

# HOW TO BUY A... BAG

The amount of gear you have to lug around each day is on the rise. Buying the right bag means finding something that reflects your way of life, your sense of style and your budget. Be it a messenger bag that leaves your hands free, a sleeker satchel for work accessories or a duffel for your gym gear, get the purchase right and your trusty bag will offer years of loyal service. We got some pointers from Christine Marks, expert designer at leading Australian bag-maker Manzoni.

## TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Test strap length, especially if you're tall. But most come with an adjustable strap. With the bag hanging over your shoulder, its base should be at the end of your fingertips.



## 1 UNDER STARTER'S ORDERS

Where's the best place to start your search? A department store, duty-free or a specialist boutique? *"Start your search at a department store where you can try the bags on and not be pressured into something you regret. Department-store shopping allows you variety in choices. Once you've decided on the look and the material, you can broaden your search for the bag that best suits you. Sale time is a perfect starting point. You'll be amazed what you find, especially at a good half-yearly department-store sale."*

*"Perhaps if you're just starting out, go for a bag that combines laptop and accessories all in one. Once you're a converted satchel wearer and convinced by the whole bag experience, you can add a couple more to your collection to match your mood or outfit."*

## 2 HAVE A HIDE

What materials should guys look for? *"Materials range from full-grain leathers in traditional vegetable-tanned finish through to softer crumbled leathers – which are also full-grained but have a trendier look and feel."*

*"You can combine leather and canvas for a casual, relaxed look, or if you're watching the budget, you can start with a vinyl or microfibre bag."*

## 3 BLACK: THE NEW BLACK

Are classic colours the best bet? *"To optimise usage and have your bag stand the test of time, go for black. It transfers easily from corporate surrounds to trendier settings. For a more casual look, go for earthier tones, ranging from dark chocolate to rugged tans. For the out-there guy who likes a bolder look, 'blue steel' is rumoured to be it this season."*

## 4 EXCESS IS OUT

What else is in? *"The latest offerings at the Milan and New York men's fashion shows reflect the economic climate."*

*"Gone are the excesses of the pre-recession boom times. The look is pared back, minimalist and unstructured, but with an emphasis on individual style and alternative materials. The styles to watch are duffels, over-the-shoulder messengers and the emerging man-tote."*

## TAKE A CLOSE LOOK

Pay attention to the quality of the fittings. Make sure they look up to the task of carrying the weight you expect to put in the bag.

## FIT IN

Take along your laptop if that's what you'll be carrying, and make sure it actually fits. The snugger the fit, the better the protection.

## 5 DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

Is it worth looking for bags with technical details? And are buckles still the go?

*"Unless you're buying for a specific purpose, the technical details shouldn't be the deciding factor. Venture out and choose the style that suits you, then make a practical choice. Look for simple details like inside pockets for easier access to small items."*

*"As for closure systems, forget the old-fashioned buckle – the world's moved on. Who's got the time, especially in an interview? Easy access is vital, so look for snappy dog-hooks, hidden magnetic dots (often under fake buckles, as with the bag shown here) or Velcro. Avoid anything too complex, as you just won't use it."*

## 6 SCRATCH AND SNIFF

How can you tell good-quality leather from poorer quality? *"When buying leather, you're faced with an array of different finishes that dictate the style and look of a bag. They range from smooth or polished aniline to sturdier pebble-grained, vegetable-tanned leather, and there's plenty of variation in-between. Just remember, leather is the hide of an animal; it's a natural organic product, unique in its characteristics. Pick it up, touch it, smell it – if it feels good, then it will work for you."*