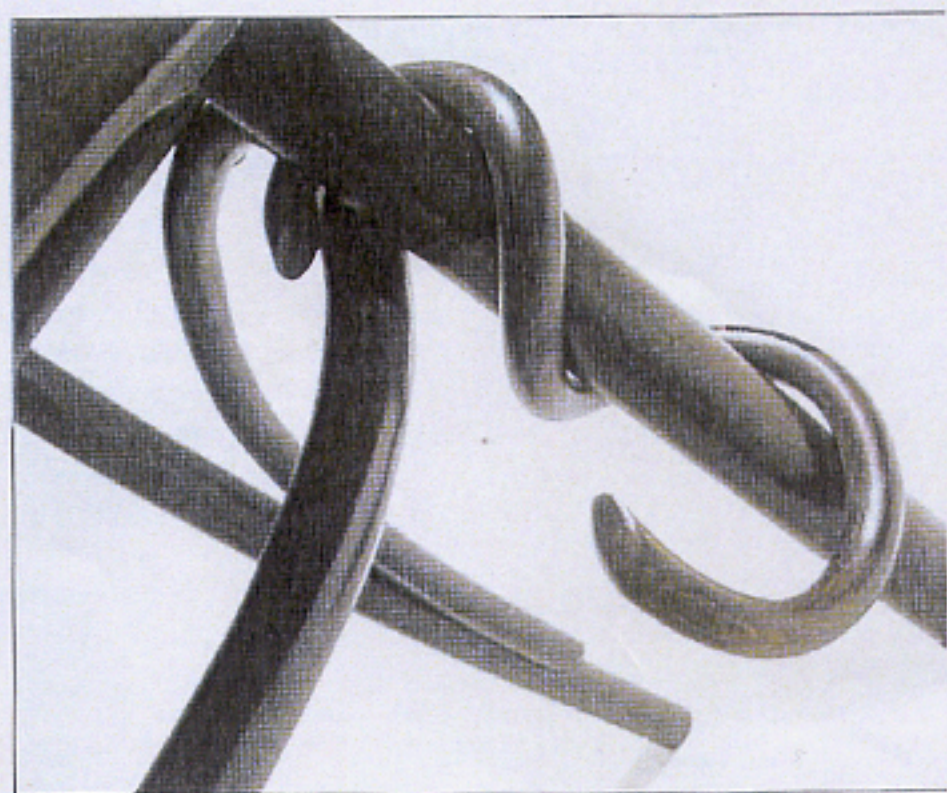


anti-crime design

crime fighters



Designers have been helping bars, cafes and restaurants outsmart bag thieves with a few simple but ingenious ideas. Catherine Slocock reports

The Twist is one the designs featured in an exhibition of anti-crime creations



It's a scenario that's all too familiar. You're in a pub with friends. The place is packed and people are jostling past you all evening. When you get up to leave and reach for your bag or your wallet, you get a nasty surprise: they're nowhere to be seen. Your heart sinking, you realise you have just become another crime statistic.

This is precisely the kind of situation Central St Martin's College of Art & Design senior research fellow Dr Lorraine Gammon has been pondering in recent months. Having liaised closely with both the Metropolitan Police and venue operators, Gammon has become something of an expert on the various techniques that criminals use to relieve unsuspecting victims of their possessions.

Now Gammon's task is to pass this knowledge on and convince designers to turn their creative powers to the battle against crime. It's a mission which she admits has required considerable imagination.

"It's been about looking at ways of actually inspiring designers to be interested in it, because they weren't at first," she says. "But what I'm finding is they end up quite enjoying it, because it's about outsmarting the thief."

Gammon's efforts have borne fruit so far in the form of a touring exhibition of anti-crime creations from designers at St Martin's, plus the publication of a CD-ROM on the same subject. Both projects are funded by the Design Council's Design Against Crime initiative, a part of the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme.

The work of one contributor to the exhibition, designer Jackie Piper, has already attracted serious interest from restaurateurs and from one well known fast food chain in particular. Taking ▶

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the UK's top five best-selling restaurant/cafe chairs as her starting point, Piper has devised hooks, clips and grooves which remain true to the design of the chairs, while providing a secure point to which customers can tether their bags.

One of the main attractions of Piper's customisations, which are currently being tested in branches of Pizza Express and Maxwells, is the ease with which they can be retrospectively fitted into operator's existing arrangements. "After doing research I realised most cafes and restaurants have made a huge investment in furniture already. Plus, for a lot of restaurants such as Pizza Express, the chair they use is part of their brand identity," she explains.

Another advantage of Piper's adaptations is their subtlety. "The ambience in a restaurant is delicate," Piper says. "Nobody wants to sit down and feel like they are eating in a prison or see things that make them think, 'maybe this restaurant's got a problem with crime'."

This subtle kind of design approach is likely to be a focus of the next anti-crime design project Gammon and others at St Martin's plan to tackle. Entitled 'Smart Anti-theft Furniture and Fittings for Restaurant Interiors', and currently still in an early development stage, the project will explore questions such as how CCTV cameras can be blended seamlessly into a venue's fittings.

Although an understated approach to crime prevention may best match the requirements of some venues, other operators take the line that the more an environment actively draws attention to the need for vigilance, the better. One such firm is Internet cafe chain EasyEverything. The group recently installed metal grilles underneath facing tables in order to prevent thieves from reaching under the tables.

This strategy was reinforced with the distribution of notices throughout the stores, reminding customers to keep an eye on possessions.

"We've got 5,000 people going through each of our London stores per day, and I think they are probably lulled into a greater sense of security than they should be," says EasyGroup director of corporate affairs James Rothnie. "EasyEverything is as public a place as the Tube, but people on the Tube always make pretty sure they know where their handbag or suitcase is."

Bass Leisure Retail adopts a similarly bold stance on security issues. For example in its All-Bar-One chain, in addition to providing hooks on furniture for securing bag straps and making heavy use of CCTV, notices are placed in prominent positions reminding people to be vigilant. Bass Leisure Retail director Bob Cartwright is matter of fact about the need for

such obtrusive measures. "I think people do recognise that unfortunately there are professional thieves out there and they tend to work crowded areas," he says.

Whether crime is tackled through chair hooks or metal grilles, the need for intelligent design in the war against crime is the over-riding message of a policy paper launched by the Design Council in March. Written by leading criminologist Professor Ken Pease, *Cracking Crime Through Design* urges everybody, from policy makers and designers to consumers, to adopt a more proactive approach to crime reduction.

"If things were designed to make crime more difficult," he writes, "and the detection of its perpetrators easier, we would reduce crime to those behaviours where ingenuity is necessary, where only those committed to searching out crime opportunities succeeded." ●

Security conscious design tips

Your lighting should strike a balance between creating a good ambience and offering clear views for staff.

Natural surveillance is important on the entire premises. Fishbowl wall-mounted mirrors may be useful in achieving this.

In pubs and bars, counter design should be carefully considered. A minimum width of 28 inches will prevent customers helping themselves and will protect staff from possible assault.

Try to ensure your main entrance is visible from the bar.

Are toilet entrances visible from the bar?

If you have door management staff, there should be an appropriate place for them to stand without causing congestion in the doorway.

Glazed panels in and adjacent to doors must be laminated.

Consider ultraviolet light sources in toilets where drugs are a potential problem. This prevents addicts from finding veins to inject and makes dealing difficult as counterfeit money cannot be identified.

Cash handling areas should be installed within a solid brick surround.

External pipework should be recessed into building fabric to make climbing difficult.

Sources: Sussex Police Crime Prevention Unit, the Metropolitan Police, the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association



The beauty of many of the designs is that they can be added to existing furniture

