

A FAMILY AFFAIR

By Grete Simkutė

When they became the exclusive distributor of UASHMAMA in the Benelux in 2012, Marion Wold and Annelot Lems had no idea what was ahead of them. Now, five strenuous yet highly rewarding years later, their company Moes & Griet is thriving beyond expectations. With plenty of store-collabs, interior designs and magazine features under their belt, this mother-daughter duo are spreading their love for this Italian “washable paper”-brand in all imaginable ways. Dwelling on their past successes is not a part of Moes & Griet’ DNA, though, as they are convinced that the best is yet to come.

Ever since she can remember, they share a passion for all things related to decorating, says Annelot about her bond with her mother Marion. “We both are visually oriented and have a strong sense for what we like in terms of aesthetics. We redecorated every room in the house we used to live in at least every few months, if not more often”, Annelot laughs. Taking this shared interest in interior design to a professional level seemed like a whimsical fantasy at that time, something they would jokingly discuss over a cup of tea and one that would always end with the same words: “One day, right?”. That ‘one day’ eventually came in the spring of 2012 during a holiday in Lucca, one of the historic hill towns of Tuscany. One afternoon, strolling through the tiny streets of the city center, Annelot and Marion bumped into the unique washable paper bags of UASHMAMA at a cute boutique named Le Sorelle. It was love at first sight. Annelot: “The versatility of the products, as well as their aesthetic appeal, just struck a chord with us. Right there and then we knew that we had to share this brand with as many people as we could.”

And so they did. ‘Moes’ and ‘Griet’ (their nicknames) became the first exclusive distributors of UASHMAMA in Europe. Not long after their kick-off, they received a phone call from Douwe Egberts, one of the most prominent Dutch coffee brands. The brand deemed the reusable and sturdy paper bags as ideal for presenting coffee beans. Luxury department store De Bijenkorf swiftly followed and a success story was born. Today, Moes & Griet collaborate with an impressive amount of 200 clients: from magazines to restaurants, from interior design agencies to small boutiques.

“This variety of retail settings shows the incredibly adaptable nature of the brand, says Annelot. When on the look-out for new stores to work with, the mother and daughter have a number of criteria in mind: service-mindedness, an understanding of UASHMAMA’s story, quality, loyalty. “We’re very happy to collaborate with, amongst others, The Daily Poetry, a small store that focuses on green living and shows how you can use the paper bags as plant accessories. Loft is another example: it’s a little department store that sells beautiful and comfy interior and fashion items. UASHMAMA’s products obviously belong there, too. And then there is Stek, a cosy concept store that has remained incredibly loyal to us throughout the past years.” It is not an exception that the retailers they work with, become friends sooner or later. Annelot: “Christine, the owner of Heerlijk Thuis, was one of our first clients and now she’s a good companion. We’re incredibly proud and happy to be able to collaborate with such great, supportive people and gorgeous stores.”

Believe it or not, but even after five years, Annelot and Marion’s love for UASHMAMA has not worn off a single bit. Much of that has to do with their regard for the Marconi family. “When you look at the products, you can see that they are made with the greatest love and attention for details. Marco, the father, combines his knowledge of an ancient craft with modern techniques and a sustainable philosophy. This results in high-quality, responsible products with a modern feel”, says Annelot. The fact that both UASHMAMA and Moes & Griet are family-owned businesses, explains the special bond that the two companies have. Their closeness, both on a professional as on the private level, is something that Annelot and Marion cherish very much. The Dutch duo regularly finds themselves in the Italian headquarters to inspire and to be inspired, after which they naturally join the abundant dinner-table at ‘la mamma’s’ warm household. “From weddings to business successes: our families have shared beautiful moments together and it is fair to say that we have all grown professionally and personally from this exchange”, Annelot shares. She regards the other distributors, 8 in total worldwide, equally as friends: “We like to jokingly call ourselves the UASHMAMA-family – it really feels like that!”

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Although working with a relative has its ups and downs, as Annelot and Marion admit, in the long-term it is highly rewardable. Decisions are made quickly, frustrations are vented easily and the combination of two different generations results in a stable foundation for innovative ideas to flourish. “We have different talents, which naturally complement one another”, explains Annelot. She furthermore praises her small yet hard-working team: “The girls in the warehouse and Evelien, who is a jack of all trades and cannot be missed, are of huge value to us.” As such, this dynamic duo are not in the least fed up with working together – and their team. On the contrary: Moes & Griet plans to open its first UASHMAMA-brand store in Amsterdam this fall. “It is going to be a comfortable place where customers can physically experience the UASHMAMA-universe and be surprised by the growing collection of lifestyle and fashion products”. After all, as Annelot and Marion both know all too well, once you own a UASHMAMA paper bag, you will be inevitably coming back for more – finalmente ci siamo incontrati, finally we have met, as the Italians would say...

