

Fake Fashion, Who Can Tell The Difference?



We know that high fashion can cost a pretty penny. Many are willing to buy the trendiest fashion items, no questions asked. Others want to wear or accessorize the best but don't want to pay top dollar. But they are willing to pay for a fake or imitation items such as a Goyard handbag.

"LOOK sharp!" Waving a passer-by to his cart at Madison Avenue and 67th Street, Omar, the vendor, pointed to the logo on one of his most popular items, a canvas tote bag patterned in a familiar-looking interlocking chevron. "This one is the wrong writing," he murmured.

The correct "writing," he went on expertly, appears only on his premium fake: a copy of the Goyard Saint Louis carryall, which in recent months has supplanted styles by Vuitton and Fendi as a totem of blue-blood chic. In the hierarchy of knockoffs, most of Omar's bags are credible impostors. Like the patrician originals, which are sold in Manhattan only at Barneys New York and Bergdorf Goodman, they display the Goyard logo and Paris address discreetly on their sides.

Simone Fee, an interior designer in New York, studied the cream of the fakes, intending to pick one up as a holiday gift for her mother. The asking price, though, stopped her dead. A steal at \$135, compared with around \$1,000 for the original, it was steep just the same. Even for this Cadillac of counterfeits, "that price is a bit silly," Ms. Fee said, adding, witheringly, "Everyone in New York is walking around with one of these."

She may have been stretching a point. But to judge by the dozens of Goyard sightings last week at the corner of

Lexington and 59th Street alone, the mock Goyard in aggressively sunny colors like corn yellow, tangerine and Bazooka pink is the most coveted knockoff of the season. If it is not as swell as the original, which can be personalized with the buyer's monogram and colorful stripes, it is this year's faux-status holiday gift of choice to those buying them in multiples for loved ones and friends.

"I think people get a kick out of copies," said Roseann Hirsch, a book packager in Manhattan. "It's a fun present even if you don't use it as a serious bag."

Ms. Hirsch, who owns an authentic Goyard and some pricey imitations, considers herself a connoisseur of fakes, having purchased faux Hermès bags in Beijing, along with a perfectly convincing Vuitton knockoff priced at \$6.99. Like others of her style-smart friends, she is disinclined to make snobbish distinctions.

"I've discovered that if something costs \$50 or it costs \$1,000, my interest in it is similar," she said. As a fashion trophy, "the item has a shelf life in my mind; once it runs its life span, I don't want to see it again."

Peri Wolfman, a writer and product designer, is considering buying a top-of-the-line fake Goyard for her daughter-in-law. "It could make a good stocking stuffer," she mused, and provide "a little fashion thrill."

"But you have to get the good copy," Ms. Wolfman stipulated, not those shoddy pretenders now bargain priced at \$40 that are popping up around Midtown. The discerning are quick to spot the replicas' vinyl handles and piping, which are far less pliable than Goyard's signature luggage leather and the leather trim on the best of the quality knockoffs.

At lunch with friends not long ago, she compared her classy counterfeit with their originals. "We looked at the details, the lining, the stitching," she recalled. "I promise you, you

couldn't tell the difference."

Such assertions do not amuse Maison Goyard, the 144-year-old Parisian luggage maker that prides itself on pedigree. "Goyard is fully committed to its brand protection," said Charlotte Letard, a company spokeswoman. She added that the company is addressing the issue of street vendors through targeted civil seizure orders, and is working closely with Customs to seize counterfeit merchandise.

A decade ago, Jean Michel Signoles, a fashion entrepreneur, bought the somewhat stodgy Goyard brand from descendants of the founders, dusted it off and reissued the classic bags in spiffy new colors. The gambit worked, attracting consumers on the prowl for the next big status sign. To retain an aura of hauteur – reinforced on the company's Web site by promotional copy that reads, "Each detail of fabrication whispers exclusivity" – Goyard sells luggage, handbags, wallets, agendas and canvas-rimmed doggie bowls in only 12 stores around the world.

For all the best efforts of law enforcement to stem the billion-dollar world counterfeit trade (in the United States, a first-time counterfeiter can face up to 10 years in prison and \$2 million in fines), fake Goyards continue to proliferate.

Only last spring, "You really had to look for a good copy," Ms. Wolfman said. Now trophy hunters are unearthing high-price knockoffs at stalls on the Upper East Side – especially along Madison Avenue between 65th and 75th Street.

Earlier this month, Ben Little, a visitor from London, scoured the Goyard shop at Barneys for a suitable bag for his girlfriend. Informed by a shopper that passable copies could be found only a few blocks up the street, Mr. Little inquired, "Where did you say, 67th Street?"

Then he turned to his friend and said playfully, "That's where

I'm going to get your gift."

Article written by Hiroko Masuiki for The New York Times [Full Story](#)