

CITY COOL

Style, Culture and More



Soak It In

Elena Corsano brings her eco-conscious sandal business to South Florida.

BY CHRISTIE GALEANO

Businesses are flocking to South Florida, and it's not only because of the weather. The area's strong infrastructure and skilled workforce have lured companies from around the globe to our backyard. Florida is home to more than 15 Fortune 500 corporate headquarters and nearly 3,000 company headquarters. Miami also has 125 companies on the 2016 Inc. 5000 list, which ranks the country's fastest-growing private companies.

SOAK, a women's shoe company, is among those drawn to the area. Founded in 2016, SOAK manufactures its slide sandals in Maine and, while the company is headquartered in New York, it recently moved its social media and marketing office to South Florida. Heading the move is Elena Corsano, co-founder of SOAK and former fashion editor of *Elle* and *Town & Country*.

With help from business advisers Elaine Sugimura, former president and CEO of Hawaiians, and Kevin Frain, former chief financial officer and vice president of operations for BarnesandNoble.com, Corsano and business partner Michelle Yale created a shoe that is recyclable, eco-friendly and stylish enough to wear from a casual meeting to the pool.

"We designed the slides to be chic and elegant for women who are always on the go," says 43-year-old Corsano. "As women, our lives are complicated and stressful, so we created a versatile shoe that is stylish but also comfortable with the

necessary arch support."

After more than 20 years in the fashion industry, Corsano has seen it all. So in 2014, when Yale approached the magazine editor with a vision for a new shoe, Corsano was ready to create something unique: a bridge between the all-too-casual flip-flop and the always-uncomfortable heel.

The company aims to expand into a lifestyle brand à la Tory Burch in the future. For now, the slides are sold at luxury hotels, including Canyon Ranch and the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, as well as several South Florida stores.

South Florida offers the infrastructure, diverse labor market, culture and proximity to the Latin American market the company needs. (Plus, a warm climate perfect for wearing SOAK slides year-round is a notable perk.)

To complement its slides, SOAK next plans to dive into swimwear. After all, there are more than 150 apparel manufacturing companies in Miami-Dade and Broward County combined—another stellar incentive for SOAK's expansion into South Florida. The brand will eventually encompass everything that can get wet—from sandals and swimsuits to umbrellas and rain boots—and it will all be manufactured in the U.S.

"It's a global world now. Women don't have to go to New York or Paris to be fashionable," Corsano says. "Fort Lauderdale is becoming a microcosm of fashion with its own take on it."



Elena Corsano, co-founder of SOAK