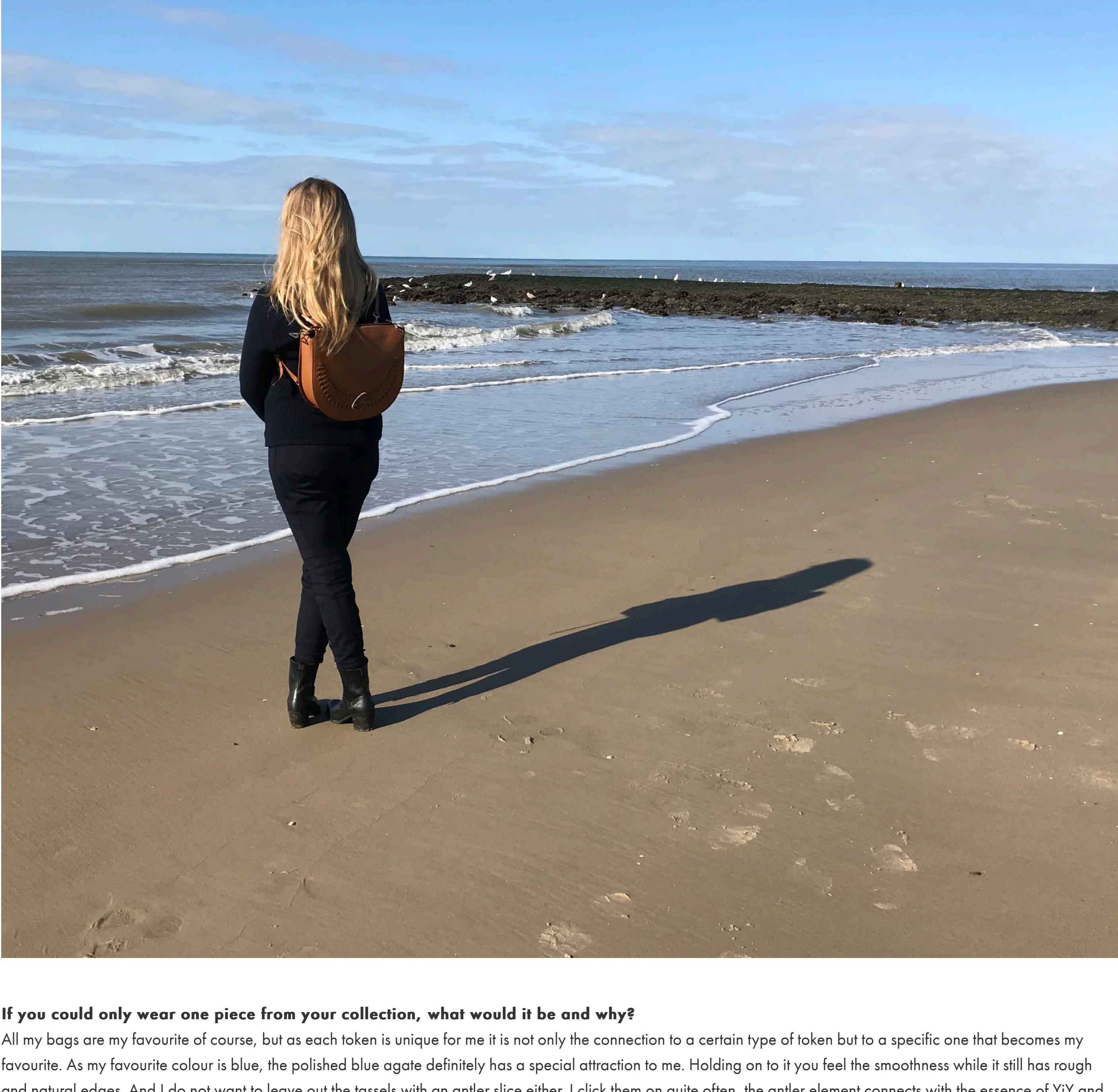
It felt like quite a responsibility with so many handbags out there in the world. So I turned to you, as YIY wants to listen to you (YIY = 'jij' in Dutch and translates to 'you'). I asked you through an extensive questionnaire about your ideal handbag and took your feedback to design the bags. One thing became very clear: you all explicitly expressed wanting to have the possibility to be able to personalize your bags, your soulmates. The pieces were falling more and more together. It made perfect sense that a soulmate needed to be truly personal, therewith reinforcing the outer and inner connection the brand tries to grow. The brand name was born: YiY, with a double meaning: You and Your Inner You.

What inspires your handbag designs?

My inspiration comes from nature. Nature is always in flow and finds its balance. Its continuing cycles connect life and death. Nature can strike you with its intricacy and yet its simple logic and functionality. And nature embraces organic forms and expresses for me both power and elegance. I found the antler a symbol from nature representing this all. An antler expresses both power and organic elegance; it is shed and grows again every year. And while the inside is a very intricate maze, the majestic outside serves female deer to find their best mating partner.

When designing the bags, I combined nature with the learnings from the questionnaire. While the bags are functional, the organic weave is intricate and shows craftsmanship. The GOTS custom lining of the bag is inspired by photography of water and air symbolizing a feeling of freedom. And the custom handler connectors is a special design element that reminds you of an antler.

Personalization had to be key. I felt this feature had to be a connection with nature, as if this could bring you back to your nature. I choose to work with unique tokens sprouted from nature. The weave leads your eye to the central place where you find a special click system that allows you to change your token depending on your moment. The tokens act as a little anchor and reminder to be in the moment – the now – and to find connection with Your Inner You...and of course it is without saying that YIY is conscious and embraces sustainability.



If you could only wear one piece from your collection, what would it be and why?

All my bags are my favourite of course, but as each token is unique for me it is not only the connection to a certain type of token but to a specific one that becomes my favourite. As my favourite colour is blue, the polished blue agate definitely has a special attraction to me. Holding on to it you feel the smoothness while it still has rough and natural edges. And I do not want to leave out the tassels with an antler slice either. I click them on quite often, the antler element connects with the essence of YiY and the tassel just makes me smile and feel free.

What have been the highest and lowest points on your journey so far?

There have been many highs and lows as it is a bumpy road of course. Thinking of the lows two things pop up:

- Finding your way into the industry, especially the production side of it. I first tried to set up production in Romania which failed and I had to start all over again. I am happy to have found a highly skilled and very amiable atelier in Spain, near Alicante, who was happy to work with me. And still in the industry – especially for a start-up – it is hard to keep production going as ateliers need minimum quantities and are not willing to deliver on demand. This leaves us (the industry) with a paradox of not only requiring investments but also evoking the risk of overproduction and waste. This effect is even more magnified by consumers who ask for immediate deliveries. A balancing act that needs continuous consciousness.

- As a small, personal brand it is really hard to find and grow your audience, your customer base with limited budgets in a world overloaded with images and messages.

As for the highs, I immediately think of each and every customer that is and stays truly happy with their soulmate. And on many occasions I had the chance to meet the customers personally (live or online) and helped them in picking their unique token. This personal connection makes it even more rewarding and the high even higher. I am grateful for that.



What's the best piece of advice you have ever been given?

Live the moment, and trust life. Let life live you and let go of your urges to control and plan life as it is not makeable. Through acceptance, giving love and kindness to yourself and others life will give back.

What drew you to Wolf & Badger?

I consider Wolf & Badger an innovative, stylish and conscious platform that carefully selects and supports independent designers. What better fit do you want for YiY?

Where do you see your brand in 5 years?

If you read about the best advice I have been given, I do not think it makes much sense to plan ahead but act on what the moment gives you. Plans can be inspiring but more often show you every moment, that the moment is not good enough as you still have not reached your goals. So I will see what life brings me in the future.

FEATURED DESIGNERS



YIY