



Inspired by the Bauhaus aesthetic, one of the bags on offer from Lautem. ALL CREDITS: LAUTEM

## Bauhaus bags

Architect-turned-leathergoods-designer Elena Garcia Silva uses her knowledge of and passion for beautiful buildings in the collections she creates for Lautem, her own leathergoods brand.

A year ago, São Paulo-based fashion designer, lover of leather and trend expert Walter Rodrigues said 2019 was certain to be a year in which the influence of the Bauhaus movement would be in evidence on catwalks and in collections. This year is the centenary of the start of Bauhaus and the emergence of its founder, German architect and designer Walter Gropius.

The founder of leathergoods brand Lautem, Elena Garcia Silva, was ahead of the game because Bauhaus influences have been part of her work since the brand's launch at the end of 2013. Elena Garcia had a distinct advantage, though, because she, too, is an architect, one whose specialisms include restoring old buildings while imaging the towns and cities of the future, one who has won awards.

Becoming an architect is not for the faint

of heart. Ms Garcia qualified in 2003 after years at university. She then returned to Turin, where she had gained work experience while still a student, and immersed herself in projects to restore and preserve a number of the Piedmontese city's eighteenth century buildings.

In 2008, back in her native Spain, she took up a role directing a series of architectural projects required for a government project called Energy City in the historical north-western town of Pontevedra. This region has a long coal-mining tradition, but Energy City's aim, and its architectural challenge, was to build clean-energy projects and integrate them into an older building that already housed the National Energy Museum. This initiative won several awards, including at the 2012 Europa Nostra Awards, a European Union programme that recognises excellence in cultural heritage projects.

### Labour of love

Moving on from this, Elena Garcia helped establish in 2013 Slow Projects, which specialises in setting up and running architectural projects that put an emphasis on connecting science, technology and society. However, around the same time, she launched, with her husband, Robert Vercellotti, her other labour of love, Lautem.

Work as an architect with Slow Projects continues. Ms Garcia describes architecture as another design discipline, although she says it's the most "complete" of all. Architects always want to design architectural projects, of course, but they "have no quarrel" with designers in any other field. This is true in the world of leather, too, as collaborative projects involving architects such as India Mahdavi and brands such as Tod's show. Lautem is not like that, though. Lautem is in it for the long haul.



In it for the long haul, Lautem wants its products to last.

"Lautem came about because Roberto and I wanted to start a project of our own," she explains. "Design has always been my field of work and I have always been interested in fashion, especially the world of accessories. Roberto's expertise is in international commerce and marketing, so we had in house all the skills we needed to start this adventure ourselves. Other reasons for launching a new brand from scratch are the desire to grow as a professional person, to express myself in my own terms and to have control over what I do and how to do it. It also allows me to enjoy freedom in the designs I create."

### Extra requirements

Among the people who have appreciated the results are star of the Harry Potter films Emma Watson and Solange Knowles, sister of Beyoncé and a famous singer in her own right. Elena Garcia says the key to gaining the attention, if not of the much-photographed and famous themselves, then of their stylists is to put in a lot of hard work and send a lot of emails to the right people. "But I like to think good design must be a part of it too," she says.

The case of Emma Watson is particularly interesting. She is vocal in her support of ethical fashion, which adds an extra layer of requirement for brands that want to win her favour. In this respect, Lautem has carried a large number of plus-points, the

founder says. "We believe in slow fashion," she explains. "We don't make new products every season. We try from the outset to make products that will last, with designs that will work season after season. We are also completely transparent in informing customers about where we make these bags, where we make the straps and where we source the leather. We take care of all our production processes and everyone who takes part receives a fair reward for what they do."

### Level of difficulty

Out of respect for the completeness and strictness of legislation and standard there, every element of every Lautem bag comes from the European Union. Within that, the hilltop town of Ubrique at the opposite end of Spain from Pontevedra has a special significance. Ubrique is a place where appreciation levels of high-quality leather and of the artisan skills and traditions required to turn it into beautiful accessories are part of everyday life. It has its own training school and small-scale, family-owned artisan leathergoods manufacturers are the mainstay of the economy of the town, which has a total population of just 18,000. Such is luxury brand Loewe's love for Ubrique that it thought long and hard in 2013 about setting up its own in-house training academy there (it opted in the end to keep the academy close to corporate headquarters in Getafe, near Madrid).

"Thanks to the excellence of the products that manufacturers in Ubrique can offer, brands that have their leathergoods made there are able to stand out from the competition," Ms Garcia says. "The people who make our bags are artisans of great experience, which is important because, by virtue of their design, these products are difficult to make. These artisans offer us a level of quality that cannot be denied. Without that level of difficulty in the design, however, Lautem would not be the same."

This certainly owes something to the Bauhaus, as the Lautem founder admits. She says the key to this, above all, experimentation in any kind of design. "I try to follow the teachings of Bauhaus," she says. "I am inspired, at least in part, by the Bauhaus aesthetic but I am trying to interpret it for our times."



Lautem bags are difficult to make because of the way they are designed. Founder, Elena Garcia, is happy to put their construction into the hands of the talented artisans of Ubrique, in southern Spain.