

Handbags for Humans — and Dogs

About-town totes emulate women's purses in form, function, and style.

Wendy Bedwell-Wilson

Courtesy of Oh Henry Pet tote designers will soon unveil pieces that truly cross the line that divides pet carriers and purses for people. Frontrunners and trendsetters marry pragmatism and style in their dog-purse creations, bringing together functional pieces with human-trend flair.

"Since the dogs are getting smaller, people are looking to find smaller bags, in addition to space, to store personal and pet belongings," says Janet Lee, president and designer for Petote LLC. "Shapes that are more purse-like and lightweight are more in demand."

For smaller dogs, bulky pet carriers have given way to trendy pieces that mirror the human market. The look resembles a fashion accessory rather than a pet crate, says Christina Laird, co-owner and designer for Canini Inc.

"We want people to not see that it's a carrier," she says. "We want them to see it as a fashion accessory for their humans first, and then notice the mesh on the side and say, 'Hey, that's a dog carrier. Pretty cool.' There are some that do look very utility. And they function well, but they don't have the look to it. So we're looking for both form and function."

High-end designers create collections of human purses and bags — many of which now include matching carriers and accessories for miniature pets.

Donald J Pliner, a shoe, bag and accessory designer based in New York, creates a line of airline carriers, day bags, collars, harnesses, leads and jackets — all coordinating — inspired by his pup, Baby Doll.

"Donald translates whatever he's doing to men's and women's shoes and handbags to dog wear," says Cory Papunen, director of Friends of Baby Doll Pliner.

Haute bag couture

Courtesy of A Pet's World Totes for pocket-size pups come in bold prints, rich tapestries and even soft velvet. Inside, cushy faux fur, fleece and sheepskin linings are removable or reversible for when the weather heats up.

"The faux fur bottoms are more comfortable for the pet," Laird says. "And some can also be reversed to the other side with the coordinating fabric on it, so it's very functional."

"The quality of the material is important," Laird says. "The bags that stand out are the ones that use more than one color or texture. It's all about detail, contrast stitching, different embossing on the leathers — like every single step of the bag was well thought out."

Accessories, accoutrements and embellishments, such as jewel-encrusted or bone-shaped zipper pulls and shiny hardware, continue to add bling to totes. "Detail in the hardware and the design will complement the style and shape of the carrier," Lee says. "The hardware finish that we are seeing this fall is brass, satin, dark mahogany wood and pewter finishes. There will be chains, padlocks, tassels, antique-like charms and detailed pockets."

The little extras make the difference, Laird says. "More and more bags are offering people-friendly accessories, such as cell phone cases, poop bag pockets and key chains," she says. "Charms and crystal initials are being added to the bags as well."

Most importantly, however, these totes have to function for their little passengers, says Deann Zampelli, president and designer at PuchiBag Inc. "There are really only so many things you can do with dog carriers," she says. "The primary goal should be for the safety and comfort of the animal."

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