

# Retailer had designs on high-end handbag business

By Paul Luke  
Staff Reporter

Zohra Shahalimi caught up with her dreams of start-

ing a business last year and threw them into a handbag. A former buyer for a fashion retailer, Shahalimi had a pretty good idea what merchants wanted in trendy, high-end handbags.

So she founded Vancouver-based Zoozy Enterprises — Zoozy was her childhood nickname — and launched the Zoozy and Amuze handbag lines.

"Purses can be accessible without being grocery bags," says Shahalimi, 31. "They can be fashionable, stylish, good quality and functional."

Her bags are sold across the Lower Mainland and as far away as Alabama and Switzerland.

Next year, Shahalimi hopes to expand her presence in Europe and to penetrate South America.

The Zoozy bags retail for \$300 to \$600, while the medium-price Amuze bags go for \$60 to \$120.

Entrepreneurship carries risks, but Shahalimi's life has

been distinguished by an ability to handle change and loss.

Born in an affluent household in Kabul, Afghanistan, Shahalimi and her family fled that strife-torn nation in 1986, abandoning their property and possessions.

They wound up in Montreal, where Shahalimi graduated from fashion-design school in 1996.

"We had everything and then nothing, so to me nothing is impossible," she says. "Some people give up when they have hard times, but there's always tomorrow. I know because I've lived tomorrow."

After fashion school, she worked for three years on the manufacturing side of the fashion business and three as a buyer.

Her fascination with fashion began as a 16-year-old when she got a summer job in production for an accessories importer in Montreal.

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