

Purse Passion

Designers go colorful, smaller and practical with fall's handbags

WELCOME TO FALL, WITH ITS DAZZLING ARRAY OF JEWEL TONE HANDBAGS IN MUCH MORE MANAGEABLE SIZES.

Even the latest incarnation of the clutch hints at practicality.

The tried, true and favored black bag is making room for color. "What struck me most about the fall shows was color," says Allyson Holleb, owner of Bess & Loie, a Chicago boutique. "Lots of jewel tones—plums, emerald greens, deep burgundy. Color is coming more into the mainstream."

In addition to big bright jewel tones, expect more earthy hues. Charcoal, navy and taupe tinged grays were all over the fall runways, presented as neutral alternatives to the basic black.

"There are still some metallics, though not as much," says Holleb. "More pewter and bronze as opposed to the foil bright silver." Additionally, look for metallic versions of the season's jewel tones as well.

Fall may be all about colors, but this season it's more muted than the riotous brights of spring and summer. This makes color much more versatile.

"It's color, but more neutral," Holleb says. "The (new) rules are, there are no rules." Try a berry hued bag with black or browns, while earthy taupe, grays and toffee browns go with everything and "really pop against black," she says.

Shapes are changing, as well. Gone are the slouchy carefree styles, replaced by more structured bags. "The 'hobo chic' look is giving way to the framed bag," says Kelly Cook, owner and editor of Bag Snob (bagsnob.com). Several designers showed a variation of the two styles, incorporating framed tops with a looser, more billowy bottom.

"Debi Kroell did a version of this that folds over and balloons out," says Cook. "Lanvin did a version (as well) and is another designer to look for at the top of the heap when it comes to this design."

"Shapes are more utilitarian," says Lisa Kingsley, designer. Women are gravitating more toward a single, knock out bag for fall, rather than buying three or more for different occasions.

That great workhorse, the tote, has undergone some changes as well. After several seasons of totes so oversized the chiropractor was kept on speed dial, our most necessary accessory is taking on a new, more back-friendly form.

"Huge oversize bags are totally out," declares Kingsley. "The medium bag is where it's at. People want practical for day; practical and chic for evening. We're going to be in practicality mode."

While still large enough to carry everything we need for day, and sometimes into the evening, the tote isn't the monster of seasons



The Linen Travel bag by Symthson of Bond Street



By Wyeth. Crinkled purple leather makes its mark for fall.



Lisa Kingsley is a relatively new designer who works largely with exotics. Pictured here, her Belden's Doctors Bag in a bone color matte lizard, \$1,850.

past. Functionality and versatility are more present in this fall's handbags than they have been in years.

"I think the large bag got a little out of hand," says handbag designer Julie Lazarus. "Our largest bag can fit a five-year-old child. (We're) still showing it for the next year, but people are starting to go a little bit smaller."

Clutches are getting smaller too. "Last fall, clutches were way oversized and exaggerated," recalls Cook. "This fall, while not tiny, they are still big enough to put wallet, a phone and cosmetics—a manageable size."

Hardware is toned down, too. Much of the dangling charms, locks and trinkets of the past year have fallen away. What little metal there is continues to be in gold, with silver accents staying on the sidelines for now.

"There's less hardware than in the past," confirms Maureen Costello, stylist and owner of Image Launch in Lake Forest, Ill. "It's (perhaps) a symbol we're going to more austere times, back to some level of simplicity."

Fall runway fashions certainly reflect our national conscientiousness, and the trends for the coming season are no exception. The nightly news is grim and the economy equally so. Fashion is often a mirror or reaction to our world, and this fall it just may be a little of both.

"We're being asked to simplify, reduce and reuse," says Costello. "(Fall trends) are an extension of how we're trimming down, going back to the bare essentials."

Overt symbols of luxury, like logos, are also falling out of favor, a trend apparent in designers' fall runway looks. "It's more about the design now than just the logo," says Bag Snob's Cook. "Even Louis Vuitton is doing bags that are about the style and shape, rather than just a bucket bag with a logo on it. Stay away from logos and look for design."

"Everyone is looking for something that's different, that will stand out in the crowd," says Lazarus. "Differentiate through color or fabrication."

This is most true on the high end, where designers are experimenting with new materials.

Bottega Veneta, known for its woven leather looks, is doing bags in buttery soft, smooth calfskin with a crocodile trim and a large hobo-style bag in a cross between chocolate and grey with a taupe-like trim, according to Cook. Other designers are using intricately woven, distressed or textured leathers.

"Textured is a point of differentiation," says Lazarus. Distressed leathers, cracked and crinkled patent leather, anything with a crumbled, weathered look are hot for fall. Even iconic bags are being reinterpreted in these new materials, including a classic Chanel flat bag shown for fall.

Floral appliqués are also popular—a nod, perhaps, to "Sex and the City" and Carrie Bradshaw's ongoing affair with the fabric flower. The flower found its way onto Valentino's fall collection, and Oscar de la Renta did a version in leather that pins on to either a bag or coat.



Jewel tones of all hues are hot for fall. Bag by Julie Lazarus.



The Max Morgan tote bag by Julie Lazarus



FIVE BAGS EVERY WOMAN NEEDS

from Kelly Cook of Bagsnob.com

1. **The Essential:** JT Air Satchel
2. **The Travel:** Smythson of Bond Street Linen Travel Bag
3. **The Treasure:** Chanel Classic flap in python
4. **The Evening Clutch:** Mary Norton
5. **The Trend:** Oscar de la Renta, the Goya

The movie, of course, featured bags and shoes including the classic Hermes Kelly bag in green. “The Hermes Lindy bag is really big right now,” says Cook. “It came out last fall but is starting to make its way into everybody’s hands. And it’s readily available—no wait list!”

Perhaps the most desirable bag for fall is one of the super hot exotics. Crocodile, alligator and ostrich skins fashioned into the most fashionable handbags of the season. It’s a great way for women to stand out in a crowd and make a personal statement. Materials this luxurious and costly communicate wealth without the logo. Both established designer and up-and-comers are using exotic materials to great effect.

“A lot of new designers coming out are doing exclusively exotic bags,” says Cook, calling out Nancy Gonzalez’s fall collection. It’s also a great way to acquire a piece in rare and costly materials for much less than those from the big fashion houses.

According to Cook, a medium-sized crocodile bag from Gonzalez runs just \$3,000, compared to one from Bottega Venetta for \$17,000 or Chanel, which will set you back nearly \$30,000.

Buying a bag from a young designer could be an investment in tomorrow’s classic. It’s like discovering a new artist before the crowds catch on. Kingsley launched her handbag line in fall 2007 to complement her growing apparel collec-

tion. Already, her bags are seen on the arms of celebrities such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Angelina Jolie, Madonna and Katie Holmes.

Kingsley initially worked solely in exotics but has a more eco-friendly line arriving this fall. “I’m beginning to incorporate more organic material and less exotics,” she says. “I’m using different fabrics that create an idea of luxury but used in a way that is so intricate and so detailed that it is a luxury item. It doesn’t have to be an exotic skin.”

Lazarus has a vegan line for fall consisting of all man-made materials. Well, man-made in Italy of course. “It’s super hip to be more conscious of the environment,” she says. Green initiatives are everywhere today, including fashion. Kingsley is launching a line of hand-painted bags, and according to Bess & Loie’s Holleb, even nylon is getting more glamorous.

“Stella McCartney started the (vegan) trend a few years ago,” notes Holleb. “There are some great options in nylon now. They’re starting to design them a lot better.”

Whether your choice is exotic or eco-conscious, the hot pick for fall is pretty much the same as every other season. Select a bag that reflects your personality and is of quality materials and craftsmanship.

“Buy the bag that is so beautiful that you’re going to pass it down,” says Kingsley. “The one you’ll use for 20 years and then give to your daughter.” ■