

THE *bag* GUIDE

SPECIAL EDITION



SECRETS *of handbag shopping*



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7 Secrets of Handbag Shopping

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START BY SHOPPING THE STAPLES – *It is essential to have a handbag in your collection to suit every purpose and occasion in your day to day.*



“

Preparation is key so that when all else fails, you can wear black and accessorize!”
– Mel Boteri





The 'Boteri' structured tote in classic black.

Designed to beautifully stow your day-to-dinner necessities, a

STRUCTURED TOTE

has sleek lines to instantly make you look put together. Grab-and-go for last minute errands, or wear it against a crisp suit to truly dress to impress through a high-pressure meeting. Invest in classic, go-with-everything black to start, but then opt for sophisticated pops of color.



Classic off-white, or natural bright hues such as yellow, green and royal blue in high quality leathers and materials will display your newfound handbag smarts!

The 'Boteri' structured tote shown here in golden yellow, emerald green, royal blue, and off-white.

SECRET 1: *Build A Foundation* THE EVERYDAY CARRYALL

One of the most classic of handbag silhouettes, a large hobo exemplifies the **EVERYDAY CARRYALL**.

Named after the wandering workers of the 19th century who had to lug all of their essentials in one sack, modern women with a never-ending list of TO-DOs can more than understand the importance of a spacious carryall. It would be wise to invest in a trans-seasonal style such as this python printed hobo in a neutral shade, but the most important thing is to select a 24/7 piece spacious enough for your day-to-day necessities – whatever that may be – which can also be comfortably thrown over your shoulder for a hands-free solution.



Mel Boteri 'Mel' hobo in bronze, python-effect leather.





Mel Boteri black & white 'Lauren' clutch.

To get the most use of a compact **CLUTCH**, pick a classic piece that will transform with you from...

1 THE OFFICE

You'll be ready for work when you pair this black and white clutch with a flowing shirt and fitted pencil skirt. Basic pumps and minimal jewelry will finish off your sleek office attire.

2 BRUNCH

Start the conversation with this tasseled bag tucked under your arm. Balance the strong contrast with a girly-print dress and go-anywhere strappy flats. Cheers!

3 DATE NIGHT

ID, credit card, cell, key and lip gloss...this is all you will need along with this fab purse, so you can focus on your date instead of fidgeting to find your must-haves.



The Statement Piece

Mel Boteri Red patent 'Cale' shoulder bag.

On days when you feel on top of the world, it is essential to have a bag on hand to showcase your surge of confidence. You never know when the impulse may hit, so the **STATEMENT PIECE** should have plenty of room for day yet be elegant enough for evening...**BUT** your unique personality and style should *always* prevail over practicality. The perfect 24-hour piece, don't be surprised when people stop to ask, **“Where did you get that bag!?”**

When a hectic day leaves you no choice but to be functional with your style, a hands-free, optional

CROSS - BODY

will suffice. Think clean lines, minimal fuss with a lack of flashy logos to ensure the focus is on your productivity. You will be the envy of others as you effortlessly maneuver from office, to gym, to carpool then dinner with clients without the faintest glimmer of sweat or stress, yet the ultimate statement of style.



Sara Hanna Photography

Mel Boteri 'Blake' Satchel.

LIFE IS A JOURNEY...

Whether driving for a weekend getaway or packing for a month-long excursion from New York to London to Paris, there are certain essentials you can't leave behind.



Croc-Embossed 'Cynthia' Tote.

Fortunately with “the bigger the better” mentality in the world of handbags, you don't have to sacrifice fashion for function when choosing a **TRAVEL BAG**. Just be sure to pick one representative of YOU to share with the world your unique personality and style.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHEfinds.com.

THE FRONT ROW

MICHELLE MADHOK

CEO and Founder of @SHEfinds and author of **WEAR THIS NOW**, Michelle is a widely regarded stylist and expert in online shopping. She makes it easy for busy women to shop and look stylish for every season, every occasion, and every day of the year.

Q:

What has been your all time favorite handbag purchase and why?



Marc Jacobs Red 'Stella' Bag

A:

I bought my first luxury handbag when I moved to NYC in 1995 for my first job at CBS Television. It was a Red Marc Jacobs Stella Tote. I remember feeling so cool with it - like I had made it in the big city. In other cities people drive cars for status - in NYC we carry luxury handbags.

FOLLOW MICHELLE



SECRET 2: *Shop Your Body*

Think of your handbag as a way to complement not only your outfit, but your physical assets as well.

.....



ATHLETIC



apple



Hourglass



Pear



SECRET 2: *Shop Your Body* SHOULDER DROP

The *Shoulder Drop* measures the distance between the top of the handbag at its center to the peak of the handles or straps - also called the *Handle Drop* or *Accessory Strap Drop*. To wear your handbag comfortably on the shoulder, look for handbags with a Shoulder Drop of about 7" (17.75cm).

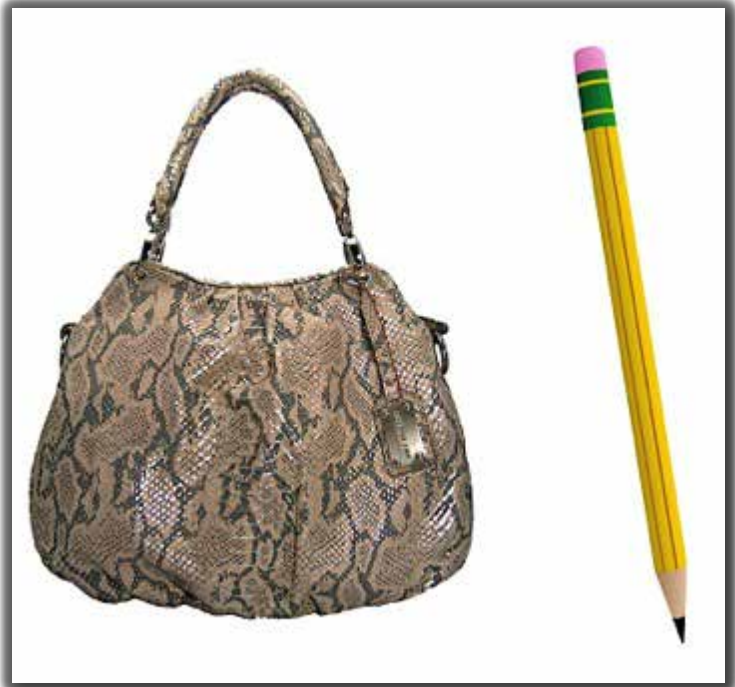


The next time you are handbag shopping, think about the part of your body you are most proud of and want to flaunt! Most women may not realize *that wherever the bottom of your handbag hits the body will be the area that is emphasized.*

Handbags that hang high on the shoulder can accentuate your busts, while longer handbags draw the eye to the hip area. A bag that hits at the mid-torso complements most women's bodies.

SECRET 2: *Shop Your Body* HANDBAG SHAPE

When choosing a Handbag Shape, choose a style that is **OPPOSITE** of your body type.



Rule of Thumb: The rounder your figure, the more structured your bag should be.

SECRET 2: *Shop Your Body* SIZE MATTERS



SMALL

Typically 6-12" in width and can hold a phone, keys, small wallet and a lip-gloss or two. Short and petite women appear taller with small handbags.



MID-SIZE

Roughly 12-14" wide and makes for a great everyday bag, holding the same small bag pieces PLUS a full cosmetics case and iPad for those long workdays. As an average sized bag, this will complement most women.



LARGE

About 14-16" wide and when shaped properly will hold a laptop, water bottle, and back-up flats. This is the ideal size for taller women.



EXTRA-LARGE

16"+ in width making for the perfect carry-on to hold your magazines, laptop and light scarf. This oversized option is best for tall women, yet universally flattering for travel.

“

The size of your handbag should ALWAYS be in proportion to your figure.”



KNOW YOUR SKINS

With so many choices and confusing leather lingo, what type of skins should you be looking for when handbag shopping?



THE BASICS



ANILINE – The most natural looking finish, this leather maintains the natural beauty of the original animal’s skin. Pores, creases and scars may be visible, although most Aniline leathers are made of the best quality, most flawless, sturdy and expensive skins.

Two ways to test for Aniline:

1. Lightly scratch surface. If it lightens, it is Aniline.
2. Lightly rub water into the leather. It should darken on contact, but then dry invisibly.

PIGMENTED – This leather has an opaque coating of color, and is often times made of corrected leather. Imperfections are sanded off, and an artificial grain is impressed into the skin. Embossed leather is a less expensive, yet durable alternative.

Two ways to test for Pigmented:

1. Lightly scratch surface. If the color remains the same, it is Pigmented.
2. Lightly apply liquid cleaner to leather. The liquid should stay on top of the leather and not darken in color.



NUBUCK Aniline dyed leather that has been abraded on the grain (outside) surface to give it a velvety-like look and feel. Often confused for suede, which is made from the flesh side of the leather and has a more distinctive nap (shaginess).

Two ways to test for Nubuck:

1. Lightly run your finger across surface. You should see traces of your finger’s path.
2. Lightly rub water into the leather. It should darken, and dry to a slightly darker shade.

Embossed vs. Exotic

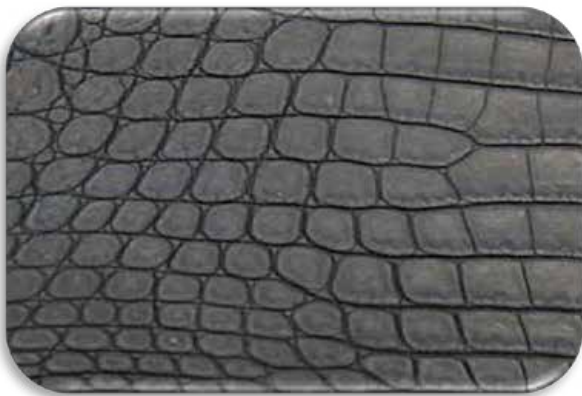


EMBOSSSED LEATHER

Cowhide that has been stamped to give it the appearance of an exotic skin such as croc, alligator, snake or ostrich. When properly processed and tanned, it is often very difficult to tell the difference between embossed and genuine exotic hides. The most obvious differentiator is the lower price point. Look for words such as “Embossed,” “Faux,” and “Effect” in the brand’s description to identify an embossed leather bag.

CAIMAN LEATHER

The lowest quality of the various crocodilian leathers, and therefore usually priced the lowest within the Exotic leather goods category. You will notice a substantial difference in the touch, as Caiman leathers are very stiff and rigid. Due to its tougher nature, the color dye on Caiman leather is less homogeneous and a bit blotchy. The scales are square in shape and much rougher overall in comparison to Crocodile and Alligator.

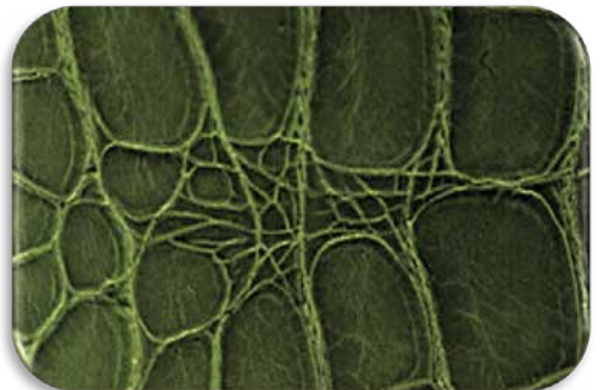


CROCODILE LEATHER

The most distinguishing feature of crocodile leather is the distinctive pore found on each scale. The belly scales of crocodile are also more regular with a gradual transition from the medium-sized scales, which slowly become smaller and more round. Genuine Crocodile leather is superior in quality to Caiman leather and therefore demands a higher price.

ALLIGATOR LEATHER

Generally considered the most luxurious of the various reptile leathers due to its durability and pliability. As the only exotic reptile to have an umbilical scar, this is the most easily identifiable feature of the hide. The belly scales of the alligator are in fact a bit less regular with a noticeable transition from the larger, more square scales to the smaller, more round scales. Alligator typically commands the highest retail price.





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What you see may not always be what you get.

Delocalize: (dē-lō'kə-līz') *verb*

To remove from local influences, delocalization - *noun*

- In the last decade or so, many of the most sought after European designers have shifted their production away from their home country origins to areas with lower labor costs including China and other parts of Asia.
- Through lax labeling requirements, brands are able to produce the majority of their products overseas, “finish” the item in Italy, and then label it as “Made in Italy.”
- To please the insatiable desire from consumers to have a “European-Made” product, many factories throughout Europe are now run by Chinese immigrants. Often times undocumented and exploited, these workers put true European factories in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal at risk of going out of business.
- China has proven they can make some of the most beautiful handbags on the market. The question is are you willing to be misled and pay a premium on a product no longer made by hand with love and artisanal craftsmanship, but on an assembly line through questionable labor and environmental standards?





PHOTO COURTESY OF VINCENT BASTIEN.

THE FRONT ROW

VINCENT BASTIEN

Former CEO of top luxury fashion house Louis Vuitton, Vincent is now professor of Marketing at HEC School of Management in Paris. Co-Author of “The Luxury Strategy,” this luxury expert also serves as a consultant to executives on the rules of marketing to grow brands profitably.

Q:

In your book, ‘The Luxury Strategy,’ you mention that luxury brands should NOT relocate their factories. Nonetheless, more and more luxury labels are moving their production to China or other Asian countries while marking their goods as ‘Made in Italy’ or ‘Made in France’ by finishing a small portion of assembly in these countries. Do you find this to be misleading advertising, or a necessary evolution of the luxury strategy?

A:

If you want to apply the luxury strategy, you must not relocate your factories for cost reasons. If you have to relocate part of it for other reasons (for instance, raw material or specific know-how availability - like Hermès does in Africa for some belts), you must be transparent and not mislead the customer with a ‘made in France’ or ‘made in Italy’ tag on those products. When you say that ‘luxury labels’ are moving their production in China, I am wondering what do you mean by ‘luxury’... Those ‘labels’ are no longer luxury; they just pretend to be ‘luxury’, which makes a big difference!



"Elegance is when the inside is as beautiful as the outside." – Coco Chanel

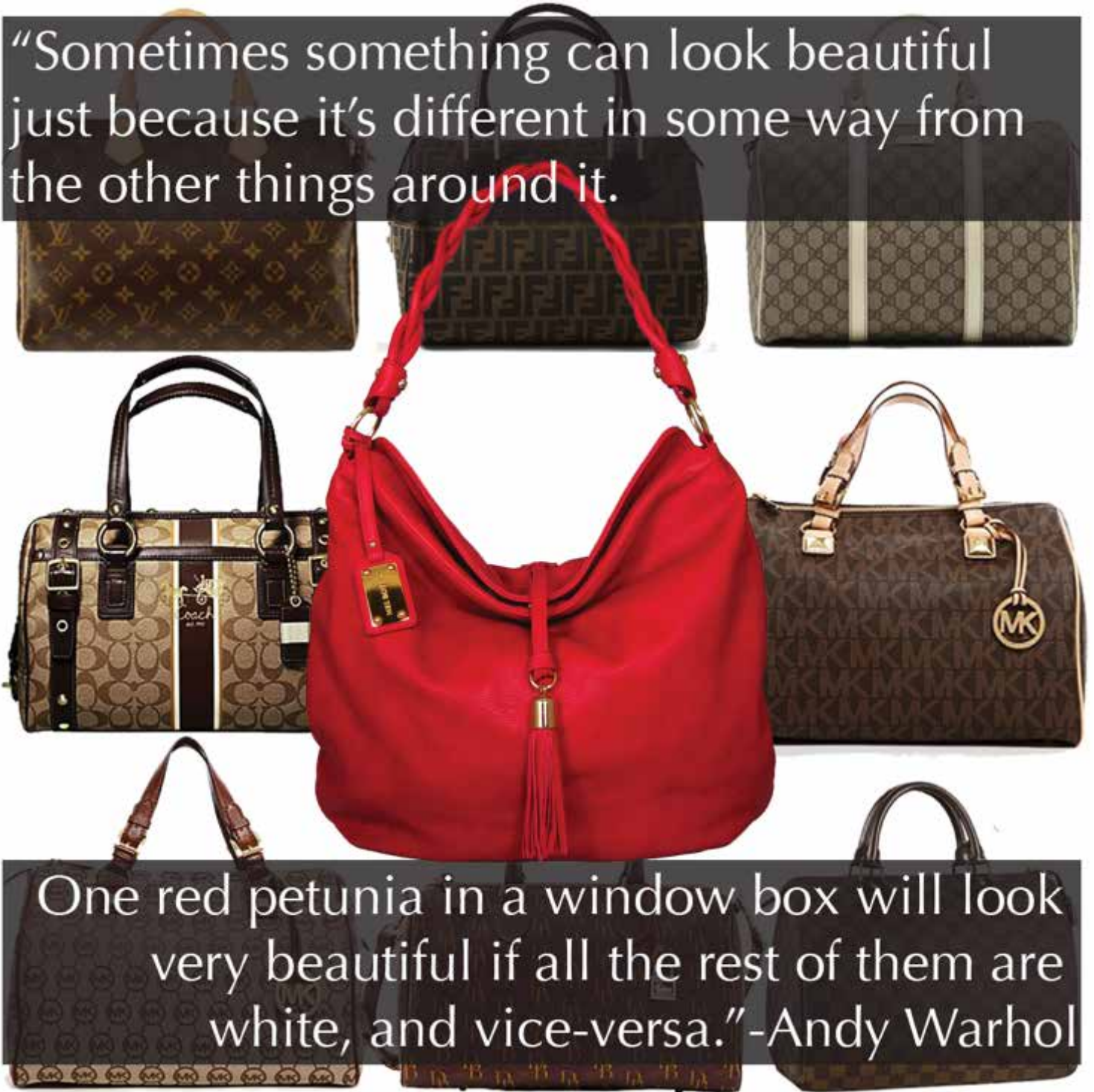
SECRET 5: *Beauty From The Inside Out* IT'S THE INSIDE THAT COUNTS



! How many times have you gone inside your handbag to search for your ringing phone, and when you finally do you've missed the call!?!? Organization is key in making your life a bit easier, and that includes your handbag. Keep this in mind when shopping, and be sure to select a bag with plenty of compartments, including zippered pockets for items that need to be secured and slip pockets that need to be easily accessible.

Scenario two has you at a business event where you have just bumped into a major power player in your industry!! She is rushing out the door, so you quickly introduce yourself as you open your bag to hand her a business card. You look down, and see nothing...literally!! Your bag has managed to turn into a black hole where you can't decipher Chanel Rouge lipstick from your left over snack. You look back up, and she's gone, nowhere to be found. The secret here is always shop for handbags with a bright-colored interior. White may be too stark (and will get messy quite quickly) so look for fun prints or a saturated version of your favorite shade. No more opportunities lost!!

“Sometimes something can look beautiful just because it’s different in some way from the other things around it.



One red petunia in a window box will look very beautiful if all the rest of them are white, and vice-versa.” -Andy Warhol

Handbag Brands Left to Right:

Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Gucci
Coach, Mel Boteri, Michael Kors
Michael Kors, Dooney & Bourke, Louis Vuitton



As the most basic form in making products feel individual and special, **PERSONALIZATION** has become quite prevalent in most industries. Think back to your grade school days with printed class t-shirts and team uniforms, or the sports trophy you won, engraved

to forever commemorate that big win. More recently, think of the monogrammed gifts you give or receive for weddings and baby showers. Personalization can turn an otherwise commonplace item into something special and unique, which has made this a popular form of gift giving. With handbags, consider monogramming your favorite, canvas beach tote. For pricier items such as leather clutches or carryalls, engraving a message or initials on an interior plate adds a nice personal touch.

SECRET 6: *Be Spoken For* CUSTOMIZATION

CUSTOMIZATION is a growing trend, which has almost come to be expected. Just think of your Starbucks order this morning. Your favorite double-tall, nonfat, no whip, extra hot caramel macchiato is not on the menu, but they will make it for you without blinking an eye!!

In the world of fashion, and handbags specifically, most companies offer some form of customization. While the majority of companies do so by offering a multitude of color options with each new season, the true customizers have a made-to-order business model and let YOU pick and choose the colors and finishes before the bag is ever made.

Just like the morning cup of joe, which is made to suit your unique day ahead, a custom handbag is created to define your personal look and style.

“

When you don't dress like everyone else, you don't have to think like everyone else.” —

Iris Apfel

HANDBAG CUSTOMIZATION: The same, basic silhouette is offered to all, but you select your leather color, texture and hardware finish. Your custom bag is then made-to-order!



IT ALL STARTS WITH A SKETCH

The ultimate experience, and the cream of the crop in creating something truly special and one-of-a-kind can only be found through **BESPOKE** services. While the word itself tends to get thrown around by marketers trying to distinguish themselves from the competition, true purveyors of bespoke products offer something exceptional. The term dates back to a time when women would go into a dress shop, flip through a book of illustrations, and sort through yards of the finest fabrics. The entire dress would “be spoken for” by the client who would dictate the cut, dimensions and final details while the tailor would be sure to use only the highest quality materials and workmanship. Today, bespoke services are most commonly seen in men’s and women’s tailored suits. However, the trendsetting man or woman with discerning taste seeks out bespoke items beyond the everyday business suit, and can enjoy the luxury of fully customized handbags, jewelry, perfume, and even wines. It is an emotional, and self-reflective process most suited for the independent and confident individual who wants to display these qualities to the world.



THE FRONT ROW

LENKA GOURDIE

CEO of the UK's only search engine dedicated to handbags, Lenka and the @BagServant team help you shop for the perfect handbag to suit any unique style, personality, occasion, and budget.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BAG SERVANT.

Q:

On the Bag Servant site, you have an option to shop by personality type. Why is it important to purchase bags that are a true extension of your unique personality and style, versus the 'IT' bag of the moment that everyone in your circle seems to be wearing?

A:

Fashion is a way of presenting yourself to the world, and with shoes and handbags specifically you can really use them to express who you are and your personality. If you want to be remembered, and create a personal brand for yourself it is important to try new things. Know who you are, make a statement, and show your status by matching your handbag to your *own* personality and style. Once you do, your handbag will become like a close friend that you will want to nurture, take care of, and love!

FOLLOW LENKA



When it comes down to the moment of purchase, the handbag you take home should engage you on an emotional level...much like love at first sight!

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SECRET 7: *Love At First Sight* SOUL MATES



If you are like most women, you probably have a closet with racks and shelves stocked full of clothes, yet you tend to be drawn to and wear the same few key pieces day in and day out. Your favorite power suit, or most flattering LBD tend to make the cut quite often, while those trendy floral pants still have their tags on.

The best way to ensure you'll actually wear what's in your closet is to only buy items that make you feel like a million bucks!! Just because it's on sale, it fits, or everyone else seems to be buying it doesn't necessarily mean it should become part of your repertoire. The same goes for your accessories and handbags. If it doesn't make your heart flutter, wait until you find something that does. With a soul mate, you have an immediate connection the moment you lay eyes on each other. It may take time and patience, but will be well worth the wait. There's no better feeling than walking out the door in head-to-toe fashion that naturally exudes your beauty and confidence.



TRUE LOVE

What moves you, inspires you, and brings a natural smile to your face? These things, people, places and memories are unique to **YOU**. The same goes for fashion. It is yours and yours alone to explore and discover. Follow your heart (and those butterflies in your stomach) and dare to show the world **YOUR** unique look and style!

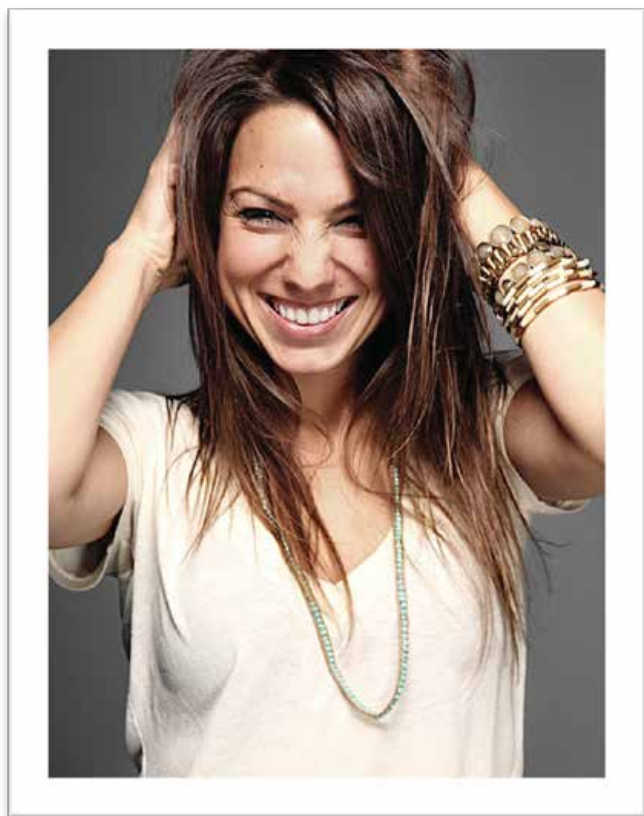


PHOTO COURTESY OF SARAH BOYD.

THE FRONT ROW

SARAH BOYD

Founder of [@SimplyStylistXO](#), [@SarahPBoyd](#) has created a unique way to connect consumers with top-tier designers, stylists and tastemakers in the fashion industry through bicoastal networking events. Expanding her reach to create a niche in PR and talent management, Forbes recently named her a 'Female Founder to Watch.'

Q: What has been your all time favorite handbag purchase and why?

A: My favorite handbag is the one I'm currently living in. It's a collaboration between Parisian line, Lancaster Paris, and model Elsa Hosk. I have it in the peach color and I've never gotten more compliments on a bag! It goes with everything and is the perfect size to fit all my must-haves.



Lancaster 'Elsa Hosk' Bag

FOLLOW SARAH





Melanie Mueller is Founder and Creative Director of Mel Boteri, a company specializing in both custom and bespoke accessories. Frustrated by a mass-produced, “one-size-fits-all” marketplace, Melanie was determined to create a unique and more personalized shopping experience for individuals and retailers alike. Mel Boteri was therefore fashioned to create one-of-a-kind, luxury accessories...the finishing touches that define your personal look and lifestyle.

As a graduate student, Melanie had the opportunity to work with the Marketing & Business Development group for Zac Posen, a world-renowned designer based in New York City. This solidified Melanie’s decision to make an impact in the fashion industry, and Mel Boteri officially launched in the fall of 2009. Mel Boteri has since partnered with fellow luxury brands such as Mercedes-Benz and Hideoki Bespoke to create both co-branded and private label accessories for a discerning and selective clientele.

Through her experience developing a luxury brand with handbags as the core product, Melanie came to discover these “7 Secrets of Handbag Shopping.” This will hopefully be the first of many *Bag Guides* giving an inside look on the fabulous world of handbags.

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