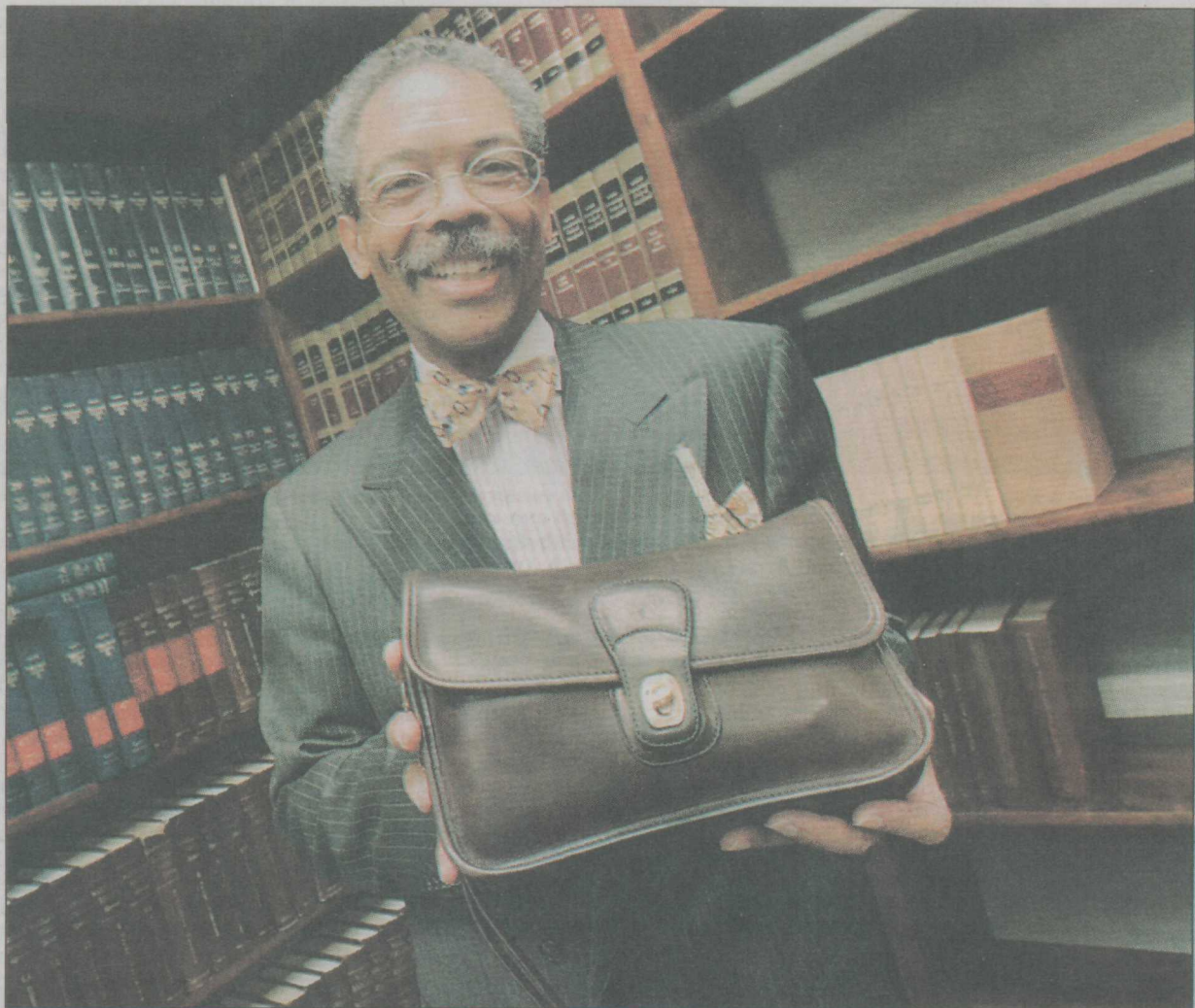


# TODAY

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JED KIRSCHBAUM: SUN STAFF

"You'll not see me without my purse," says Robert M. Bell, chief judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals.

## HE WEARS IT WELL

More and more men are bagging the stereotype and carrying purses.

By TANIKA WHITE  
SUN STAFF

Some call it the man bag. Others call it a murse. As proof that he was on fashion's cutting edge, Jerry Seinfeld tried to call it a "European carry-all," but in the end, he had to admit the truth.

It's a purse.

A man purse.

Whatever you call it, if a man carries one, he's bound to raise an eyebrow or two.

That's why, for so long, it's taken a brave, brave man to proudly walk around with a trendy tote on his shoulder, a fashionable clutch in his hand, or a slick leather satchel strapped across his body.

Robert M. Bell, chief judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals, carries



These field bags by Jack Spade are examples of what men are carrying.

several different ones — a Coach bag, a Bruno Magli — and has for more than 20 years. And none of this "man bag" business for him. His Honor just calls them purses.

"I've been carrying the thing so long, it's a part of me," Bell says. "You'll not see me without my purse."

And lately, more and more men are joining the ranks — decrying the widespread notion that carrying a handbag makes a man less of a man.

These fashion-forward men say there's no reason they should be forced to carry their belongings in overstuffed pants or coat pockets. It's just easier to toss your cell phone, PDA, wallet and keys into a handy bag, throw it over your shoulder and go, they say. And it looks better, too.

"My friends laugh at me, but I'm sorry, I don't want my cell phone and my Blackberry in my jeans. It looks crazy," says [See Purse, 8D]



# Bagging the stereotype, carrying a purse

[Purse, from Page 1D]

Emil Wilbekin, former editor in chief of *Vibe* magazine, and now vice president of brand development for Marc Ecko menswear in New York.

Wilbekin said he owns at least 20 different man bags in various shapes and sizes, and by many high-end designers, such as Gucci, Prada and Louis Vuitton.

"Why I love man bags is because I can carry my journal, my BlackBerry, notes, magazines, newspaper, camera, granola bars. ... Everything I need for a day is all in one very stylish and chic carrying case," he says. "The man bag is the modern-day briefcase. Our dads carried briefcases. We carry man bags."

Does just any old carry-all qualify as a man bag? Experts say no.

## The real deal

To be truly called a man purse, the bag can't be placed in a briefcase, backpack, gym bag, laptop carrier or overnight bag category. Some of the growing-in-popularity messenger bags count, but generally, a man bag is a bit smaller than a messenger bag. A man can carry it in his hand, dangle it on his wrist, strap it to his belt, or hook it over his shoulder.

And here's the telltale sign: A man bag is toted around even — or in some cases, mainly — during non-work hours. At night and on weekends. To parties,

bars, sporting events. Anywhere a woman would carry her trusty pocketbook.

"We're seeing that designers are creating more of these types of smaller bags for the weekend for men," says Andrew J. Blecher, a spokesman for Saks Fifth Avenue in Chevy Chase, and proud owner of three man bags.

Indeed, this spring, several menswear's designers — including Gucci, Roberto Cavalli, Prada, Paul Smith, Miu Miu and John Varvatos — showed versions of the man purse on the runways.

"It goes hand-in-hand with the idea of the metrosexual — the guy who's well-dressed, who's well-groomed, who knows what it means to take care of himself," Blecher says.

These days, men wear jewelry and get manicures. They're using hair products, and scrubbing their faces with Clinique exfoliator.

"The lines between what's feminine and what's masculine have really blurred over the last five years," says Calie Shackelford, co-owner of Love Handles, a fashion bag company she says has been getting major kudos from men. "Men have just gotten a lot funkier and a lot more fun, and they take a lot more risks. I think it's really become not only practical, but sort of a fashion statement for them. I think it shows a sort of security in their manhood. It doesn't in-

timidate them just because traditionally they've been called purses."

As the baggy hip-hop look for men is going the way of Vanilla Ice, and men's fashions are becoming more tailored, the man bag has become an attractive alternative to bulging side pockets.

"What we've noticed is that now that clothing is beginning to fit a little bit more snugly, it's much more challenging for a man to put his wallet and everything he's carrying into his trousers pocket and be comfortable," says Marc Sklar, president of the upscale Gian Marco Menswear on South Charles Street. "We've seen several very confident individuals carrying such a bag."

In fact, American men are slow to catch on to the trend, says John Massey, Gian Marco's executive vice-president.

"In Europe, everybody carries a bag. All the men carry bags," Massey says. "In Italy, all the men have a shoulder bag or a pocketbook, clutch-type bag. It's just being seen more and more here now."

If it's so practical, better-looking, and it's a powerful, masculine fashion statement, then why is the man purse just now becoming mainstream? Sorta.

"I think the manly men are a little bit nervous about being seen as girlie men," says Cordila Jochim, founder and designer of Thickskin, a New York-based

company that specializes in bags for men.

Old-fashioned gender rules die hard.

In one fifth-season *Friends* episode, when Rachel persuades Joey to carry a "man's bag," he suffers all sorts of taunts from the other friends. Ross even called Joey the "anti-man."

## Handbag hang-ups

Jochim says she understands the hang-up many men feel about carrying a handbag. That's why her man purses are "cool, tough-looking" bags, many made with hyper-masculine details.

Hard-rocker Tommy Lee even carries one of her specialty man bags, Jochim says. It has camouflage on the inner flap.

"We still want our men to be men," she says. "We don't want anything to be fluffy and light. We definitely want them to be rugged."

So are man purses only for the rock or rap star, the fashion-forward, the New Yorker, or the metrosexual?

Not at all, fans of the bags say. Jayme H. Simones is a self-proclaimed regular guy — a 37-year-old husband, father and public relations executive in a firm in quiet Hillsborough, N.H. — and he adores his clutch-style man purse.

It dangles on his wrist, out of his way when he's reaching for things. It's useful to carry everything he needs, including pens,

passports and airplane tickets.

"It's a very useful thing to have," Simones says. "It's nothing like my wife's purse that weighs about 60 pounds and things seem to disappear into it."

But like a woman's purse, men have discovered that the man bag does have drawbacks that take some getting used to.

They're easily forgotten, some men say, left behind in cabs or at restaurants.

If you have more than one man purse, and switch them often to match outfits, it's easy to leave something crucial — like lip balm or business cards — in the other bag.

"There's new etiquette that goes along with the man bag that men don't know yet," Wilbekin says. "When you have a drink in one hand and a clutch in the other, and you have to shake someone's hand, what do you do? And I just learned you're not supposed to put your bag on the floor."

And take heed, guys, some women give men with man purses a hard time.

"I think other men understand that it's not necessarily a gay thing, and it's not necessarily a metrosexual thing. It's modern. And it's part of how we live now. It's part of the whole modern man sensibility," Wilbekin says.

Or maybe it's just that purses were women's domain for so long, they're just not ready to

## Tips

What Not to Do with Your Man Purse, according to Matt Singer, art director for Jack Spade, a men's accessories company.

**1** Don't carry it in the crook of your elbow, like a Grandma clutch bag.

"I don't care if you're juggling meat cleavers," Singer says. "Just put the bag down instead."

**2** Never, ever dangle it on your wrist with your palm facing up.

**3** If Donna Summer comes on the radio while you're carrying your man bag, "pretend like you don't know the lyrics," Singer says.

**4** Keep these no-no items away from your man purse:

- Hello Kitty lighter
- Puffy stickers of kittens
- Capri cigarettes
- Makeup

**5** And, "If you have to have an emery board in there," Singer said, "get one on a Swiss army knife."

Tanika White

give them up to men.

They're already using our moisturizer.

"I think maybe we're a little threatened that they're gonna have nicer bags than we do," Jochim says. "I think it might be a little bit of purse envy."