



HANDBAGS

A Love Story

MONICA BOTKIER

LEGENDARY DESIGNS FROM
AZZEDINE ALAÏA TO YVES SAINT LAURENT

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INTRODUCTION

I remember the first time I fell in love . . . with a bag. It was locked away inside a glass tower at Bergdorf Goodman on the main floor. I strolled through, as I usually do every time the seasons and the collections change, and noticed this buttery soft brown hobo with impeccable stitching, a confident slouch, and the most alluring antique-like horn handle attached by simple rings on each side. It was everything I wanted to be: sophisticated, well traveled, exotic. That bag represented all my dreams. I had to have it. The bag was Yves Saint Laurent's Mombasa, designed by the sexiest of designers, Tom Ford. I went to visit it every day for a week until I finally convinced myself that buying it was more important than paying the rent.

Once I was the proud owner of my first designer bag, I began to notice how many other women had one. I also started to see bags for their color, size, condition, and brand. Designer bags had become my addiction, and I was inducted into a secret society that came with its own silent language spoken between members in knowing nods and glances of approval—in the streets, on the subway, at restaurants.

Men have various trophies—cars, watches—and women have bags. It's true that bags are practical—they protect our belongings and carry us through the day—but they also reveal taste, power, and status. A gorgeous bag signals to other women what tribe we belong to. Handbags, whether pristine and pricey or worn with character, project who we are and, more often, who we want to be.

After my initial purchase, I wound up adding several more beauties to my stable. I was seduced and enticed by material, stitching, hardware, construction, and silhouette—even zipper teeth! The bags infused luxury into my daily routine, made my heart skip a beat every time I carried them. Often, a woman will catch my eye on the street because of her hair or her clothes or her beauty, but usually it's because of her handbag. "Where did she get it?" I wonder. Followed by: "I want it, I need it."

So, realizing that I had a problem—I couldn't afford to plunk down four figures for each bag I wanted—I decided to beat the system. As a fashion photographer who created her own portfolios, I had already begun experimenting with leathers and had a sizable collection of swatches. And in New York you can do anything if you are resourceful. So I designed my first bag, the Trigger, in 2003 and, using the Yellow Pages, found a local manufacturer to help make it.

Slouchy, with zipper accents and tasseled pulls, that bag embodied my downtown mood at the time. Priced at \$595, it became a knockout. The formula seems so simple



now, affordable luxury, but back then the handbag market was very clear-cut—mass on one side, pricey on the other, and nothing in the middle. Now “approachable luxury” is a term we hear all the time in fashion and never think about twice, but to this day women still come up to me to tell me that their gateway to designer bags was a Trigger.

As a handbag designer, I'm always asked about the secret to making a hit bag. If only it were that simple. For starters, timing and being able to gauge the direction of the fashion current are important. In 2000, when Nicolas Ghesquière set about designing his first bag, the Lariat, for Balenciaga, he looked at what was out there and realized “that all the bags were with logos and were stiff, very heavy and kind of structured,” according to *Women's Wear Daily* in 2005. “We thought, ‘Why don't we do a very soft, supple and light bag that is kind of friendly and recognizable without a logo?’” Proenza Schouler's Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez did the same for their PS1 satchel. “It was very much about an ‘It Bag.’” explained McCollough to *Women's Wear Daily* in

THIS PAGE:
Trigger bag,
Monica Botkier,
Spring 2005.

2013. “Aesthetically those bags were very much covered in hardware and buckles and logos, and we kind of wanted to do something that was the antithesis . . . something more stripped down and incognito, easy wearing.”

The celebrity factor is fashion's not-so-secret secret. Mary-Kate Olsen helped ignite Alexander Wang's Rocco, while the tales of Princess Diana and Lady Dior or Jane Birkin and the Hermès namesake have reached almost mythic status. The rise of tabloid culture, celebrity glossies, social media, blogs, and street-style photographers only amplifies the reach now. I'll confirm it for you here: designers do send the bags out early to editors and bold-faced names to add a little glamorous cachet early on.

Quality is a must, as is a distinguishing feature. Whether it's allover logos and decorative frippery you can spot a mile away, a quiet yet distinctive silhouette, or a particularly alluring leather, there has to be something recognizable, a calling card that announces, or even whispers, that you're part of a designer's inner circle.

There's a certain balance that hits the eye when a handbag is really well designed—it's no different than successful architecture or interior design. It captivates and draws you in. Of course, there's a certain mystery involved, too. “Trying to do an It Bag is like doing market research or studies,” Marc Jacobs told *W* in 2005. “You can try, but I think you just have to do your own thing. Ultimately, it's the women who decide whether it's ‘It’ or it's not.”

What matters is exclusivity and supply versus demand. It's simply human nature to want what you can't have. Brands will cap the number of bags they produce each season to avoid oversaturation and stoke the appetite. I remember being advised to retire the Trigger. There are waiting lists—some real, others manufactured—that stir up the urgency to buy. The Hermès wait list is legendary—up to six years, according to a 2015 *Fortune* report.

Handbags: A Love Story isn't a history of handbags—there are plenty of great reads out there that trace the lineage, dating back to the 1790s, when women began wearing gauzy Empire dresses and the drawstring purses they previously tied to their waist went

solo in the hands. This book is about the handbag as a modern phenomenon that exists in the swirl of desire, style, and aspiration as well as celebrity, marketing, and social-media cachet. Every bag featured here is a fashion and cultural *happening*, winnowed down from the past twenty-five or so years. But before eagle-eyed observers start quibbling about dates, the earlier styles, such as Chanel's 2.55 from the 1950s, made the cut because they're still wholly relevant and ever present.

Handbags focuses on a more modern time frame because that's the era that begat the It Bag—that must-have, most-wanted fashion creation that can instantly confer and telegraph a certain status and discriminating taste. Sure, covetable high-priced bags go back to the 1950s, when the Hermès Kelly became the Kelly and Coco Chanel added gilt straps to a quilted bag, and the 1970s, when logomania had its first wave—socialite Nan Kempner's horrified response, as she told *Women's Wear Daily* in 1973: "I had all my Vuitton painted solid brown in Paris. They nearly died." But it wasn't until the 1990s, the era of luxury conglomerates, that the handbag became this intoxicating *thing* that proliferated from city to city and the It Bag notion and name were cemented. The Fendi Baguette, the Prada backpack, and the Kate Spade tote gave way to the monogram madness of Gucci, Dior, and Vuitton, which led to the Balenciaga Lariat, the Chloé Paddington, and the posse of Roxannes, Alexas, Sofias, and Zoes from Mulberry and Marc Jacobs. Between 2002 and 2007 handbag sales surged 139 percent. And that's what's *on* the record—the It Bag is a boon for counterfeiters. Meanwhile, some brands poked fun: Dooney & Bourke named its candy-colored logo bag—the one Vuitton took to court—the It Bag, while Spade, in collaboration with artist Hugo Guinness, created a canvas tote in 2006 with the word "it" scrawled in the corner.

It Bags eventually fell out of favor when "it" became a bit of a dirty word. Part of being It is the inevitable countdown to *not* being It, and countless designers began wordsmithing their way around, tossing out It for the PR-friendly "iconic" and other

romanced alternatives. "I think the It Bag is the kiss of death," observed Cameron Silver, founder of the vintage store Decades, in *Harper's Bazaar* in 2008.

Yet after every article that rang the death knell for the It Bag—"Much like the popular pretty girl who always dies first in a horror film, the It Bag was a victim of its own ambition," reported the *Los Angeles Times* in 2008—another would pop up, introducing a new trend of discreet, restrained, relatively hardware- and logo-free bags that did the bumping off. And isn't that really just the same thing? As Tom Ford noted of Bottega Veneta in *The New Yorker* in 2011, "By not doing the It Bag, you do the It Bag."

The idea of It will always be there in some form or another. But nowadays, as handbags become an ever-increasing and ever-essential element of the fashion industry and as women become more educated about what's out there, there's a new freedom of choice. Anything goes, really. With the exception of a few houses, women aren't as brand-loyal anymore. You can have your allover embellishment and indulge your inner minimalist, too—all with a swap of a handbag. It's about individuality and embracing a woman's modern, multifaceted life and personality.

Handbags: A Love Story celebrates all those bags that have had the power to quicken our pulse and give us a pang of desire or jealousy when we ran our hands over the leather or slipped our fingers between the handles. Perhaps, for you, it wasn't the Mombasa but Céline's coolly minimal Trapeze. Or Valentino's Rockstud. Or one of Alexander McQueen's edgy and often bejeweled skull minaudières. Chances are, if you're reading this, you're thinking back to more than one—a 2016 report noted that women between eighteen and forty-five own an average of thirteen different bags from seven different brands.

Flip the page. It's your turn to decide. I've dug through research, polled industry friends, and interviewed experts to compile an illustrated anthology of the most influential and compelling handbags. I hope you fall in love like I did and perhaps even rediscover lost loves or learn something new about an old favorite.



Phoebe Philo for Céline

BOX, 2010

LUGGAGE, 2010

CABAS, 2010

TRAPEZE, 2013

In 2006 Phoebe Philo was a design star when she decided to leave Chloé to focus on her family life. A favorite of editors, retailers, and handbag lovers, she had created the popular Paddington bag. After a three-year break, she decided to return to work in 2009, when she became the creative director of Céline. She soon put to rest any doubts about whether she still had the magic touch.

Her debut collection for Resort 2009, presented in an empty New York loft, was a quiet affair—simple, spare separates that exuded chic restraint. By the time Philo held her first full fashion show in October 2009, the consensus was in: “Triumphant return,” declared the *New York Times*.

A beautiful collection, with precision lines and a laser focus on modern minimalism, it created a tectonic shift in the fashionscape that introduced a new mode of modern dressing. Less was now undeniably more.

The Philo mindset extended to the handbags, which telegraphed her vision of pure design and also created a revolution in accessories by eliminating excessive hardware and froufrou in favor of clean, Spartan lines. The bags quickly became mainstays. The Box is a small flap style with soft-grained leather and a geometric double-square gold clasp. The Luggage satchel features distinctive curves and a zip on the front, while the Cabas tote is a purely reductive design. The Trapeze is sleek, with extra-wide “wings” that allow for intriguing color-block combinations.

Designer after designer took their cue from Philo’s approach for the next seven years, until longtime Gucci designer Alessandro Michele became the creative director in January 2015 and effectively swung the pendulum back a year later.

Céline’s bags continue to sell out, and Philo isn’t in the least bit concerned about the look-alikes. “I love it,” she told *Vogue* in 2013. “I’m nothing but flattered. I’ve got friends with copied pieces. My mum’s even got a knockoff bag!”



OPPOSITE:
Luggage medium tote, Céline,
Paris, September 2014.

RIGHT:
Cabas Phantom tote, Céline,
Fall 2016.

PAGES 46–47:
Luggage micro tote (far left),
Céline, Paris, October 2015.



Chanel

2.55, 1955

BOY, 2011

The cultural impact of Chanel—as a house, a brand, a story, and a history—is unparalleled in the accessories world. People know there’s a Coco behind Chanel and they recognize her codes: the LBDs, the pearls, the camellias, the two-tone ballet flats, and the tweed bouclé jackets. They resonate solidly throughout the world as a visual vocabulary that is *Chanel*. And prime among those Chanel pillars is the quilted 2.55 and its update, Boy.

The original design, created in 1929, liberated women in the same way Chanel’s jersey dresses and tweed jackets offered an escape from hobble skirts and corsetry. By adding thin straps, inspired by those of soldiers’ bags that you could sling over your shoulder, Chanel freed up the hand. The iteration we’re familiar with today dates to February 1955, when she resurrected and updated the style as part of her postwar comeback; the bag’s name stems from its date of rebirth.

There’s a story behind every detail of the 2.55—from the burgundy lining, which represents the uniforms at the Aubazine convent where she grew up, to the gold chains inspired by those the nuns wore to hold their keys, to the front flap pocket where she allegedly placed her love letters. The iconic diamond quilting comes from her love of equestrian culture and jockey jackets, though some sources point to the cushions in her apartment, others to the stained-glass windows at Aubazine. The slim interior lipstick pocket was equally personal, as Chanel never went anywhere without her red lipstick.

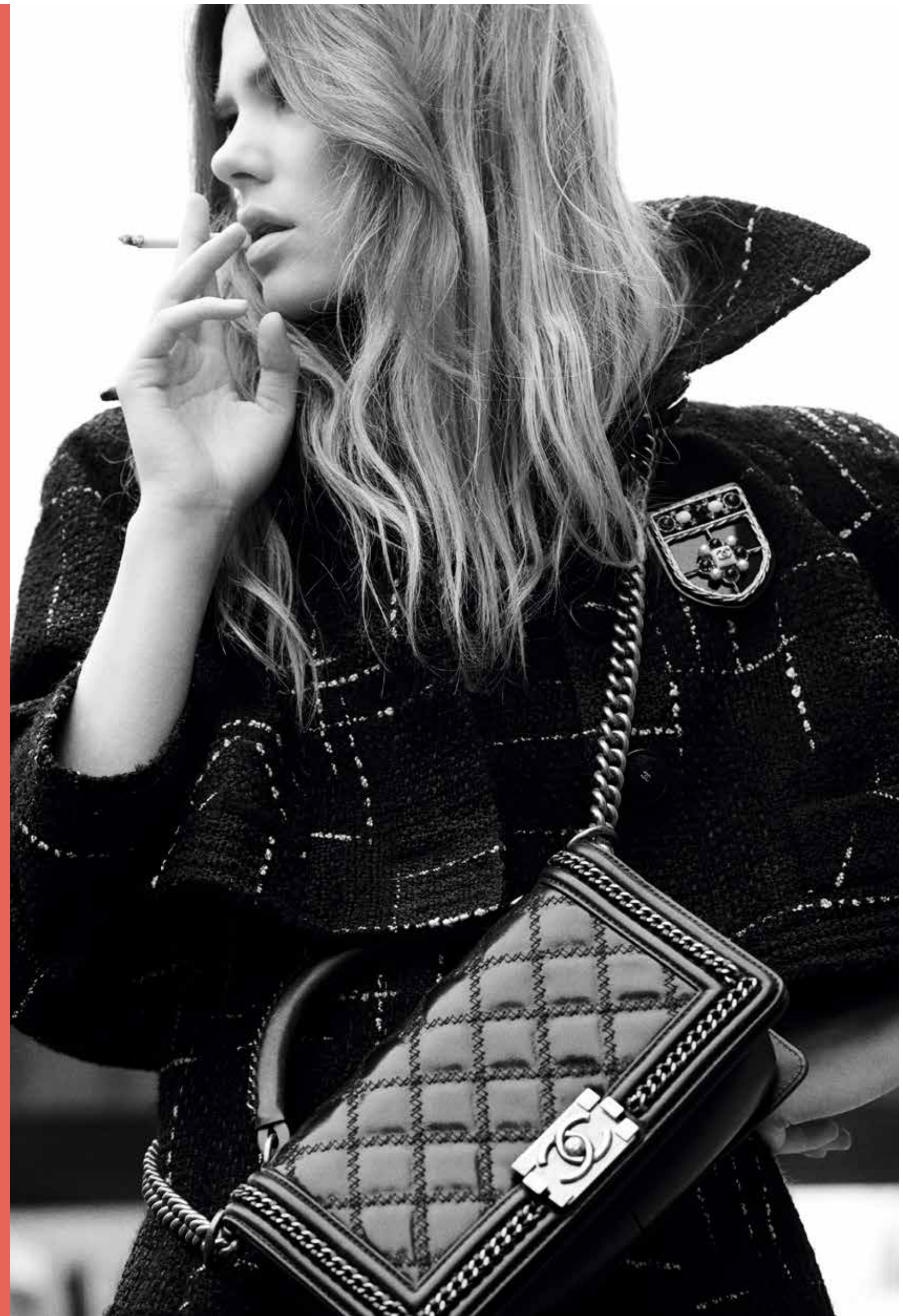
Since taking over the design direction of Chanel in 1983, twelve years after Mademoiselle’s death, Karl Lagerfeld has updated the classic 2.55. He replaced the original rectangular turnlock—known as the Mademoiselle Lock, an amusing reference to the fact that Chanel never married—with one flaunting the double-C logo. And he kept the 2.55 going strong, generating new takes season after season—hot pink, denim, embroidered, terry cloth, covered in 1970s-style crochet. There are also plenty of versions cut from that house staple tweed, which Chanel liked extra nubby, even though the irregularities were considered flaws in her day. In 2005 Lagerfeld reintroduced the original in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary.

The Boy redefines the 2.55 for a younger audience. It features the double-C logo atop a rectangular metal clasp and a front flap that goes all the way to the bottom, unlike the 2.55, which stops roughly two-thirds of the way down. The rest of the codes are there: the chain link; the East-West rectangular shape; and the quilting, with three additional quilted “stripes” bordering the edges. There’s storytelling magic here, too. The elegant polo player “Boy” Capel was Chanel’s great love and muse until he died in a car accident at age thirty-eight in 1919.

OPPOSITE:
Karlie Kloss with a burgundy
Chanel 2.55, *Vogue*, August 2010.

PAGE 52:
Dress designs by Chanel.
Illustrations from *Vogue*,
April 1927.

PAGE 53:
Chanel advertisement,
1980s.



TOP: Mia Farrow on the set of *Rosemary's Baby*, 1967.

БОТТОМ: Jacqueline Kennedy leaving the Carlyle Hotel, New York City, March 1962.

ОППОЗИТЕ: Boy bag, Chanel, *Numéro Tokyo*, July 2015.

РАСЕ 57: Coco Chanel in the Tuileries Garden, Paris, September 1957.



Christian Dior

LADY DIOR, 1995

Much has been written about the revolutionary impact of Christian Dior's New Look collection, which debuted on February 12, 1947. The silhouette emphasized a heightened femininity, with nipped wasp waists and full, generously cut skirts, meant to soothe wartime memories. The New Look impacted accessories as well, with petite ladylike pochettes—roomier shoulder bags, with their straps reminiscent of soldiers' bags, were out. "Don't forget, a bag is not a wastepaper basket!" advised Monsieur Dior in his now-classic tome, *The Little Dictionary of Fashion* (1954). "You can't fill it with a lot of unnecessary things and expect it to look nice and last a long time."

Dior, one of history's leading fashion houses, did not have an iconic handbag until 1984, when Bernard Arnault, chairman and CEO of LVMH, acquired the firm. He did away with licensing obligations and focused on in-house production—the first step to the birth of the bestselling Lady Dior.

Princess Diana received Dior's black boxy quilted bag, originally named the Chouchou (French for "pet"), as a gift from French First Lady Bernadette Chirac at the opening of a Cézanne exhibition at the Grand Palais, Paris, on September 25, 1995. As luxury lore goes, Diana loved the handbag so much that she ordered one in every color and was soon photographed with it everywhere, from a business trip in Argentina to the Met Gala in New York, where she wore a blue bias-cut lace-trim gown by John Galiano for Dior. When photos were published of Diana carrying the bag during a visit to Birmingham in 1995, Harrods reportedly sold out of the style within hours. The following year, 140,000 bags were sold at \$1,200 each. By this time, the company had smartly renamed the style—it was now the Lady Dior.

Over the years, the handbag has gone through countless permutations without losing any of the inherent elegance and simplicity that have made it such a favorite. There was the diamond-studded version, the collaboration with German artist Anselm Reyle (Dior's first with an artist), the mink version, and the ones in woven leather or embellished with petals or patch pockets. They all featured the house's trademark *cannage* pattern, metal rings connecting the handles to the body, and D-I-O-R logo letter pendants. *Cannage*, from the French word for "caning," was inspired by the caned seating of the chairs at the 1947 show.

"If it's an icon bag with a real story, people say, 'We are ready to invest in that,'" observed Sidney Toledano, president and CEO of Christian Dior, in *Women's Wear Daily* in 2010. "People are rediscovering that luxury has meaning only if it goes through a long process across time, which means you have to have heritage."

OPPOSITE:
Lady Dior, Dior advertisement,
Pre-Fall 2014, featuring
Marion Cotillard.

PAGE 72:
Princess Diana carrying
a black Lady Dior bag,
London, March 1997.

PAGE 73:
Illustration by Christian Dior,
Vogue, June 1947.



“There is nothing I would like better than to make every woman look and feel like a Duchess.”

—CHRISTIAN DIOR, from *Vogue on Christian Dior* by Charlotte Sinclair, 2015



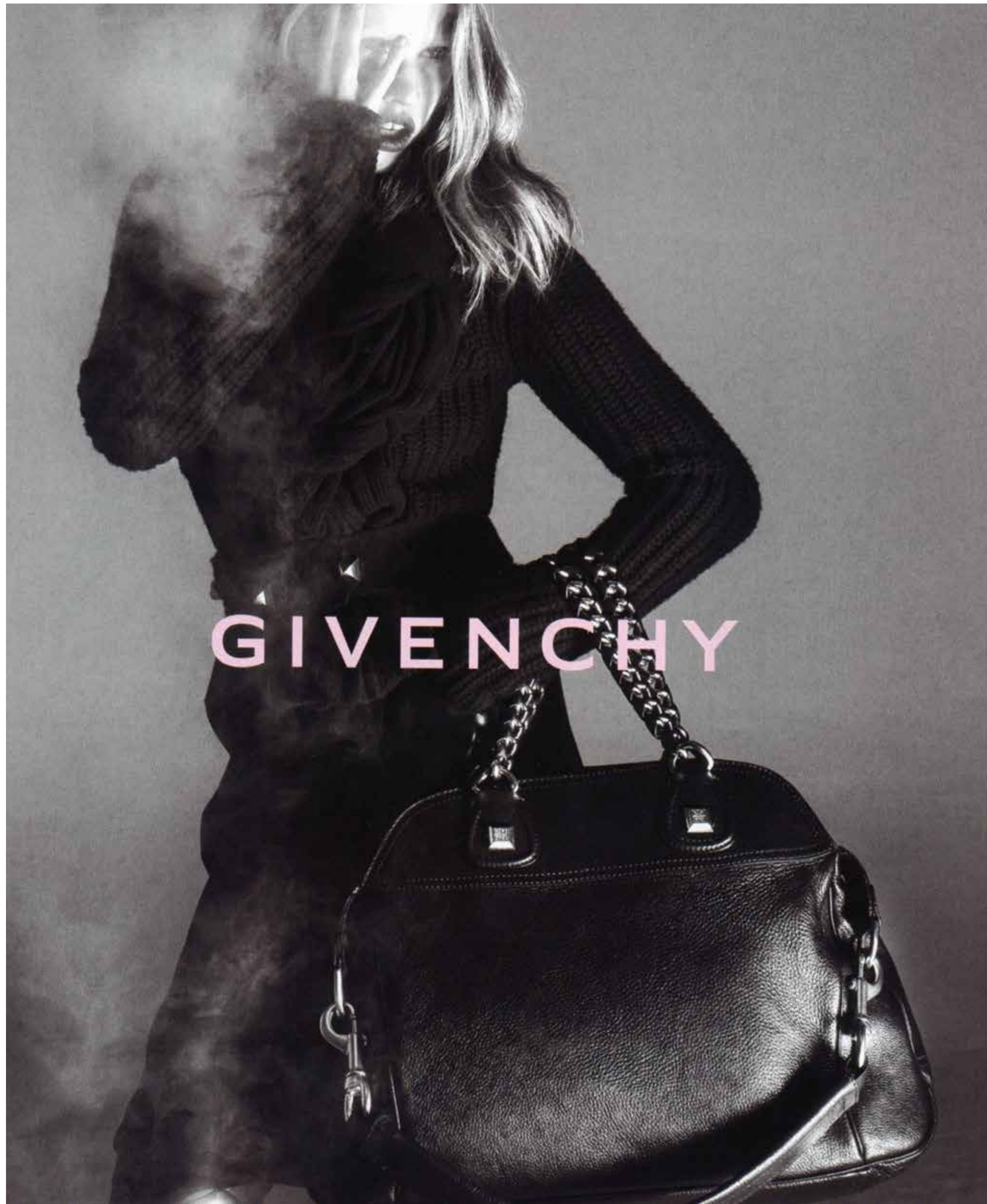
Christian Dior
La ligne corolle
Jaquette cintrée en shantung,
jupe longue finement plissée.

HANDBAGS IN FILM

In film, as in life, handbags announce a person's identity and style. A glimpse of Sarah Jessica Parker with her Fendi and Chanel in *Sex and the City* tells you all you need to know about her character, Carrie Bradshaw—she's fashion obsessed. In *Legally Blonde*, Reese Witherspoon's character, sorority-sister-turned-law-student Elle Woods, carries a bright red Bottega Veneta bag, perfectly telegraphing her character's optimism, drive, and love of a good luxury object. Handbags have been used cleverly throughout the history of cinema—here are some of my favorite moments.

1. Grace Kelly carrying a Mark Cross overnight case in *Rear Window*, 1954.
2. Lauren Hutton carrying a Bottega Veneta clutch in *American Gigolo*, 1980.
3. Scarlett Johansson carrying a Mulberry Roxanne in *Match Point*, 2005.
4. Amy Adams carrying a Gucci Bamboo Lady Lock in *American Hustle*, 2013.
5. Louis Vuitton trunks carried by Jason Schwartzman, Adrien Brody, and Owen Wilson (pictured here) in *The Darjeeling Limited*, 2007.
6. Cate Blanchett carrying a Hermès Birkin in *Blue Jasmine*, 2013.
7. Scarlett Johansson carrying a Marc Jacobs Zoe in *Lost in Translation*, 2003.
8. Gal Gadot carrying Valextra in *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice*, 2016.
9. Gwyneth Paltrow carrying a Hermès Birkin in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, 2001.
10. Anjelica Huston carrying a Hermès Kelly in *The Royal Tenenbaums*, 2001.



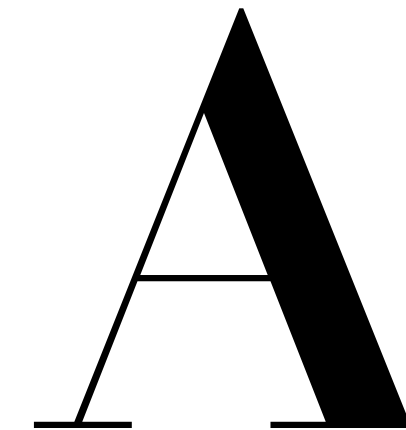


Riccardo Tisci for Givenchy

NIGHTINGALE, 2006

ANTIGONA, 2010

PANDORA, 2010



fter the legendary Hubert de Givenchy stepped down as director of the eponymous couture house he founded in 1952, he was followed by John Galiano, Alexander McQueen, and Julien Macdonald, none of whom could match his success. When Riccardo Tisci arrived at Givenchy in 2005, the fashion industry was skeptical that the thirty-year-old Italian, who had only two collections under his belt, would succeed either.

The reviews of his first outings were brutal. “There’s only one way to sum up what went on at Givenchy: It was painful,” jabbed *Vogue* in 2005. “Riccardo Tisci of Givenchy has the pretension to be a couturier but not the discipline or the honest imagination,” sniped the *New York Times* in 2006. Yet, after a few seasons, all those critics who questioned what his vision had to do with the Givenchy heritage found themselves coming over to his side. “Sometimes you need to see a movie three times before you understand it,” Tisci said. “I think it’s the exact same style it always was, but now everyone is used to it.” And, indeed, Tisci’s hybrid of goth, romance, and power aggression came to be celebrated editorially and commercially as a revival triumph.

Tisci’s golden touch carried to the accessories, which capitalize on street appeal and luxe sophistication. The Nightingale, named after Florence Nightingale, made a splash when it debuted on the runway: Naomi Campbell carried one in each hand, as did other models. The shots went around the world, and the rounded satchel that originally had a logo embossed on the handles became the house’s first great hit. The style was updated in 2015—the perpendicular cross-seams and logos were eliminated to achieve a more streamlined look, the clean curved contours recalling Givenchy’s pioneering couture line.

Part satchel, part messenger bag, the Pandora made headlines for its unusual angled double-zip top, which playfully riffs off the Greek myth of Pandora’s box. The Antigona, a more structured, angular, and architectural style, comes in a variety of extreme versions with goat hair and Rottweiler prints for more outré clients, including Marina Abramović, Mariacarla Boscono, Madonna, Rihanna, and Florence Welch. As he told *Women’s Wear Daily* in 2016, “I was born a daring designer and I’m going to die a daring designer. That is me.” The following year, he left and was replaced by Clare Waight Keller of Chloé, who is the first woman to step into the creative director role.

OPPOSITE:

Nightingale bag, Givenchy,
Fall 2007 advertisement.

PAGE 90:

Dress design by Hubert de Givenchy,
L’Officiel, March 1953.

PAGE 91:

Nightingale bag, Givenchy,
Spring 2009 advertisement.



“He needed to
create his own
world, and now
people have
fallen in love
with it.”

— MARIACARLA BOSCONO,
on Riccardo Tisci, *Harper's Bazaar*, October 2008



GIVENCHY

“Gucci represented a glamorous brand from glamorous Italy, where movie stars vacationed and movies were made.”

—VALERIE STEELE, *Women's Wear Daily*, June 5, 2006





Hermès

KELLY, LATE 1800S

BIRKIN, 1981

H

ermès is the luxury firm that all other luxury firms aspire to be. Its reputation is unchallenged.

At Hermès, product rules. “We don’t have a policy of image, we have a policy of product,” former chairman Jean-Louis Dumas told *Vanity Fair* in 2007. Its bags are still made the same way they have been for decades, from the best exotics and completely by hand, stitch by stitch. If a product is imperfect, it’s destroyed. You can wait years for a bag, and that’s after you’ve handed over six figures for it.

The Hermès story began in Krefeld, Germany, northwest of Düsseldorf. When the French citizen Thierry Hermès was born there, the land was still under Napoleon Bonaparte’s control. By the 1820s this son of an innkeeper had made his way to Paris, where he got a job in leatherwork. In 1837 he opened his own shop specializing in carriage harnesses for the aristocracy.

The family-run company has been led by a number of top industry names, including Martin Margiela, Jean Paul Gaultier, Christophe Lemaire, and, today, Nadège Vanhee-Cybulski. While it has expanded to include everything from scarves to ready-to-wear, its reputation is still very much in leather and in two bags in particular, the Kelly and the Birkin, both of which have their own captivating stories.

The slightly trapezoidal Kelly, with two slim straps at the top and a single handle, is the successor to the Haut à Courroies, originally a revised saddle holder from the late 1800s. The defining moment came in 1956, the year actress Grace Kelly became the Princess consort of Monaco after marrying Prince Rainier III, and pregnant with Princess Caroline, used hers to hide her belly bump from the paparazzi; the shot made it onto the cover of *Life* magazine, immortalizing the design and forever linking the two. In 1977 the Haut à Courroies—which required 680 hand stitches and took one craftsman two weeks to complete—was officially renamed in her honor.

OPPOSITE:
Birkin bag, Hermès.
A magazine, April 2007.

PAGE 108:
Hermès advertisement
featuring the Kelly, 1957.

PAGE 109:
Newlyweds Prince Rainier III
of Monaco and Grace Kelly
(with her eponymous bag), 1956.

“I imagined the Queen of the Queen bees trying to brush by me and getting stuck in her gut with my boxy Birkin. Really, you couldn’t put a price on that.”

—WEDNESDAY MARTIN, *Primates of Park Avenue: A Memoir*, 2015




HERMÈS
24, FAUBOURG SAINT-HONORÉ

BIARRITZ - CANNES - DEAUVILLE - LILLE - MONTE-CARLO





Judith Leiber

CRYSTAL MINAUDIÈRE, 1966

Born into an upper-middle-class Jewish family in Budapest in 1921, Judith Peto was studying chemistry in London with her sights set on a career in cosmetics—"I could have been Estée Lauder," she told *Moment* in 2012—when World War II broke out. Home for the summer, she decided to stay. With the number of opportunities for Jews now limited, she got a job at Pessl, a local handbag company, working her way up from sweeping floors and cooking glue to becoming the first female apprentice. Along the way she learned every step in the bag-making process.

When the Nazis entered Hungary, Judith's family escaped with the help of an uncle employed by the Swiss consulate and moved into Swiss-protected housing. When the Russian army closed in, they were forced into hiding. Terrible memories haunted her—hiding in basements, smelling burning flesh outside. Once, on a rare outing, she was hit in the left arm by a bullet. "I tried to fall asleep by dreaming of making handbags," she recounted in the biography *No Mere Bagatelles* (2009).

After the war, she returned to what she knew: handbags. But Pessl was no more; the owners had been sent to a concentration camp. So Leiber opened her own business, working with whatever materials were available. In 1945 Allied soldiers arrived, including Signal Corps sergeant Gerson Leiber. On his second day in Budapest, he met Judith. "I saw the girl of my dreams, it was love at first sight," he recalled in *Judith Leiber: The Artful Handbag* (1995) by Enid Nemy. The young couple wed the following year and set sail for the United States, settling in the Bronx.

Leiber's first job was at a union handbag factory. "The owner said to me, 'You remember how you made bags in Hungary, all the hand work? Well, that's not how we do it here. Here we bake them like strudel in sheets,'" Leiber said in *The Artful Handbag*. "I was used to handling each bag like a baby and I couldn't stand it." She eventually found herself a position with American fashion designer Nettie Rosenstein in Manhattan and in 1953 got her big break when Rosenstein was tapped to create Mamie Eisenhower's inauguration dress; Leiber made the matching bag. In 1963 Leiber struck out on her own, and in 1966 she created what would become her signature and her claim to fame: the crystal-covered minaudière.

OPPOSITE: Red Apple bag, Judith Leiber, *Lula* magazine, Fall/Winter 2011.

PAGES 120–121: A selection of Judith Leiber's more inventive crystal minaudières through the years.



“Judith Leiber is one of the first who has created an accessory that can stand alone as a sculpture. If you set one of her bags on a table, it has a life of its own.”

— HAROLD KODA, *W*, September 2003

Leiber had designed a metal box bag, but when the samples came back from the manufacturer, the exteriors were badly tarnished. Thinking quickly, she covered them with rhinestones and dubbed the bag the Chatelaine. That style begat the myriad bejeweled minaudières now ubiquitous on every red carpet and at every black-tie gala. They are available in all sorts of whimsical and highly collectible shapes: asparagus shoots, Humpty Dumpty, dachshunds, rotary phones, and three-tier wedding cakes. Nearly every First Lady since Mamie Eisenhower has had one.



Leiber has designed some four thousand different styles, from animals and musical instruments to Fabergé-like eggs. Depending on the intricacy of the bag's form, models are made in either cardboard or wax. The forms are used to create molds, which ultimately are cast in brass, then gold-plated on the outside and lined with kid leather on the inside. They are painted before being festooned, most commonly with crystals, though gold and silver mosaics, precious stones, beads, and shells have adorned them, too.

Leiber fans are many, and her bags are red-carpet favorites, spotted on Zsa Zsa Gabor, Jennifer Lopez, Joan Rivers, and Elizabeth Taylor. In 1998 the *New York Times* noted that Bernice Norman, a patron of the arts in New Orleans, had nearly three hundred; the late opera singer Beverly Sills owned more than seventy. When Leiber retired in 1998, her company changed hands and shortened the name to simply Leiber, but her legacy endures on television, red carpets, and runways. For instance, designer Jeremy Scott sparked a renaissance when he attended a Chanel couture show in 2000 wearing a sparkly Leiber teddy bear as a pendant. In 2005, Judith and Gerson, an artist, built a Renaissance-style Palladian museum dedicated to a retrospective of their careers.

“When I’m wearing one of her egg designs, people ask me if it’s a Fabergé egg,” Sills is quoted in *The Artful Handbag*. “To me, it’s just as valuable, it’s a Leiber egg.”





Louis Vuitton

SPEEDY, CA. 1930

NOÉ, 1932

PAPILLON, 1966

NEVERFULL, 2007

F

ounded by Louis Vuitton in 1854, this French company has long been one of the world's great luggage makers, with clients ranging from Czar Nicholas II to Charles Frederick Worth—the father of haute couture—to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, who traveled to New York City's Waldorf Astoria every year with some ninety bags, more than sixty of which were Vuitton. The eponymous firm started out making trunks painted light gray. There were soon imitators, so in 1872 the trunks were decorated with stripes—first, red and beige, and, four years later, the now-trademark light-and-dark beige.

Nevertheless, copies persisted, and in 1888 the company created the checkered pattern known as the Damier canvas. In 1896 came the Monogram canvas that featured the interlaced initials LV and three stylized floral motifs. Louis was the hand behind all these changes to prevent forgeries, save for the Monogram, which was the invention of his son, Georges.

"[Georges] was overjoyed when . . . the Americans copied his products and in their ads called their Louis Vuitton counterfeits French trunks," wrote Paul-Gérard Pasols in *Louis Vuitton: The Birth of Modern Luxury* (2012). "This really made him feel he had won, not only for his own company but for all French trunk manufacturers."

The company is also known for its easily recognizable signature styles such as the Noé, a bucket shape inspired by a five-bottle champagne case made by the firm in the early days; the wide Neverfull tote; and the Papillon. The Speedy, a smaller version of its Keepall travel bag, was created in the 1960s for Audrey Hepburn, who requested a smaller style to match her petite frame; the name also nodded to the fast-paced life of modern times. Cut from the same trunk canvas, now coated in PVC for a moldable, supple effect, the styles all sported the checkered and monogram patterns. By the 1960s and 1970s these bags became a signifier of haute luxury, boosted by images of the era's glitterati living the good life with a Louis Vuitton by their side—Twiggy posing seductively in a 1967 issue of *Vogue*, Sophia Loren photographed stepping out of a hotel in Nice in 1977.

In 1996 Louis Vuitton celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Monogram canvas by inviting seven designers to reinterpret the icon. Azzedine Alaïa wrapped an Alma bag in panther skin; Helmut Lang created a DJ case equipped to hold seventy vinyl records; and Vivienne Westwood designed a rounded bustle-like fanny pack. The arrival of Marc Jacobs in 1997 transformed the company into a fashion force and resulted in a new set of creative collaborations (see "Marc Jacobs's Art Trek for Louis Vuitton" on page 140). Nicolas Ghesquière, formerly of Balenciaga, took over Jacobs's practice in 2014. His debut coincided with the brand's 160th anniversary and, in a repeat of the 1996 campaign, Ghesquière gave six designers carte blanche to rework the classic monogram, pushing it to new inventive heights. Fellow designer Karl Lagerfeld's submission was a boxer's leather punching bag covered in the initials LV.



OPPOSITE:

Twiggy with a Louis Vuitton Toilette pochette, *Vogue UK*, November 1967.

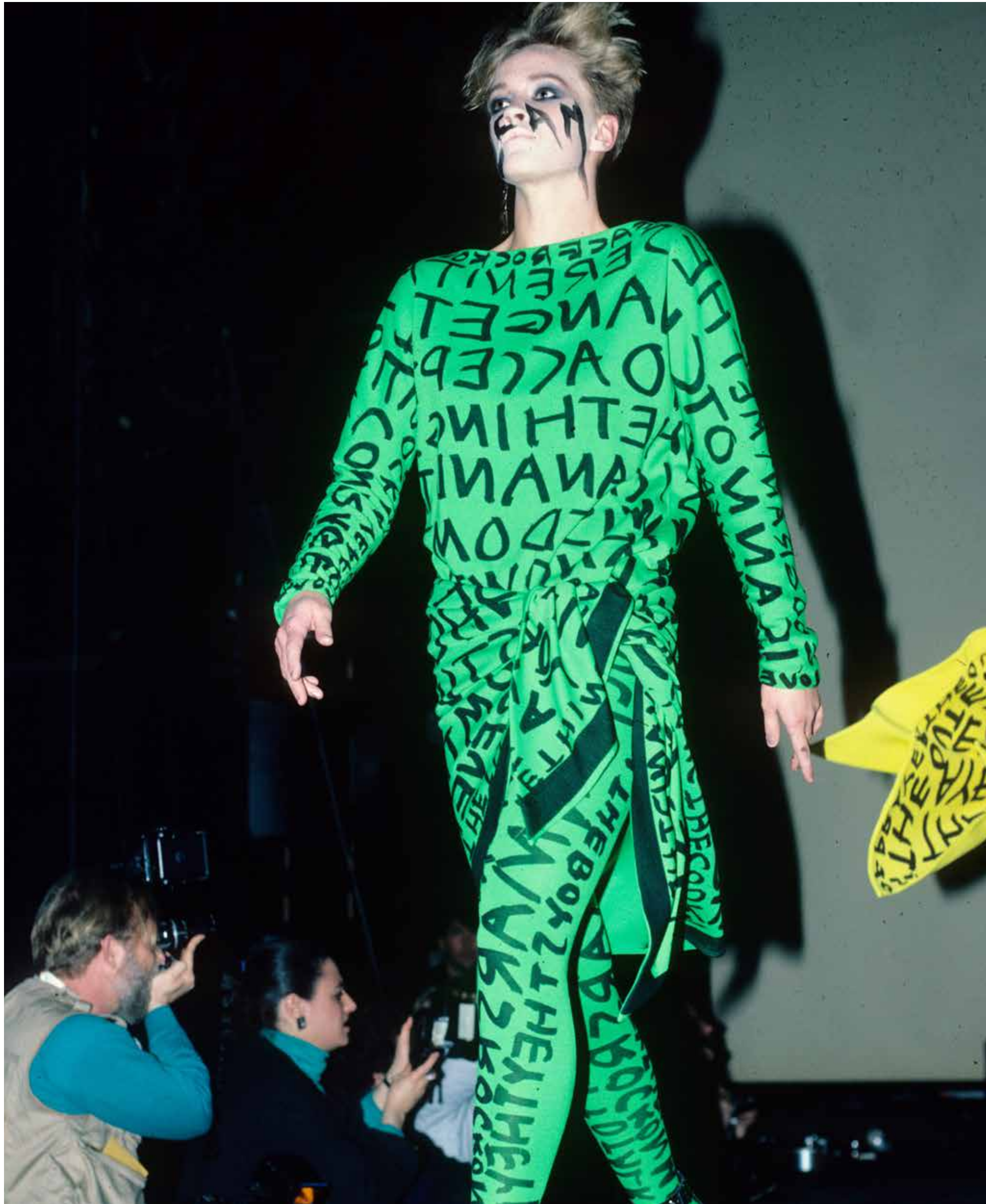
ABOVE: Louis Vuitton advertisement, 1925.

PAGES 134–135: Assorted Louis Vuitton bags and luggage, *Vogue Japan*, April 2012.

PAGES 136–137: Selections from "The Imaginary Voyages of Louis Vuitton" campaign, 1995.

PAGES 138–139: Catherine Deneuve (left) with an array of luggage and a Manhattan bag, and Scarlett Johansson with a Neverfull bag, Louis Vuitton, Fall 2007.





MARC JACOBS'S ART TREK FOR LOUIS VUITTON

When Marc Jacobs became artistic director in 1997, his challenge was to launch the luxury leather luggage firm's first ready-to-wear line. His first outing, in 1998, was a minimalist affair. He was, in effect, beginning with a blank slate, all clean shapes and pure lines. There was only one handbag on the runway—a white messenger bag with the monogram discreetly embossed on it. “I was told that I was not allowed to change the monogram, or do anything to it,” Jacobs recounted to the *Daily Telegraph* in 2008. “But at one point I just said, ‘I’m going to do what I want.’” And “what I want” translated into a series of revolutionary—and, saleswise, absolutely explosive—collaborations. Here’s a look at Jacobs’s top art-fashion partnerships.

“I’m not really rebellious, but it was kind of a clever solution to doing what we were told by a certain old guard at Louis Vuitton we couldn’t do: ‘You don’t deface the Monogram; you don’t change the Monogram.’”

—MARC JACOBS, from *Louis Vuitton/Marc Jacobs* by Pamela Golbin, 2012

OPPOSITE: Stephen Sprouse, Fall 1984 ready-to-wear.

RIGHT: Speedy bag, Stephen Sprouse for Louis Vuitton, 2001.

STEPHEN SPROUSE SPRING 2001

The inspiration behind Marc Jacobs’s Spring 2001 collection was mere happenstance. Once, when Jacobs visited actress Charlotte Gainsbourg at her Paris apartment, he noticed a Louis Vuitton trunk that her father had painted black. He liked the way her father had taken something iconic and tampered with it. That act reminded him of one of his favorite works, a Ready-made by Marcel Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919), a postcard depicting Leonardo da Vinci’s portrait of the *Mona Lisa* that Duchamp “defaced” by adding a mustache and a beard and scribbling in the title of the work. The black trunk also reminded him of fellow designer Stephen Sprouse—of his way of reframing and shaking up fashion standards, though rather than defacing the iconic, he took inspiration from the street and made it art.

Jacobs decided to vandalize the tony Vuitton monogram and enlisted Sprouse to do it. What was supposed to be a collection just for the runway and editorial shoots became a commercial blockbuster for Vuitton. It gave Jacobs the creative freedom to blur the lines between art and fashion, resulting in one hit bag after another. “To this day some of those bag souvenir places right by our offices in Paris have these little nylon bags that are so clearly taken from that Sprouse graffiti,” Jacobs said in *Louis Vuitton/Marc Jacobs* (2012). “They say things like ‘Paris France’ written in a style that’s obviously imitating Stephen’s in the way we presented it.”





Mansur Gavriel

BUCKET, 2013

Rachel Mansur and Floriana Gavriel met in 2010 at a concert in Los Angeles and soon became friends. They had a shared aesthetic and both were in the world of fashion—Mansur had studied textile design at the Rhode Island School of Design and Gavriel had interned at Lanvin. The very day they met, they decided to launch a line. By 2012, after a couple of years of lively exchanges via email and a shared Tumblr account, both had relocated—Mansur from Los Angeles and Gavriel from Berlin—to New York to start what they had decided would be a handbag line. “We didn’t know where to begin, but we knew what we identified with intuitively.” And that was something “beautiful and clean but also had a warmth to it,” as they recalled in “Happy Bags Happy Girls” on *wmagazine.com* in 2016.

In June 2013 they launched their business with the Bucket. With money they had saved, they had the first prototypes made at a factory in East Los Angeles. A month later, there were waiting lists, which is astounding, given that the brand and its designers were unknown.

The structured Bucket bag, which is clean and elegant, without hardware or logos, and with just a peek of vibrant color on the inside, turned into a cult item seemingly overnight, thanks in part to social media—most notably, a beautifully curated Instagram account that combined images of flowers, art, and deftly styled bags. In December, when Mansur Gavriel announced the arrival of a new shipment of multiple styles, 95 percent of the stock sold out within an hour. The audience helped sales, too, as those who were able to get their hands on a bag posted on Instagram to flaunt their wares, stirring up the frenzy even more.

The power of the Bucket is its ability to ignite an It Bag moment during an era that is decidedly post-It. The bag is impeccably crafted in Italy—beautiful architectural construction, minimal seams, smooth vegetable-tanned cowhide—and still affordable. Plus, the designers also recognize the power of intense color and incorporate extremely saturated hues not usually seen on accessories, like Indian spice and bright azure, both inside and out. Beloved by major retailers, the distinct style of colorful simplicity continues to entice, even as the firm expands into other styles—including clutches and backpacks—and categories. What everything has in common is the ability to resonate on an emotional level through pure color and design.

OPPOSITE:
Bucket Bag, Mansur Gavriel, 2013.

“It’s better to own one good bag than half a dozen of inferior quality.”

—ELSA SCHIAPARELLI, from *Couture Confessions* by Pamela Golbin, 2016

ROLE MODEL

COCO ROCHA



ABOVE:
Coco Rocha on the Louis Vuitton
runway, Fall 2006.

OPPOSITE:
Coco with a bag of her own design
in collaboration with Botkier,
Holiday 2015.

Since landing her first fashion show with Christian Lacroix, in spring 2006, model Coco Rocha has been one of the industry's top faces, appearing in virtually every major fashion publication worldwide and in advertisements for Balmain, Chanel, Dolce & Gabbana, and Longchamp. The Toronto native was discovered at an Irish dance competition in 2002; after hearing about her dancing talent, Jean Paul Gaultier enlisted her to dance down the runway for his Scottish Highlands-inspired Fall/Winter 2007 show—and from there she soared straight to the top. As a passionate and vocal activist for models' rights, Rocha was instrumental in pushing through a 2013 New York labor law that protects models under the age of eighteen and has served as brand manager for Nomad Mgmt modeling agency since 2016. Here she talks about a few of her favorite bags and reveals her own handbag tips.

What was the first bag you fell in love with?

My mom worked as a flight attendant my whole life and would frequently bring me bags back from Asia and overseas. Let's just say they weren't always "originals," but I remember the girls in middle school would be so jealous as they would see me walking by with my supposedly "designer bags." I started working as a high fashion model while still in high school. I'd spend weekends working in New York or Paris and then fly back for school on Monday. It was after becoming a model that I saw the vast difference between real, beautifully constructed designer pieces and their imitation knockoffs. By my junior year I was wearing the real thing around school, but by then I'm sure the other girls just assumed they were fakes. What normal high school girl takes a \$3,000 purse to school?

What bag means the most to you?

My first Louis Vuitton bag was given to me by Marc Jacobs himself for being his fit model in Fall 2006 and walking in the show. It was a very special time in my life and my career, and I remember blurting out to the team how excited I was to finally own a *real* Louis Vuitton. The casting director laughed and said to never admit that again.

When it comes to getting dressed—bag first or outfit first?

I always choose my outfit first unless I just got a new bag, and then absolutely I will dress around a bag!

What are your handbag style tips?

Don't buy a bag because it's trendy or the cool girl is wearing it. Buy a bag because you love it and you want to make it part of your life. You want a bag that works for years and makes a statement without being outdated in a few months.

Describe one moment of handbag envy.

I absolutely loved Alexander Wang's 2015 spring bags. They have this sport element that I based my clothing line Co + Co around. Obsessed!





Mark Cross

GRACE BOX, 2012

The American luxury firm Mark Cross, founded in 1845 in Boston as a purveyor of leather equestrian goods, had its Hollywood debut in 1954 in Alfred Hitchcock's film *Rear Window*. There's a scene in which Grace Kelly, as Lisa Fremont, arrives at her boyfriend's apartment carrying a boxy black overnight case by Mark Cross. No mention is made of the bag, but as she enters the room, a stunning vision of sophisticated polish in pearls and a veiled hat, she places it on a table next to James Stewart, who's playing her beau, L. B. "Jeff" Jefferies, broken-legged and in a wheelchair. The camera follows them as they converse about the man who lives across the courtyard—they suspect he has murdered his wife—and the bag is right there in the foreground—slim and spare, with a top handle and gold hardware.

The scene ends up revolving around that Mark Cross bag, which was created especially for the movie. Kelly picks it up and puts it down, all the while musing out loud about how handbags can demonstrate a woman's predictability. Minutes later, she whispers that she's staying the night. "I won't be able to give you any pajamas," replies Stewart.

Kelly closes the blinds and opens her case while sitting on his lap so he can see a negligee and slippers spill out—we catch a glimpse of the bag's detailed interior, the red lining and the mirror. "Preview of coming attractions," she purrs and retreats to the bedroom to change. Pretty hot stuff for the 1950s and a fantastic showcase for the bag, which, in an early example of product placement, gets named twice.

There's plenty more glamour behind this accessories firm, one of America's oldest. It was owned by the family of Gerald Murphy, who, with his wife, Sara, became part of the expatriate circle of wealthy artists and writers who settled in France in the 1920s. They were allegedly the inspiration for the jet-set figures Nicole and Dick Diver in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* (1934).

After all these years, the company continues to mine its rich history, even though it's changed hands, closed, and relaunched numerous times. While the style seen in *Rear Window* was a one-off, a version was put into production in the late 1980s and early 1990s, then updated in 2012 and named the Grace Box—the epitome of the brand's understated American sensibility. In 2015, at the request of a collector, an exact replica of the film prop, the Grace Overnight Case, was introduced. The Scottie, named after Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald's daughter, was launched in 2012; like the other styles in the company's stable, the design is boxy, clean, classic, and practical yet chic.

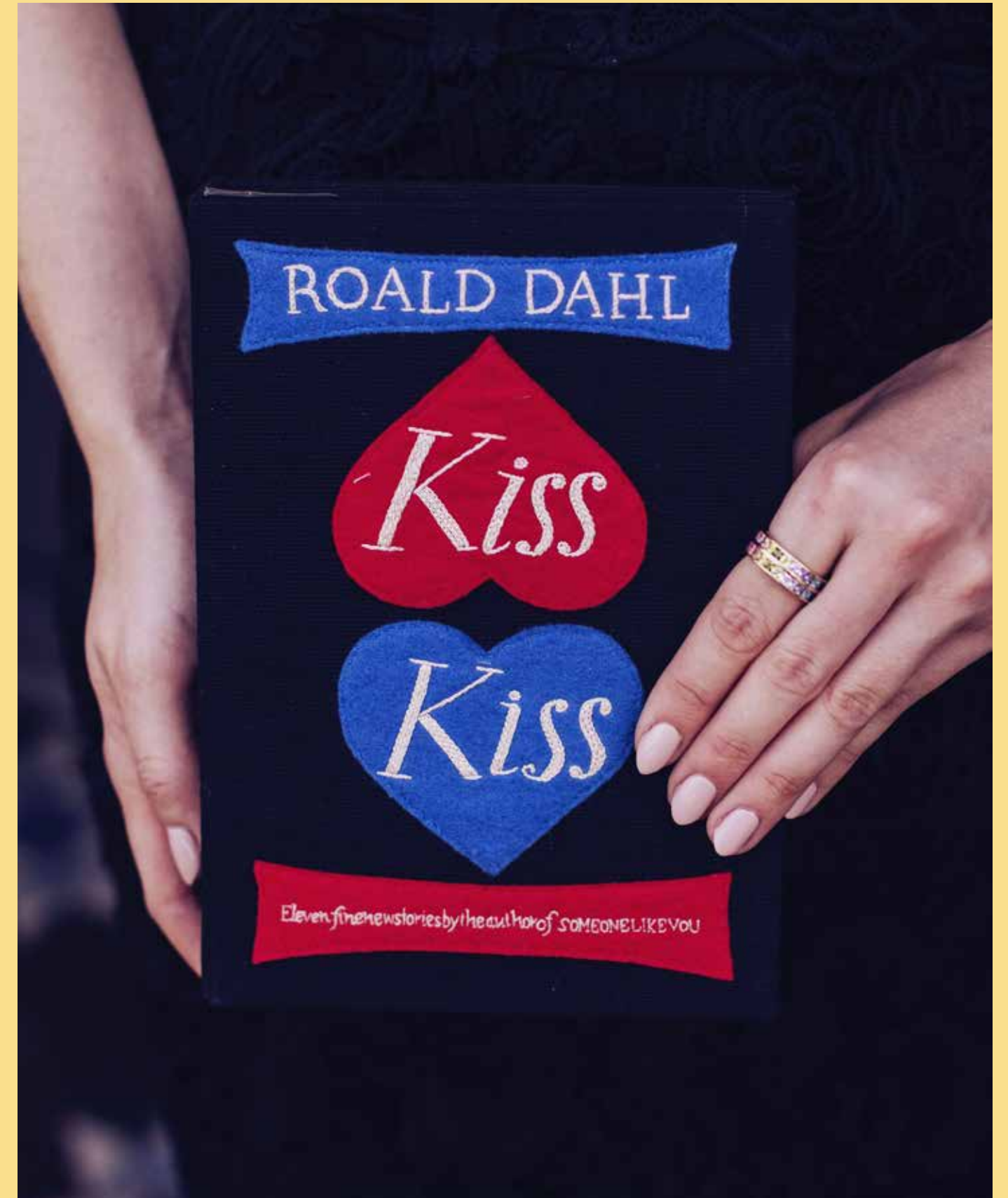
"The glamour and roots of Mark Cross personify luxury to me," New York designer Derek Lam, who teamed up with the house on a collection in 2014, told *Vogue* that year. "And I think where American heritage exists, it should be celebrated."

OPPOSITE:
Grace Box bag, Mark Cross,
Elle Singapore, August 2015.

PAGE 158:
Grace Kelly with a Mark Cross
overnight case in stills from
Rear Window, 1954.

PAGE 159:
Grace Box bag, Mark Cross,
Paris, October 2014.







Salvatore Ferragamo

GANCIO TOP-HANDLE BAG, 1990

FIAMMA, 2014

Ferragamo is one of Italy's famous family-run firms, and Salvatore Ferragamo's tale is legendary. Born in Bonito, the eleventh of fourteen children, he knew he wanted to become a shoemaker from an early age. At nine, he made his sister's First Communion shoes. At eleven, he was apprenticed to a shoemaker in Naples. By the time he was sixteen, he had joined his brothers in the United States to learn more about the business.

In 1914 Ferragamo worked at a shoe factory in Boston and five years later moved to Santa Barbara, an emerging center for the film industry. His first job there was to make cowboy boots for the American Film Manufacturing Company, also known as Flying "A" Studios. When moviemaking moved to Hollywood, so did Ferragamo, who opened a shop on Hollywood Boulevard in Beverly Hills. He continued to make shoes for movies such as Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and garnered a clientele of loyal Hollywood stars, including Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Mary Pickford, and Gloria Swanson.

As his reputation grew, so did his orders, with department stores Saks Fifth Avenue and I. Magnin knocking on his door. But unable to find enough skilled artisans, Ferragamo returned to Italy in 1927. The following year the company Salvatore Ferragamo was officially launched in Florence. In the ensuing decades, Ferragamo came up with one footwear innovation after another, such as metal shanks for arch support and invisible sole stitching, and experimented with novel shoe materials like plaited raffia, crochet, wicker, straw, fish skins, cork, and candy wrappers—materials he turned to when leather was scarce during World War II.

The company didn't really enter the handbag scene until 1965, five years after his death, when his daughter Fiamma, who had trained with him in the atelier, launched a line for the house. Among her early styles was the Salvatore, a big doctor's bag with zippered side pockets that was inspired by a bag her father used to carry his footwear prototypes.

But it wasn't until 1990 that Ferragamo made a real impact with a hit bag. Previously, Fiamma's attentions were set on innovating the footwear business, proving to buyers and clients she was a worthy successor to her father. In 1978, for instance, she designed the Vara shoe, topped with a flattened grosgrain bow—a detail now seen on handbags as well. In 1990 Fiamma created the now-iconic Gancio, originally called the Gancino, a trapezoidal ladylike satchel that was crafted from myriad materials—wicker, plaited calfskin, Plexiglas, and crocodile, among others—and is emblematic of the brand's polished elegance. Its defining feature is the horseshoe-like Gancino logo. According to *Salvatore Ferragamo—Evolving Legend, 1928–2008* (2009), the design was inspired by the wrought iron gates of the Palazzo Spini Feroni, Florence, where the Ferragamo offices are based. Since then Ferragamo has created such popular bags as the Lotty and the Sofia, named after Sophia Loren, born Sofia Villani Scicolone. The Fiamma, a rounded top-handle design with a lock closure, is named in honor of Fiamma, who passed away in 1998.

OPPOSITE:
Mini Sofia bag, Salvatore Ferragamo, Paris, July 2016.

PAGES 198–199:
Gancio top-handle bags have been made from a wide range of materials over the years, including—but not limited to—wicker, wood, various plastics, brushed and dyed steel, and exotic skins.

PAGE 200:
Black leather and straw-fringe tote, Salvatore Ferragamo, date unknown.

PAGE 201:
Audrey Hepburn with Salvatore Ferragamo and his wife Wanda, Italy, August 1954.





Yves Saint Laurent

MUSE, 2005

MONOGRAM, 2013

SAC DE JOUR, 2013

T

he signature logo of the house of Yves Saint Laurent was created in 1961 by artist Adolphe Jean-Marie Mouron, also known as “Cassandre,” who intertwined serif and sans-serif letters to elegant effect. That monogram is “as synonymous with—as significant to—20th-century style as T. S. Eliot’s is with literature,” wrote journalist Olivia Barker in *USA Today* in 2008.

Curiously enough, the early hit handbags did not feature the famous logo. The Muse—a sleek, oversized take on the traditional bowling bag—has a subtle Y-shaped panel stitched on the side instead. The Muse Two, which appeared three years later, in 2008, is a chic, utilitarian rectangular satchel with a front flap and a circular gold closure. Speaking to the *New York Times* that year, creative director Stefano Pilati explained the repurposing of the bag’s name despite the very different styles: “Customers seem to like to ask for bags by name, but I don’t really like to name my bags—they are not children or pets.”

In 2012 Hedi Slimane became creative director, ushering in a sea change for the company. He revamped the stores, chose to work from his hometown of Los Angeles rather than move to the firm’s Paris headquarters, and restored the long-forgotten blocklike Helvetica logo, introduced by Monsieur Saint Laurent himself for the ready-to-wear Rive Gauche line launched in 1966. The revival logo appeared on one of Slimane’s debut handbags, the Sac de Jour, a seductively spare and modern style reminiscent of the Hermès Birkin, with practical compartment dividers and expandable, pleated sides. The Sac exuded a cool allure, and the brand surged in popularity: Joan Jett and Courtney Love sat front and center at the runway shows, Joni Mitchell and Marilyn Manson starred in ad campaigns, and countless hip-hop artists invoked it in song.

Despite widespread public misconception, Slimane did not do away with the original Mouron logo. It continued to be used with fragrances and accessories such as the Monogram bag. While the style comes in numerous versions—from a ladylike crossbody with chevron quilting to a glamorous gold-tassel clutch—the highlight is the original YSL logo prominently displayed on the front, both a status marker and beautiful design element. With its rock-and-roll edginess, the Monogram has given the storied logo a renewed sense of currency for a new generation. Slimane left the company in 2016, yet Saint Laurent continues to be a cult favorite, bridging the worlds of high fashion, pop culture, and music.

“My YSL bag deserves a seat all of its own.”

—SARAH HOLDEN, *Daily Mail*, July 16, 2007

OPPOSITE: Monogram bag, Yves Saint Laurent, *Marie Claire France*, Spring/Summer, 2014.

PAGE 222: Monogram bag, Yves Saint Laurent, Fall 2014.

PAGE 223: Monogram bag, Yves Saint Laurent, New York City, 2015.



“What makes
a good bag?”

“You gotta have
it or you’ll die!”



—TOM FORD, from *Purse Pizzazz* by Marie Browning, 2005