



Handbag heaven

CAYLA DENGATE reports on the allure of functional fashion items

Seduction is like a velvet blindfold – true desire blacks out the world, so all that exists is you and the object of your affections.

For many women, there is nothing sexier than a tight, yielding surface of leather, punctured by shining metal buckles, lined with ever so slinky silk.

Yes, handbags are alluring creatures.

These seemingly functional fashion items elicit very un-functional desires in many fashionistas. We want them, no matter the cost.

“Women who have experienced the genuine articles will never go back,” Simonne Santana, the fashion director of luxury accessory lending service Love Me and Leave Me, said.

“There’s just something special and unique about soft, buttery leather, supple lining, precise hand-stitching and ornate hardware – oh, so good!”

Love Me and Leave Me is like an accessory library – Santana buys the most desired handbags, shoes, belts and jewellery and rents them out to those who have to have them, but can’t necessarily afford them. This means it is Santana’s job to keep an eye on It Bags worldwide.

An It Bag is not an ordinary handbag; it’s an elaborate, exorbitantly expensive, exclusive offering from one of the most glamorous fashion houses in the world. As *The Devil Wears Prada* so eloquently stated, “it’s a piece of cultural iconography”.

It Bags go in and out of vogue like the stars that wear them. One season, the world’s most powerful women are toting tiny, bling-covered baguette bags and the next, they’re lugging around oversized carry-alls weighted with expensive hardware (bulky buckles and metal details).

Today’s newest trends include the Yves Saint Laurent Downtown – based on the shape of a Chinese takeaway container, and the Puffy bag – Zagliani’s \$7612 creation made from alligator skin injected with botox.

But handbag heaven wasn’t always so high tech.

It all started with the achingly beautiful Hermès Kelly bag. With elegant angles, superior quality and just enough room to fit a lady’s belongings, it captured the hearts of women.

Compare that with the considerably louder Louis Vuitton Murakami bag, released in 2003.

For \$1970, this handbag is dotted with the LV insignia in bright – one might even say lairy – shades of the rainbow.

More recently, hardware has been popular, hanging off the Chloe Paddington bag retailing at \$2300 and the Dior Gaucho tote at \$2400.

Yet even if you have a few thousand dollars to spend, it is not as easy as walking up to the counter and picking the bag.

“These days, there are wait lists for must-have

accessories,” Santana said. “This only creates more hype and more desire to own an item that everyone wants. It is simple economics – supply and demand, therefore, you have to know what the next It Bag is going to be before it hits.”

But do Australians – creators of the laid-back bikini lifestyle –



buy into the It Bag hype? “Definitely. We tend to follow the trends in fashion from Europe and America, particularly their celebrity culture. Celebrity culture and following has had a lot to do with our desire for “it”. We see women such as Kate Moss, Sienna Miller, Chloe Sevigny and Mischa Barton being the powerful style icons dictating the latest must haves and, of course, fashionistas follow,” she said.

While Gucci, Christian Dior, Hermès and Louis Vuitton know what women want from a handbag, Santana knows what we want to pay for it – and it’s not \$8000.

Love Me and Leave Me lends the MARC by Marc Jacobs soft leather holdall for \$79.95 a week or the saddlebag-style Dior Gaucho tote for \$99.95.

“Borrowing gives people access to luxury products when they usually could not afford

the full retail price. This borrowing model gives Australian women access to the hottest fashion for short periods of time and really makes sense not only financially, but it also allows variety in a forever changing industry.”

■ www.lovemeandleaveme.com



The Hermes Kelly bag: where it started



Simonne Santana 'fulfills women's desire for luxury bags without the price tag