



Handbag/Purse

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History of handbags

Handbags existed ever since men had something valuable to carry. They evolved with fashion and social norms. It also became an accessory that tells the story of women's independence and liberation.

Handbags throughout History



Handbags men carried...



- From the days of Ancient Egypt to the late 1600s, it was men who primarily carried bags. Even the word "handbag," which became popular around 1900, originally referred to a man's travel bag.
- For much of history, bags served purely practical purposes. Early humans crafted them from animal skin and plant fibers to transport tools for hunting and gathering.
- It was in the Middle Ages when bags first became a fashion accessory. Bags became a form of self-expression and portable canvases showing the bag maker's craftsmanship. Men of high social status showed off their wealth with a luxurious purse tied to their waist.

Renaissance Period

During the Renaissance in Italy, messengers used durable, tooled leather bags to transport documents and money between banks. Around 1497, Leonardo da Vinci ventured briefly into fashion, sketching an intricate design for a leather bag. In 2012, Leonardo's vision was brought to life.

Yet Leonardo's design wasn't meant for women. At the time, men typically kept their money in pouches made of cloth or leather, fastened to their belts. Women, meanwhile, carried drawstring purses, both as a fashion statement and a practical means of holding small personal items. It was common for grooms to gift embroidered bags to brides, often adorned with love stories.



16th & 17th century

Changes in fashion led women to wear their pouches under their skirts, eventually inspiring the creation of pockets. Men's fashion evolved too, with the invention of pockets around 1670, men no longer needed pouches and instead used smaller pouches that later became wallets. Meanwhile, lower classes and travelers used larger, practical crossbody bags, known as sacks, for carrying everyday items.

18th century

Fashion shifted again. Women began wearing slimmer dresses that couldn't hide the pouches. This led to the reinvention of the purse: women started carrying slender handbags with wrist straps, known as reticules.

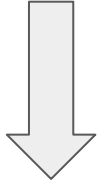


Handbags as a sign of women's liberation

Bags not only reflected the wearer's social status and identity but also indicated their freedom to move within society. In earlier times, wealthy men were the primary users of bags, as they were more likely to travel outside the home, while women, largely confined indoors, had little need for them. By the late 19th century, with the rise of public train travel, women began to socialize and travel more independently. The purse emerged as a true symbol of female emancipation. In addition to larger luggage handled by porters, women required smaller bags to carry essentials like tickets, documents, and money. Designers like Louis Vuitton responded by creating practical, compact bags — essentially miniature suitcases with sturdy handles, compartments, and snap closures.



1920s



1940s: war time innovation



1950s: post war luxury

Handbags again became a symbol for wealth, the iconic chanel and hermes bags were popularize.



1980s



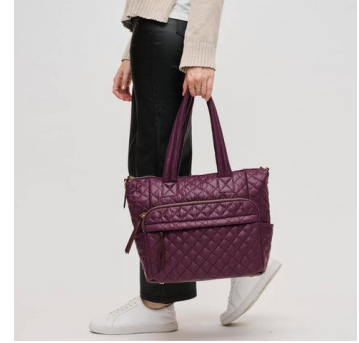
1990s

avored a more minimalistic design: “Less is more.”



2000s

shifted to more casual
and environmentally sustainable



Citations

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