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**Designer Envy: Knock It Off!**

**By Gregory Lions**

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CHANEL, VERSACE, DOLCE & GABBANA, VUITTON, GUCCI, DIOR, FENDI, PRADA, COACH, MARC JACOBS et al.

As the holiday shopping season kicks into high gear, these are the brand-name clothing and fashion accessories that women will expect. But with the average cost of these items ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars, how can the average woman afford these at all?

Add to the mix the celebrity endorsements. Paris Hilton wears CHANEL sunglasses, Jessica Simpson totes a VUITTON Speedy bag, Jennifer Lopez wears a DOLCE & GABBANA dress. "What's Jennifer Aniston got on?" "Oooh what's Madonna wearing?" Stars don't have to worry about scrimping and saving to buy high-priced designer items; in most cases they don't even have to pay anything, the companies freely give them the merchandise. Designers know that just having their products displayed by pop icons translates into millions of dollars in increased sales.

The celebrities are having a fashion party to which the average working woman is not invited.

So what is a woman of modest means to do?

Enter the knock-off. The fashion industry has created a need that the replica industry fulfills, designer clothing and accessories within the reach of the middle class budget.

By pricing their wares in the stratosphere, designers are essentially causing the knock-off market to thrive. Women see these must have fashion accessories in magazines like VOGUE and ELLE and want them. But when a handbag costs what the average middle class woman makes in a year, what choice does she have? She can't afford the real thing so she buys a copy, much the same way that an art lover who desires a Picasso will hang a lithograph on his wall.

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Each day on Canal Street in New York City, tour buses deliver scores of consumers who descend like vultures upon the rows of merchants who sell designer look-alikes. At the behest of the above mentioned designer corporations, the NYPD is constantly shutting down sellers and confiscating their merchandise, forcing these vendors underground as they try to keep up with the insatiable demand for replicas. Commenting on the public's maniacal desire to own designer accessories, Tommy Y. a 20 something vendor sagely notes "We make them famous, and then they arrest us"

The real irony comes when the fashion giant out sources the manufacture of their product to the very same company in China that is producing the copies. If the item is made by the same factory, how does one apply the "genuine" rule? Genuine as in "sanctioned by the manufacturer"?

A great deal of the blame must be placed squarely on the shoulders of the designers themselves. How can they justify such outrageous prices? VUITTON has a leather coin purse that sells for \$275! MARC JACOBS has a \$9,995 tote bag! HERMES' bags start at \$5,000 and rise steadily from there. CHANEL

sunglasses average \$300 per pair, non-prescription! Regardless of how loudly these companies cry foul, and hide behind trademark infringement laws, it's all too obvious that they are greedily profiting from their media generated envy.

Gregory Lions is a former financial analyst for Dun & Bradstreet Inc. He is currently the CEO of

## **How To Buy Designer Handbags With Confidence**

**By Kelly Gillis**

It can be difficult buying a designer bag these days. With the proliferation of on line sites selling fakes as authentic and unscrupulous salespeople. With all the designer knock-offs being called "authentic" it's easy to be misguided into spending way too much money for a fake without knowing it.

There is a difference between buying a designer knock-off and knowing it and being told you're buying the actual bag when it's not.

When you see that Chloe python Silverado bag on i offer you are told it is 7 star quality and mirror image up front, that's honest salesmanship. I don't see a problem with knowingly buying a designer knock off. However, watch these knock-offs too. There are many different qualities. Some will sell an inferior quality knock-off bag for much more than it's worth. I saw a seller on i offer who offered the same exact bag for two very different prices. When I questioned her as to why the same exact bag was being sold for two different prices her reply was that she had to "fix" her description. Hmmmmm. I have also noticed nothing in the description of these bags has changed. I wonder how many people have unwittingly paid for the more expensive of the two bags. Investigate before you buy.

Know the old sayings "if it's too good to be true it probably is" and "you get what you pay for" hold true.

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You can be assured that lovely Fendi Spy Bag on that online auction, the one starting at \$249.00, the one with the bright yellow Fendi tag is not the real thing. No one would offer an authentic Fendi Spy Bag for \$249.00.

Who you're purchasing the bag from is of utmost importance. You can be guaranteed that when purchasing that Prada bag from Nieman Marcus or that Gucci from Bergdorf Goodman you're getting an authentic bag, although perhaps not a deal. Check the e-luxury site. Louis Vuitton is one of the actual owners of the e-luxury site. Purchase your Coach bag from their online site. Needless to say authenticity is guaranteed.

Before purchasing a bag on e bay visit their Community Chat Room. There is a wealth of information on how to detect counterfeit bags. Even an e bay "powerseller" can be offering fake bags. When e bay is alerted about a particular seller it may take them some time to investigate. During the time it takes for the investigation the seller could have sold many counterfeit bags. E bay has shut down dealers selling counterfeit bags, but even e bay cannot protect you from all the unscrupulous sellers out there.

Some buyers take their bags to stores like Nieman Marcus or Lord & Taylor to have them authenticated AFTER they purchase them. These department stores will not give a written authentication on a particular bag, but the salesperson will probably tell you whether or not they think the bag is authentic. Don't purchase a bag from anyone without a money back guarantee – ever. If they don't offer a money back guarantee you can be assured the bag isn't authentic. Even if it's the bag of your dreams don't buy it. There will be another one.

Don't be fooled thinking that only authentic bags have holograms and serial numbers. Those that make their money producing knock off bags are on their toes and keep up with any changes made in authentic bags. Even more importantly, when you see a designer bag for sale, do you really know what

the hologram should look like? Do you know if the serial number should be on a separate metal plate or embossed somewhere inside of the bag? Should the name Gucci also be imprinted on the hardware of an authentic bag? I've seen Chloe Silverado bags with and without Chloe embossed on the flap – which is the authentic bag?

The best way to protect yourself when making ANY purchase is to educate yourself.

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