

UBUNTU x Zazzle

The Making of *The Adventure Collection*



Humble Beginnings

Fifteen years ago, Zane Wilemon graduated college and bought a one-way ticket from Texas to Kenya. There, he met Jeremiah Kuria, a Kenyan minister from a small town outside Nairobi. The unlikely duo shared a common passion to create opportunities that empower the people of Maai Mahiu to help themselves. Together, they worked to launch a new model for sustainable development: Ubuntu.

“Ubuntu is a South African word that means ‘I am because we are,’ and it has been the core of our organization from the beginning. It is all about interconnectedness and meaningful relationships, and it’s the perfect word to unite our model for impact.”
—Zane Wilemon



Zane Wilemon and Jeremiah Kuria, co-founders of Ubuntu.



Ubuntu operates Cafe UBUNTU in Maai Mahiu. It has become a model for future development in the area.



Ubuntu operates a dairy exchange, supporting local dairy farmers.



Ubuntu provides training, employment and other services for the Ubuntu moms and their special-needs children.

Photo (left to right): Mike Ndung'u, Teresa Mugure, Peninah Wambui, Esther Muthoni, Teresiah Nyokabi, Beatrice Nduta, Mercy Njoki, Alice Njeri

UBUNTU meets Zazzle

Jeff Beaver
Co-Founder and Chief Product Officer

“Zane and I met eight years ago – his heartfelt charisma and unbridled belief in his organization’s mission were contagious. He told me about these moms in Kenya who all had children with various mental and physical disabilities. It was heartbreaking to hear that they were outcast from their communities due to spiritual tribal beliefs, and were struggling to survive and provide for their children. But perhaps more significantly, Zane affirmed that charity was not the answer. What these moms needed wasn’t money, handouts, or even pity.

What they really needed was opportunity. A chance to lift themselves and become independent on their own. He and his small team at the time were teaching them how to sew, and creating simple but beautiful products that they could then sell to the Western world. That was the moment I knew Zazzle could help! Our partnership was then forged to leverage Zazzle as a platform for the moms’ creations.

We are so incredibly grateful for this partnership with Ubuntu, and the opportunity to collaborate with these courageous moms, and their wonderful children.”

Photo: Zane Wilemon (left) and Jeff Beaver (right)

The Launch of Zazzle Heart

After Jeff’s first visit to Kenya in 2014, he returned to Zazzle with powerful transformation stories he had seen firsthand. By teaching these women to sew and sell simple, beautiful products, the Ubuntu team had empowered them to become entrepreneurs, transforming their lives from social outcasts to revered members of the community.

These skills change the womens’ ability to provide for themselves and their families; some were even able to purchase their own home. Most importantly, all were providing the required care and schooling for their kids with special needs.

“That trip was the adventure of a lifetime, but also a huge surprise. Probably due to typical African imagery portrayed in the media, I was prepared to exclusively experience sadness and despair, but was instead met with the most joyous, empowered and ambitious group of people I have ever met. The relentless positivity of the moms, the growth of their kids due to proper care, and the love pervading the Ubuntu organization is totally beyond words.”

This life affirming experience was the catalyst for the first Zazzle Heart collection – created in partnership with Ubuntu to provide a platform for change.

Photo: Emily Wairimu – Program Manager at UBUNTU Heal.

Zazzle Heart in Africa

In early 2016, to further the partnership, a larger Zazzle Heart team traveled to Kenya to create an entirely new collection. This time around, the goal was to take the products to a new level of quality with leathers and more sophisticated sewing techniques, all centered around the theme of “Adventure” and reflecting the vast landscape of the Rift Valley in Kenya.

The Zazzle Heart team trekked hundreds of miles across Africa, from meeting with suppliers of raw materials to collaborating with the leather workers to connecting with everyone involved in the Ubuntu organization. Especially in Maai Mahiu, the team was inspired by the dramatic impact that Ubuntu was creating in the community. In addition to experiencing the many vibrant cultures on the journey, the team had lots to accomplish — from iterating and detailing the specifications of every cut of leather, to innovating a branded mark containing Maasai beadwork, which hails from an incredibly remote part of Kenya where the Maasai women bead under acacia trees as a small community.

This journey fundamentally altered the course of the collection and resulted in a level of quality and uniqueness that the world has never seen.



The Zazzle Heart team traveled to the Rift Valley in Kenya to co-develop The Adventure Collection with Ubuntu and the Maasai people of Kenya.



The Adventure Collection features a beaded mark on the exterior, which is handmade by the Maasai and helps support their villages.



Jackline Sinjore, one of the Maasai tribeswomen, explains the importance of beadwork in the Maasai culture. For the women, it is their livelihood.



The Ubuntu Moms complete the finished fabric products in The Adventure Collection (Canvas Tote and Canvas Journal) — and most importantly, they love what they do.



Julia Mweru Mbute is heads down when she works. These women take pride in their work and are proud of their final products.

Developing *The Adventure Collection*

The Adventure Collection is inspired by the vast expanse of the Great Rift Valley in Kenya. Every product detail reflects the land in which it was made and the people who made it. The light tan leathers reflect the scorched earth, the green canvas evokes the adventure of safari, and the angular stitches emulate the “rifts” of the intra-continental ridge system that spans Kenya from north to south. Finally, the beaded mark signifies the Maasai who are sprinkled across the region, and whose colorful adornments highlight the landscape. The beauty of the region is beyond words, and we went to great lengths to ensure the products do it justice.



The Adventure Collection was developed with measurements down to a fraction of a millimeter. In this photo, Bobby Beaver (Zazzle Co-founder), makes adjustments to the dimensions of the Ubuntu Made iPhone sleeve.



Each leather product is hand-cut and hand-sewn by a team of skilled artisans in Kenya.



Zazzle and Ubuntu spent months developing and iterating upon The Adventure Collection to ensure the highest level of quality in every element of production.

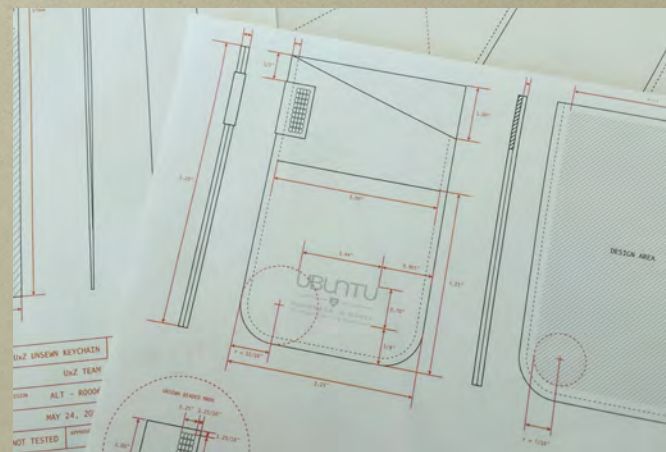


Anthony was able to expand his leather business and move into an entirely new, larger workspace as a result of this project. Here, he examines the leather travel pouch, which is embellished using Zazzle's new laser etching technology.

Crossing the Finish Line

Excellence is in the details. The final months in our co-creation process came down to the nuances that take a product from *good* to *great*. Rough samples evolved into deliberate product details to combine both beauty and everyday use. Did the travel pouch dimensions allow room for the most popular tablets? Was the width of the leather tote strap comfortable after many days of adventurous travel? Elevated components were sourced to achieve the ultimate aesthetic appeal, with quality materials to withstand wear and tear. We even approximated some of the “rift” stitch angles (roughly **36 degrees**) to the longitude of Maai Mahiu, Kenya on the globe (1° S, **36° E**); along with the number of beads (4 x 9 = **36**) in the branded mark. And finally, the 1” drops in the products signify Ubuntu’s “inch wide, mile deep” philosophy of fully committing to a single community. Suffice it to say, there has been a healthy obsession toward every last detail of the collection.

Beyond any details, however, the collection exemplifies the possibility of collaboration and the power of doing something from the **heart**.



From sketches and rough samples to deliberate product specs, every item is designed with the end use in mind.



A glimpse at the final zipper selection for the Leather Travel Pouch – the 8” YKK chain and donut slider in an antique brass finish.



The beads were a complicated, yet essential feature, in order to incorporate and honor the Maasai. The blue and orange beads represent warmth and friendship.



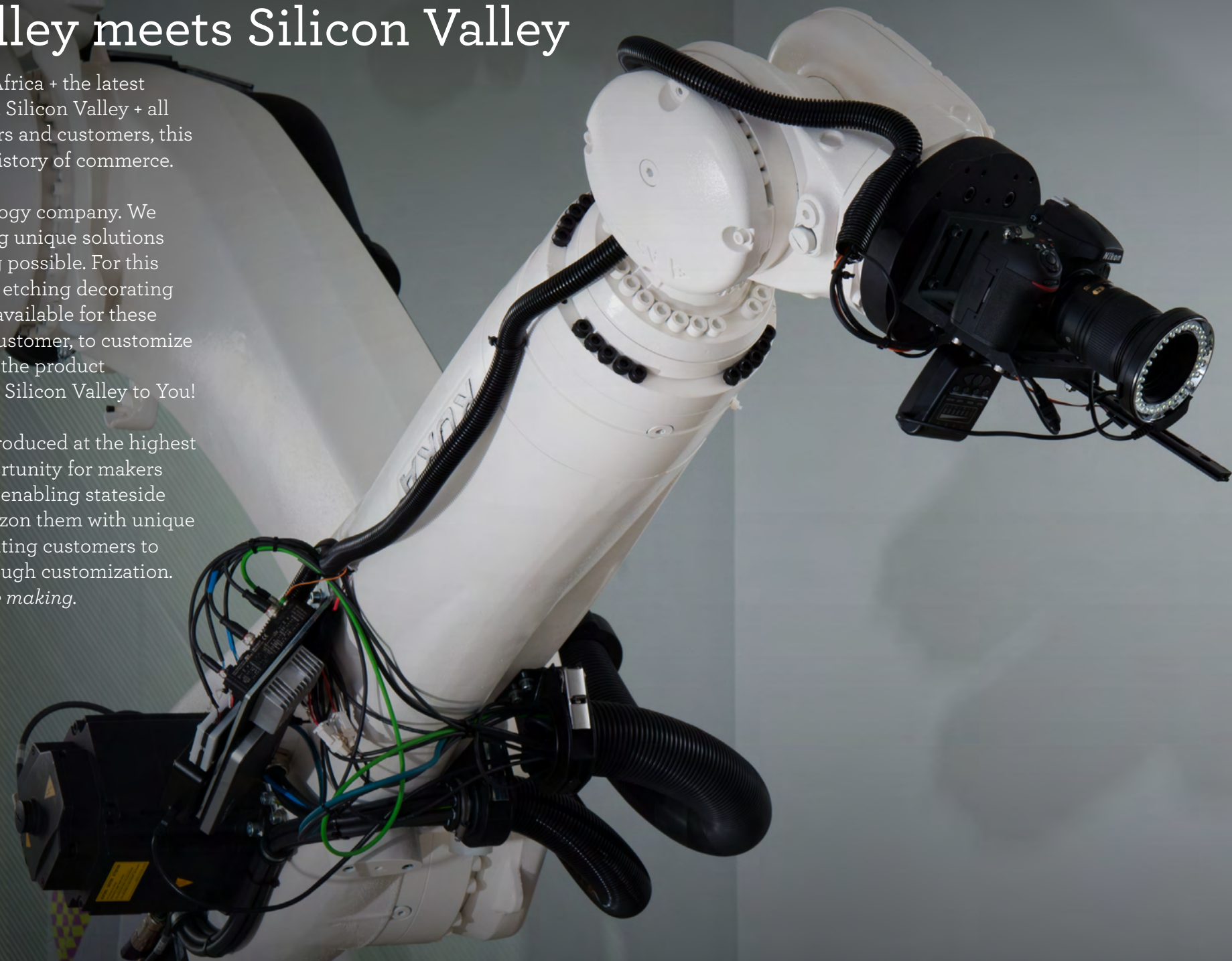
Countless iteration – around the clock and over many months – resulted in a final collection that surpassed everybody’s original expectations.

Making Commerce History: The Rift Valley meets Silicon Valley

From handmade products in Africa + the latest customization technologies in Silicon Valley + all fully customizable by designers and customers, this collaboration is a first in the history of commerce.

Ultimately, Zazzle is a technology company. We pride ourselves on engineering unique solutions to make customizing anything possible. For this collection, we invented a laser etching decorating process that is currently only available for these products. It enables you, the customer, to customize and therefore also be a part of the product collaboration — from Africa to Silicon Valley to You!

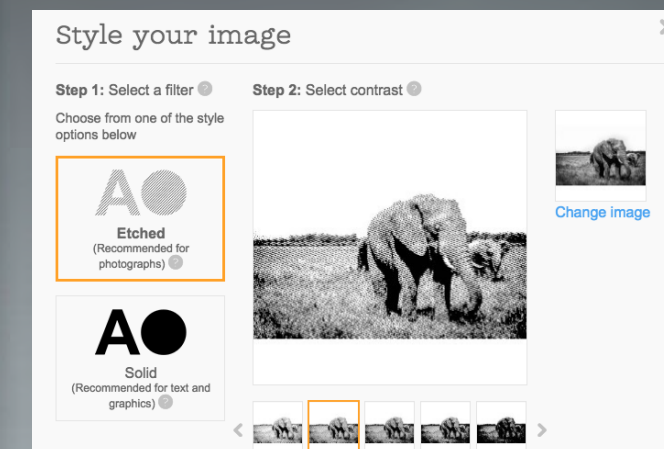
Not only are these products produced at the highest quality, they are creating opportunity for makers on the other side of the world, enabling stateside artists and designers to emblazon them with unique artworks and content, and inviting customers to make their personal mark through customization. This is truly a *revolution in the making*.



Zazzle's visualization robot, Talus, automates the photography process which enables the ultimate in precision for real-time visualization of artwork and customization online.



Our laser embellishment and post-sew process is the first of its kind for high-end leather fashion. When we say "make it your own," we mean it.



Our unique halftoning tool allows anyone to upload a photo and instantly generate a beautiful piece of artwork which is suitable for laser embellishment on The Adventure Collection's leather goods.



One-of-a-kind designs meet first-of-its-kind technology. Zazzle's cutting-edge laser etching process allows for a truly unique customization process.

Next Step: Designers & You!

Designers: Zazzle isn't your typical e-commerce site — we're a platform and ecosystem of creative individuals. Our community of more than 600,000 designers is a core part of that ecosystem. Designers are invited to create designs for *The Adventure Collection* and, if accepted, they will earn a royalty on every product sold containing their artwork.

YOU: You are the final — and arguably the most important — step in this adventure. You have a chance to make your own personal mark on any product from the collection, thereby participating in a collaboration that has spanned the globe. When you purchase a product from *The Adventure Collection*, you are helping to provide sustainable opportunity and change lives in Kenya.

Our hope for this collection is that everybody who receives a product feels the same inspiration and emotion that we did in creating it — the connection to wonderful people in Kenya who crafted these products by hand with love.

The Adventure Collection is a celebration of the human spirit. We invite you to be a part of the adventure with us! Find out more by visiting zazzle.com/heart



