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MIDTOWN

# The Haute Design Approach To Foiling Urban Thieves

Although formerly dicey neighborhoods like the meatpacking district have experienced both a sharp drop in crime and a proliferation of well-dressed cafe-goers, the city has yet to do away entirely with either purse snatchings or fashion victims.

But if a group of scholars and designers in London has its way, a new wave of cleverly designed bags and cafe furniture will help foil the city's thieves while remaining easy on the eyes. In an era when many young women, unaware of the city's more sinister years, tend to be casual about where they put their handbags, such items may fill an unexpected niche.

"Design doesn't have to look criminal," explained Lorraine Gamman, director of the Design Against Crime Research Center at the Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. Several of the center's stylish thief-thwarting chairs and bags are included in "Safe: Design Takes On Risk," an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art through Jan. 2.

The two Design Against Crime chairs, both riffs on classic styles, are elegant in their simplicity. The Series 7 chair, a curvaceous Danish modern model executed in blond plywood, has two slots cut out at the front of the seat, on which a woman can safely loop the handle of her bag. The Thonet chair, an update of a classic 19th-century bent-wood design seen at cafes around the city, appears to have sprouted an extra vine, which entwines itself around one of the chair legs to provide a secure hook for the occupant's bag.

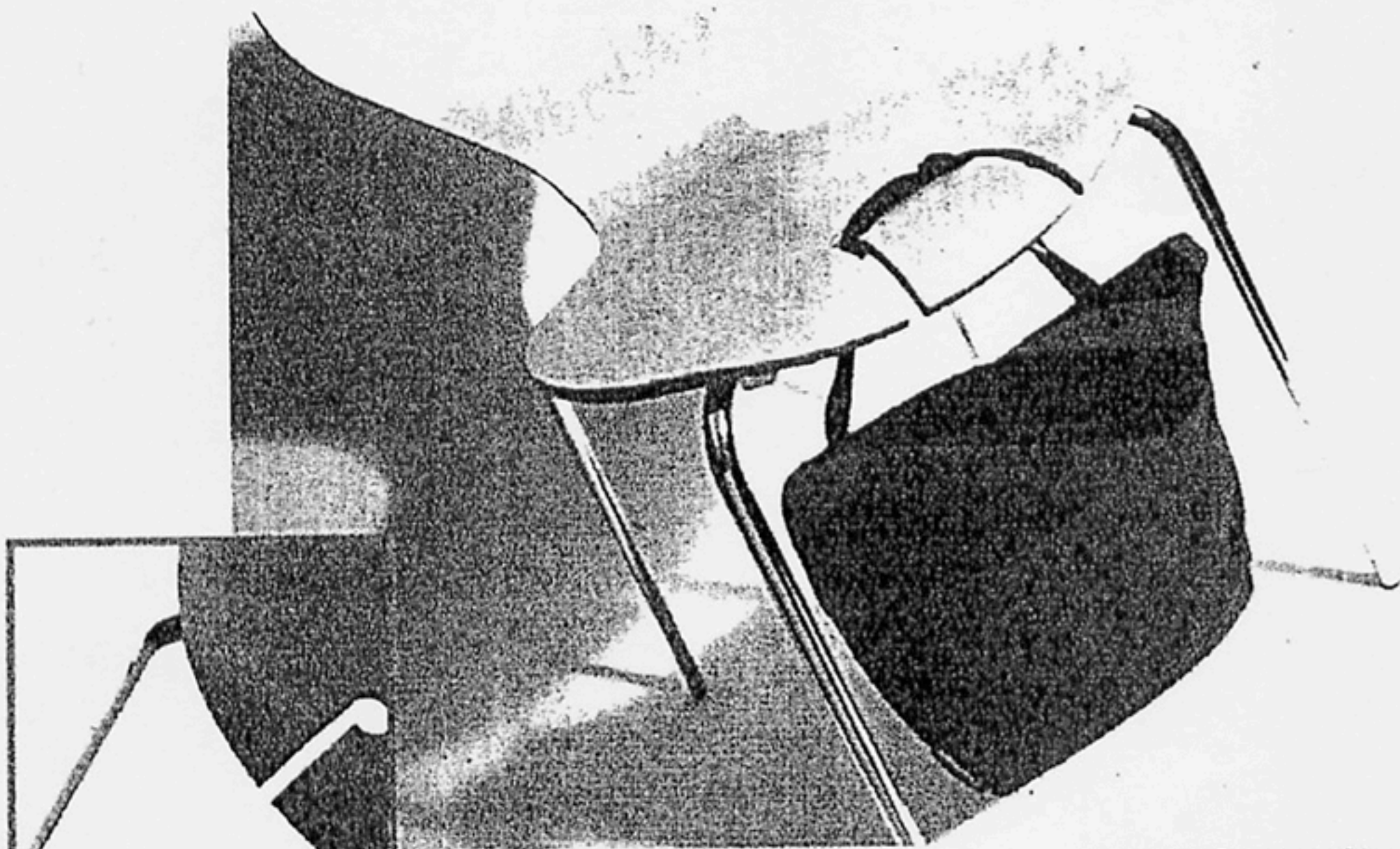
"Often it seems like there are cunning thieves out there outwitting us," Dr. Gamman said, explaining the genesis of the designs, "but really we usually just get distracted and put our bags down."

The chairs, which were created with comment from the police in London and New York, as well as restaurateurs, are not yet available in New York, but they seem likely to find an eventual market if made available here.

"It sounds like it would be a good idea, especially during the holidays," said Elizabeth Negrotto, the assistant general manager of the restaurant Pastis, an early outpost of trendiness in the meatpacking district. But she cautioned that the market for such chairs might be limited to new businesses. "Lots of restaurants already have their chairs," she said. "If there's 150 chairs, they're not going to run out and replace them all."

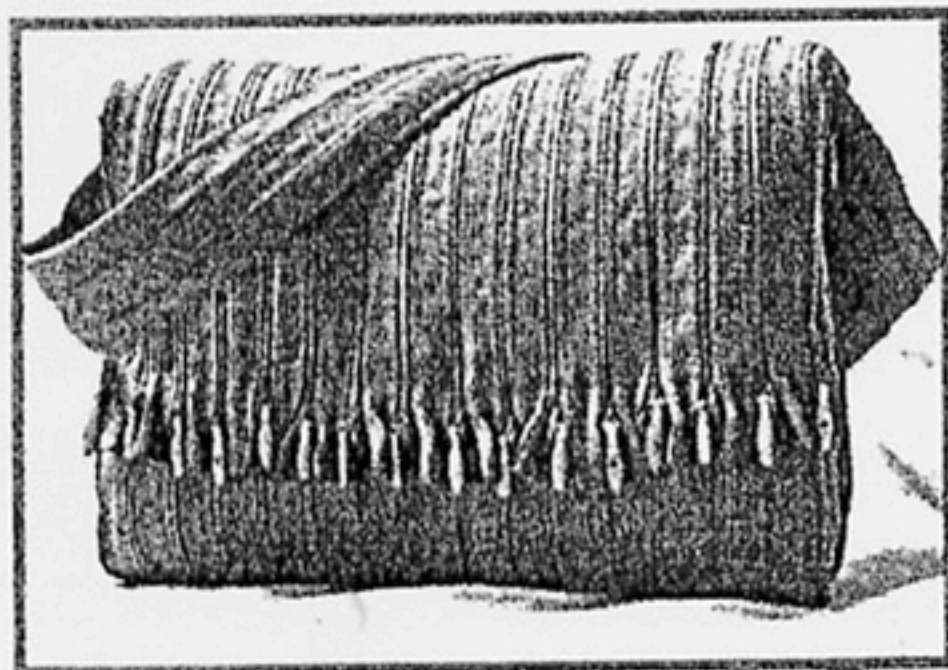
For women who fear that the crime-fighting chairs are not enough, there is another Design Against Crime item intended to confound urban thieves, the so-called Zip Zip, a fringed handbag made entirely of zippers sewn together. Only two of the zippers are operational, however, and a woman can reprogram the bag every morning so that only she knows which zippers open.

"That would make me feel better about pickpockets," said Astrid Brucker, an East Village costume designer who was trolling the MoMA exhibit for fabric ideas the other day. "And it looks like it's from some hip little shop on the East Side. I definitely would put it into productions I'm doing." **JOHN FREEMAN GILL**

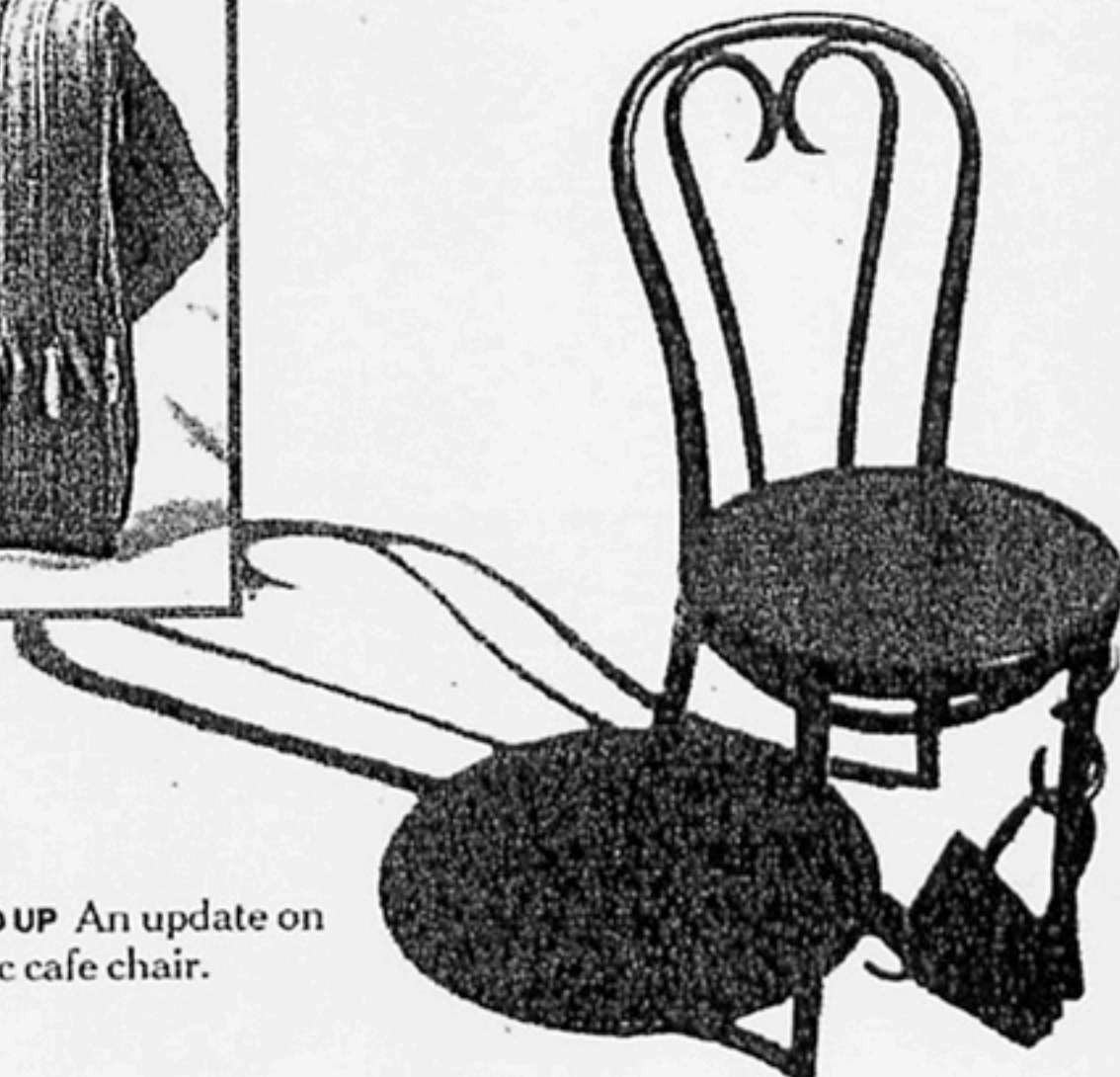


Photographs by Design Against Crime

**HANDS OFF** Crime prevention with a Danish modern accent.



**ZIPPY** A fringed handbag made entirely of zippers.



**HOOKEK UP** An update on a classic cafe chair.