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HANDS OFF OUR GUNS

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Tip Sheet

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STYLE

Think Outside The Briefcase

By Jaime Cunningham

Youngjoon Park, an attorney at a Manhattan law firm, just wanted a decent-size bag where he could carry his cell phone, personal organizer and a book. "I didn't have enough space to carry my knickknacks, and if you stick everything in your coat pockets, it bulges," he says. But the messenger bag he'd been using was bulky and uncomfortable on the crowded subway, and most of the smaller bags he'd looked at seemed too feminine. "I would love to wear a backpack to work," says Park, "but I think that just doesn't look right." Finally, he laid eyes on a small black bag by Tumi and was sold.

After years of stuffing their pockets with cash, keys and eyeglasses, men finally have some options. A boom in high-tech accessories like PDAs, iPods, cell phones and personal organizers has spawned a parallel revolution in carrying cases. So, how does a guy choose a masculine-looking bag that fits his style? "Suede or leather messenger bags are rugged and handsome-looking and they have a lot of character," says Carson Kressley, the fashion guru on the American male-makeover show "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy." "They look great with jeans and they can also look cool with a sportcoat or suit." Kal Rutenstein, senior vice president of fashion direction at Bloomingdale's, says leather and canvas men's bags are a hot seller this holiday season--"and the more classic-looking they are, the better they seem to be doing." Here are some tip sheet picks, from the sober and practical to the colorful and hip.

Need to carry your laptop around along with other essentials? Tumi's (\$195; tumi.com) Expandable Flap Messenger Bag can help you pack away your computer, cell phone, house keys and a PDA. It even includes a water-resistant umbrella pocket for those wet days.

For an urban professional look, shop no further than Jack Spade. The Dad Field Bag (\$125; jackspade.com) is smooth-looking on the outside, but has numerous compartments and ample storage space on the inside. Or try the smaller Nylon Canvas 10-inch Messenger for \$80, available in gray, navy, tank and orange.

For a more traditional style, try Cole Haan's Maggiorie Canvas Messenger Bag

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(\$365; 001-415-391-1760). Handmade from cotton canvas, with Vacchetta leather trim, it has a rich maroon lining and plenty of compartments for a PDA, business cards and a phone. Best of all, there's a small handle on top for when your shoulders get tired.

Coach's soft Trans-atlantic leather Map Bag (\$328; coach.com) is weather resistant and sports a generous main compartment, so you can store that ultra-slim laptop and slip those designer pens into any of three smaller compartments.

For ultra-versatility, check out Eddie Bauer's Convertible Briefcase (\$69; eddiebauer.com), which can be worn as a tote or a backpack. This bag can hold legal-size notebooks, your Discman and a spare set of clothes, while safely stowing all your smaller items in multiple pockets.

Are you feeling like sporting something bolder and brighter? Check out the Chrome Commodore Laptop Bag (\$95; chromebags.com) Available in a variety of colors, in glittery shades and nonglitter canvas, the Commodore comes with a padded laptop insert and hidden straps that allow you to convert it into a backpack.

With so many options, there are a few key rules to keep in mind. "If you saw it sitting unattended at an airport, would you want to call the bomb squad or steal it? If you'd want to steal it, that's a great bag," advises Kressley. One look to avoid? "Anything that attaches to your waist is wrong. The fanny pack is not a good look--it never was and never will be." So, if you already own one, it's time to trade up.

DRINKS

BEYOND EGGNOG

Want to spice up your year-end party? Serve an unfamiliar holiday beverage. Poncho de Crema (see grace foods.com for recipe) is a Trinidadian spin on eggnog. Gluhwein is a Mitteleuropean ski-season classic and can be made cheaply and easily with Pompadour Gluhfix packs, available for \$2.99 at germandeli.com. Or try Swedish glogg:

1/2 tsp. cardamom seeds, crushed

cinnamon sticks, to taste

1 dozen cloves

3-in. piece of ginger, peeled, sliced thin

Zest of 1 orange

(cup vodka

1 cup sugar 1 bottle light red wine Raisins and blancB almonds for garnish
Combine cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, ginger and orange zest in a glass container. Add vodka, seal and store unrefrigerated overnight. Strain vodka, discarding spices. Pour wine and spiced vodka into a large saucepan, add sugar, cover, and heat until sugar dissolves. Serve with raisins and almonds.

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