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## For Anna Street founder, versatile style is in the (hand)bag

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PORTSMOUTH — Carrie James' collection of fabric was mounting. Bright colors, prints, subtle solids. "I kept buying fabric," she says, citing purchase after purchase, just because she liked the look of the material, and the "endless possibilities" it represented. The fact that James didn't know how to sew wasn't a deterrent.

Finally, James decided to get out the sewing machine she'd re-

ceived as a gift a few years earlier. What emerged after a year of teaching herself to sew and developing patterns is a signature line of classic and stylish handbags, each sewn by James herself.

Anna Street Boston, as James calls her line, includes styles from handbag to totes, and almost all of the styles are reversible.

Flip from elegant black piped with red to tiny martini glasses printed on a rich crimson. Pick up a Burberry-like tan plaid and flip it

over to a solid. Go from black with pink accents to pink with black accents.

"I definitely wanted them to be reversible because I wanted them to showcase as many fabrics as possible," James said.

Each of the reversible bags ties with a bow, and nonreversible versions that use a magnetic snap are also available. The bags are ScotchGuarded™ and can be dry-cleaned.

The possibilities are virtually

endless; through the Anna Street Custom line, James will make bags of any combination of colors and prints for customers.

"Every bag is different," James said. "The great thing about accessories is they really make or break an outfit."

Even with those that are pre-made, James says she strives to keep them looking as original as possible, purchasing only limited amounts of fabric and retiring certain combinations in short order

so there aren't too many with the same look out there.

Anna Street bags are presently sold either via the business' Web site or at Making Faces, the Ceres Street makeup shop owned by one of James' chief entrepreneurial influences, Annie Loomis.

This fall, Loomis and James will be collaborating on "Girls Nights" events where participants can have their makeup done and select fabric for a bag that James will custom-make for them. James has

also expanded her offerings to include makeup bags.

As soon as she can find the right retail location, James plans to open a downtown shop of her own where she can sell both pre-sewn bags and custom designs.

"We're looking for that perfect fit," she said.

To date, Anna Street offers bags in more than 100 fabrics — and James plans to offer up to 200

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## THIS business is all in the bag

HANDBAGS, from Page A1

when she opens her store — along with choices of ribbons and straps to mix and match. She's also recently added change purses and belts to her line.

Each of those designs comes out of more than a year of experimentation, which sometimes yielded frustrating and mixed results.

James said she didn't have a moment of "Eureka! The bag is right," but made the realization more gradually.

"It really became real for me when I would go shopping and shop owners would ask where I got the bag," she said.

After trying to sew and work full-time, James decided that to make her dream come true, she would quit her job as an advertising-agency account manager.

"It was a really scary leap," she said. "Making the commitment to do that was a great thing to do."

Working with James, 30, is her boyfriend, Nick Saunders, who runs the business side of Anna Street, including its Web site.

"Without Nick, there wouldn't be Anna Street," said James, describing how Saunders talked her through the moments early on when she was still learning to sew and her bags weren't coming out right. Saunders even helped fashion some of the equipment James uses in cutting fabric for bags.

So where did the name Anna Street come from?

"The name sort of comes from where the whole thing grew out of," said James, explaining how she spent much of her life in the South on vacations and attending college.

In Delray Beach, Fla., where James' family vacationed, "there's a little beach road called Anna Street," she said. "I



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Carrie James displays some of the many handbags she has created for her business, Anna Street Boston. Most of the bags she creates are reversible.

### THAT'S HANDY

- Anna Street, founded by Carrie James, makes handbags, each designed and sewn by James from patterns she developed.
- Almost every bag made by Anna Street is reversible.
- Currently, the business operates from James' home, but she plans to open a retail store in downtown Portsmouth.
- James founded the business believing she'd have to open her shop in Boston to attract customers. Now, she's staying here and changing its name to Anna Street Studio.
- James' custom-made bags carry the Anna Street Custom label.

always felt so good on Anna Street."

In addition to bringing happy memories for James, Anna

Street is in the South, where women take their handbags seriously.

"In the South, all the women

are all about accessorizing," James said.