

WEEKEND POST

TIFFANY'S GOT A BRAND NEW BAG

Why the people behind the little blue boxes decided to start selling leather purses

Richard Lambertson has Bergdorf Goodman, Barney's, Gucci and Geoffrey Beene on his design résumé, while John Truex can ring off Carlos Falchi and Calvin Klein. Together they formed Lambertson Truex, their luxury handbag company, in 1998 and flourished until the economic downturn in 2009 forced them into bankruptcy. Enter Tiffany & Co., who promptly snapped up their company and put the pair in charge of their new handbag and leather goods category, which launched last year. It's a colourful array of wallets, silk-satin bags and sumptuous structured leather purses, some with tiger's eye bead clasps, others in printed calf hair or exotic skins (the collection runs from \$395 to \$17,500, with most bags around \$1,000), and all with a discreet wink of the historic jeweller's signature blue hue, be it as a lining or a subtle enamel detail on the clasp.

On a visit to promote the full launch of the Tiffany leather goods collection in Canada, Nathalie Atkinson sat down with the designers to talk about American heritage design, alligator bags and little blue boxes.

Q *There is a bit of everything in the collection — structured, unstructured, day, evening, dressy, casual, tote, crossie —*
Truex We approach design in the sense that it's a full assort-



everyone's doing now. All the things that are happening and popular now are very clean and tasteful and all design-driven. It's not embellishment and just throwing stuff like logos on.

Q *There is still subtle ornamentation, like that new quilted velvet version of the Bracelet bag. What was behind those particular details?*

Truex Walking through the [textile shows], we wanted something very crusy, very holiday, very party, very festive. Then we took that idea of winter in New York City, the big crystal snowflake and created embroidery to go on it.

Q *Are there any specific instances of archival Tiffany inspiration in the bags?*

Lambertson We've been kind of careful not to be too derivative because, well, we've done some things where management has said, "Oh no no, I don't think we could do that." Only because, it's beautiful, but whoever bought the Schlumberger brooch for \$45,000 doesn't want to see a copy of it stuck on a handbag! So we've taken liberties, like the studded [Vivian] bag. You see the note. Or the beaded Bracelet bag handle, that came from the idea of the beaded bracelets that Tiffany sells. They're nod to Tiffany, blown up. And the Camille bag has a bow in Swarovski crystals that actually did come from the archives.

ment, as opposed to coming in and saying here are our three bags in five colours. We can't just be one thing. We don't have a "runway" message. We're not sending coats and jackets and shoes all down a runway. We do need to have a diversity in the collection and I do feel that you can have a structured bag and you're wearing skinny jeans, stiletto heels, a Peretti cuff and an Alala jacket and it's completely modern, or that same bag can be in a classic suit with a sensible suit, that same bag really looks very different. It goes back, to me, to a woman's personal style that gives that bag its flexibility.

Q *Most of the collection, with all the structured, simple shapes and frame handles, seems to linger in a specific period of American fashion, the late 1950s and Camelot era.*

Lambertson That's always been kind of our passion — that period of clean, modern sportswear. America really started sportswear, it didn't exist before. There's a casualness that we've always kept in the collection, and a sporty quality. Our bags, we work a lot on the function — we're not so thrown by the trend or the "inspiration from Morocco" or whatever. We really stick to what services our clients. We've got bags for women to take to the office and we're not embarrassed to have bags that are working bags. Like John said, a little something for everybody and they all have that continuing line of classic, of timeless.

Truex But that's also very fashion-forward. It's funny that you bring up the '50s. To me that was such a modern era. Women took chances and had individual style — it wasn't about a cookie-cutter bag that everyone had, it was about a bag that a woman had, not a group of women. It just translates that way for me, looking at these images, and also the idea of leopard print, which is a big signature of ours.

Lambertson And you can't take something retro and just copy it, because it doesn't fit society today. We have cellphones, or everybody wants a bag that they can put their



computer in...

Truex Yet we're always inspired by details. One of our first bags, in 1998, was inspired by a little pocket for lipstick and a little pocket for a mirror in a vintage purse and obviously, women don't necessarily put lipstick in a pocket any more but the idea of function, that goes back to the 1950s. ... We try to design bags that will accessorize a lot of different looks and nothing's more thrilling, really, when you see a Marc Jacobs runway and he's doing polka-dots and his colours are burgundy and pesto, and our colours for fall are burgundy and pesto. We do have perfect bags that will go and that's perfect, because women like to mix stories.

Q *With your own company in the late 1990s it was the height of logos and branding, of everyone knowing what kind of bag you were carrying, and yet —*

Truex We were the complete opposites!

Lambertson And that's what

It was a small diamond brooch done in the 1920s. It comes directly from the archives but far back enough that it's not a woman saying, "That's my brooch!" Even her grandchildren are dead already!

Q *I've heard you say that you think women buy themselves a bag before they'll buy themselves jewellery.*

Truex Women like to receive jewellery as gifts, there is something very personal about it. But I think with bag, it's the flipside of personal in the sense that she has to function with it.

Q *Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen's luxury label The Row's generated a lot of media heat last week after they boasted about their \$29,000 crocodile backpack selling out. The Tiffany leather collection includes a \$17,000 alligator satchel. Why do you think that some luxury goods, like that backpack, elicit such shock and to some degree, outrage but others, like Kim Kardashian's whopping diamond engagement ring, don't?*

Lambertson That's a very good question. **Truex** In jewellery there's the specialness of the material, the uniqueness of the stone or the purity of the gold and it's no different about the specialness of the leather.

Lambertson I think it's exactly what's going on with Wall Street and marching in front of Rupert Murdoch's. It's taking a shot at a certain segment of the population. Anybody who can afford a \$39,000 backpack in crocodile is in the 2% of the population, if that. So it's taking a shot at rich people in general, not the fact that it's alligator vs. a diamond. But it's also something that's considered ordinary, so why not buy one at Target for \$29.99? ... We used to have a customer in Chicago who would come in every season with her personal shopper and her fur coats and we would make her alligator bags to match each one. There are people who have alligator-covered seats in their jets, you just don't hear about it. It sounds ridiculous, but it's no different than Kim Kardashian's diamond.

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