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# The bags that are designed not to be snatched

by PATRICK SAWER

**T**HIS IS the brave new world of crime prevention — and it looks as if it has come straight from the catwalk or the pages of a fashionable design magazine. Some of the brightest design talents in London have turned their skills to thwarting the capital's army of pickpockets so you can enjoy an evening out without losing your purse, your wallet or your cool.

Anti-slash webbing, mesh material and wire cables have been employed by students and teachers at Central St Martin's College of Art to create bags even the most determined "dipper" would find it

hard to penetrate. These go on display at the Design Museum today as part of a project to encourage designers to devise simple ways of foiling street criminals.

St Martin's product design tutor Jackie Piper said: "Crime prevention is not regarded as sexy but the reality is that we all carry bags and sit in pubs and restaurants where we risk being robbed.

"Designing out crime has become essential and we've shown it can still be stylish, innovative and contemporary.

"We hope the project will encourage other young designers to address crime in their work." The Design Against Crime exhibition includes:

- A handbag covered in zips to confuse pickpockets.
- A rucksack that turns into a hood and cloak concealing the valuables stored inside.
- A shoulder bag with the zipper on the inside so the opening is not visible.
- A design for an airbag concealed inside a laptop computer bag that explodes when forced open (MI5 agents take note).

One bag even contains a transparent cover showing a primed mouse trap beneath with the slogan "try me if you dare".

While some of the designs use sophisticated techniques, even incorporating bullet and shrapnel proof materials, others are deliberately low-tech.

Carole Collet, course director in MA design, covered her shoulder bag in a rough mix of waste synthetic materials designed to snare a knife blade.

Ms Piper devised a solution for women — who account for 85 per cent of pickpocketing victims — to prevent their handbags being stolen from beneath their chair in a pub or restaurant.

She cut a slot into a chair into which to slip the bag strap. The owner forms a "lock" by sitting on top of the strap. Another simple idea was a bag hooked on a chair leg. These features are now being put on trial by Pizza Express and Maxwell's in Covent Garden, where in 1997 £22 million worth of bags and their contents were stolen in only three streets.

"Existing chairs can be easily and cheaply modified to incorporate these ideas and they don't ruin the



Designs on beating crime: Carole Collet's anti-slash bag, above; Jackie Piper's anti-snatch chair, right; and Sharon Baurley's crime-proof clothing, left

overall appearance of the venue," said Ms Piper. The ideas on show have been compiled on a CD-Rom by St Martin's research fellow Dr Lorraine Gamman, who co-ordinated the project. She said: "We received advice from the police and materials experts. They had real nous about the way dippers and snatchers work and how you could beat them. Simple, practical ideas were the key for a lot of these designs."

The police welcomed the innovations in the battle against crime. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens said: "Crime reduction is not solely the responsibility of the police. Manufacturers and businesses can play a very significant part in reducing opportunities for criminals by designing out crime."

● The Design Against Crime exhibition runs until Sunday 21 January at the Design Museum in Shad Thames, SE1



Pictures: ALEX LENTATI

