

From top: Tiffany & Co. Camille clutch (\$1,450); Vivian beaded leather clutch (\$1,200); Bracelet bag in burgundy (\$1,200); tiffany.ca

"There are a few designs that give a nod to the Tiffany jewellery collections. The silver-bead collection inspired the Bracelet bag and the Vivian clutch, and the Camille satin clutch has a brooch taken from an old Tiffany design that we have reproduced using Austrian crystals."  
— Richard Lambertson



## BLUE BOX

*Turns out, DIAMONDS aren't a girl's only best friend. TIFFANY & CO. has just the cure for anyone with the handbag blues.* TEXT: NOREEN FLANAGAN



Richard Lambertson (left) and John Truex

“We really love when a woman walks into the room and everyone notices her — not the bag. Our design aesthetic is about complementing the woman.”

— John Truex

Richard Lambertson has a few pet peeves when it comes to women and their handbags. Without knowing it, I committed one of these transgressions within moments of meeting him. (More on that later.) I was in New York at Tiffany & Co.'s Fifth Avenue store to chat with Lambertson and John Truex about their new accessories line, which launches in Canadian stores this fall. I was ushered into the showroom, where I was relieved to set down my generously large oyster-pink leather Rabeanco bag. It was, as usual, crammed to capacity. I bought it in Hong Kong several years ago, and it has become my go-to bag when I want to be prepared for absolutely everything.

Although both designers are new to Tiffany & Co., the name “Lambertson Truex” is well known to handbag collectors who embraced their eponymous line when it launched in 1998.

The pair met while Truex was the director of design and sourcing for Calvin Klein and Lambertson was senior vice-president and creative director at Bergdorf Goodman (following stints at Gucci and Geoffrey Beene).

“We were both in great positions in our careers, but we wanted to go to the next step,” recalls Truex. “There was also a void in the luxury market,” adds Lambertson. “It was before everyone who had ever designed a T-shirt had an accessories collection. It was also during logo mania, so we entered the market with subtle, well-designed bags.”

Even today, when Lambertson and Truex make personal appearances at Tiffany & Co. stores, women will show up carrying their original LT bags from 10 years ago. “They tell us that they are happy we’re back, and so are we,” says Lambertson.

Following the downturn in the economy, Lambertson and Truex entered bankruptcy court; shortly after, in 2009, Tiffany & Co. bought the company and made them design directors. They spent >

Clockwise, from top left: Tiffany & Co. French wallet (\$465); coin purse (\$90); City clutch (\$600); zip card (\$115); zip continental wallet (\$480); tiffany.ca

"We use Tiffany's signature colour as a logo. Sometimes it's on the outside, but other times it's in the interior or a tiny spot of blue enamel on the hardware."

—Richard Lambertson

the next 12 months working on the Tiffany Leather Collection, which launched in September 2010 in select markets.

It was an easy design marriage, as Lambertson and Truex are known for their sophisticated, subtle and timeless design sensibilities. But don't call it classic: In past interviews, Lambertson wasn't fond of the term because, without a broader context or explanation, it sounds old-fashioned. "It can also mean boring, and our designs are far from ordinary," adds Truex. "If you look at a Rothko, for example, you step back and see shades of colour, but as you get closer, you see even more shades—you notice how expressive the colour is and how the lines merge from light to dark. You have to take time to discover it."

While Truex is quick to note that he's not comparing their work with Rothko's, he says that both he and Lambertson are inspired by painting, photography and sculpture. It influences their work, but an even greater influence is the women in their lives—starting with their mothers. "My mom wasn't a handbag collector," says Truex, "but back in the '60s, even if you went to the grocery store, you dressed up—you wore white gloves and always carried a purse." Lambertson's mother is in her 80s and, to this day, changes her handbag at least twice a week. "I think

that's pretty cool for someone who doesn't really have a purpose for doing that," he says. "She doesn't have a big social life, but recently I had to clean her apartment because of a flood and she still had every one of our handbags. They were stuffed with tissue paper, placed in their flannel bags and lined up like little soldiers."

Another woman whom Truex describes as an "inspirational force" is Ellen Carey. She was raised on a dairy farm outside of Montreal but moved to New York to work at Barneys, where she met Lambertson—who was the store's accessories buyer at the time—during the '80s. Today, she showcases new designers in her Seedhouse showroom. "Ellen is very chic and stylish," says Truex. "She'll pair something vintage with something from Lanvin's recent collection and one of our bags. She's our number one fan—after our mothers, of course!"

But they don't only turn to women they know for advice; women at events aren't shy about opening their bags and telling them what works and what doesn't. It's a rare glimpse into a woman's private space, so it's not surprising that both men say they've acquired some insight into the female psyche. "Women cart around everything they own—it's like they think they'll be abandoned," says Truex, laughing.

Lambertson says that it was always his dream to go on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* to do a Dr. Phil-like segment on women and their handbags. "I would have asked some audience members to empty their bags and then have them identify what they *really* need—I can only imagine what would have come out!" he says. "I love the glam days, when all that was required was a dainty clutch with a top handle. One of my pet peeves is when women carry bags that are too big—they just look like pack mules! The bag does everything but drive them to the airport."

Guilty as charged. On that note, I actually do have to get to the airport. Hurricane Irene is making her way to New York and there's nothing in my giant purse that can protect me from her wrath. □

From top: Tiffany & Co. Beatrice top handle in crocodile (\$21,200); Avenue tote (\$1,100); tiffany.ca. (Crocodile and ostrich bags are not available in Canada.)