

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Judith Leiber: Dusting off a luxury brand

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*In the bag? Image credit: Judith Leiber*

By [Marie Driscoll](#)

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From novelty to classic, Judith Leiber's creations are works of art and the recent exhibition, "Judith Leiber: Crafting a New York Story," at New York's Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) is a testament to her design genius.

Judith Leiber minaudieres were the "it" bags of the "carriage set," preciously held in the palms of New York, Palm Beach and Los Angeles elite and the like. But changing lifestyles and the birth of designer handbags left this brand a shadow of its former self when acquired by Authentic Brands Group (ABG) in 2013.

A trip to MAD this spring renewed my wonder in Judith Leiber's handbags, many of which would be better called objects d'art. It was only nine years ago that New York's Luxury Institute voted Judith Leiber the most prestigious luxury handbag brand two years running, ahead of Herms and Chanel.

Leiber bags are considered collectables among consumers and world-renowned museums alike. The novelty pieces are works of art adorned with thousands of Swarovski crystals and lux materials.

If ABG has any say in it, the [Judith Leiber](#) brand will again be recognized as prestigious and luxurious with a 2020 twist, and by more than the Luxury Institute.

### Heritage

Judith Leiber's minaudieres and fine skins and leather handbags are luxury products as luxury was defined for hundreds of years, not the more recent iteration of mass-produced logo-ed product along with creative marketing and product positioning.

Each Judith Leiber minaudire is complete in itself, in a Sartre en-soir way. Nothing needs to be added or taken away. It is perfect and sublime.

To own such a creation makes one special. For me, it evokes memories of watching my mother with eyes wide open as she dressed for a special evening with silks and lace, talc and fragrance and choosing a bag, much smaller than her day bag, to complete her ensemble.

*Judith Leiber Couture: The art of craftsmanship*

Judith Leiber allows the little girl in all of us to feel like a princess and lovingly cradle a Judith Leiber minaudière much as one did a favorite doll or pet.

Betta Carrano, CEO of Italian footwear brand andrea carrano, said, "There is nothing like a Judith Leiber purse. It totally changes the way a woman feels to carry these precious creations. Each one is a unique piece of art. When I was younger I would visit Bergdorf's just to look at the Leiber melon that I adored."

The Judith Leiber "story" entwined with the brand, is the arch of a life that includes being the first woman to join the Hungarian Handbag Guild in Budapest, narrowly escaping the Holocaust, arriving in New York in 1947 with her new husband, founding her own company after designing for others in 1963, and receiving the lifetime achievement award in 1994 from the Council of Fashion Designers.

Ms. Leiber changed the United States handbag industry much as Elizabeth Arden, Helena Rubenstein and War Paint now on Broadway and Estée Lauder changed the U.S. cosmetic and fragrance business.

Despite the incredible beauty and craftsmanship of the products and the substance of the brand, by the 21st century lifestyles changed.

If you went to the opera, you did not dress and the brand's retail presence had contracted.

The beauty that Judith Leiber brought to the world, and the attention to art, craft and whimsy, has been overshadowed by streetwear and athleisure.

#### Re-positioning

Historically Judith Leiber targeted a luxury, older more affluent consumer looking to purchase handbags to complete her look at high-profile events, award shows, fashion week and on the red carpet.

Today's target is not just wearing her Judith Leiber to a special event. She is also wearing it out Saturday night with jeans and a great pair of shoes the epitome of a high-low dressing strategy and very appropriate to 2017's lifestyles.

ABG may not be top of mind as a natural acquirer of Judith Leiber intellectual property.

The company specializes in brand development through global partnerships and distribution programs.

Building off the inherited brand history, ABG works to create a solid DNA, brand story and messaging through marketing, social media, collaborations and public relations, and has strong relationships with luxury to mass-market retailers worldwide.

To entice a new generation of Judith Leiber aficionados, ABG relaunched the brand in 2013 complete with a social media program designed to create brand awareness and establish a presence among a younger audience.

Now, Judith Leiber has 56,700 followers on Instagram where posts include lifestyle, product, celebrities and a link to YouTube where creative director Dee Ocleppo Hilfiger discusses the latest collection and its inspiration.

The brand is very much in the zeitgeist of retro 70s Americana with a modern twist. Stuart Vevers' collection at Coach and Raf Simons at Calvin Klein are similarly dipping into this creative well.

#### New creative director

In January, ABG established a strategic partnership with Dee Ocleppo Hilfiger, who joined the brand as co-owner, creative director and global brand ambassador.



*Dee Ocleppo Hilfiger holding Judith Leiber's Paedras in black and gold resin bag*

Ms. Hilfiger's passion for fashion and technology, customization and her social media savvy will be instrumental in building out a lifestyle brand replete with apparel, fragrance and footwear in tandem with enhancing brand relevancy for today's consumer.

The first Judith Leiber X Dee Ocleppo collection will launch holiday 2017.

#### *Judith Leiber: The inspiration behind the holiday 2017 line*

The redesigned Web site with ecommerce and customization functionality provides a catalog of recent seasons, but notably lacks the brand story and heritage as well as the recent branding efforts. Interested shoppers can link to Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and Twitter for additional storytelling.

#### Red carpet

Influencer and celebrity dressing play an important role for the brand by showcasing Judith Leiber to a new generation.

A Judith Leiber minaudire is the Go-To accessory for the red carpet and today's new celebrity influencers include Rihanna, Jennifer Lopez, Blake Lively, Tinashe, Scarlett Johansson and Lilly Collins. These women have huge fan bases and are expanding brand awareness and future purchase intent.

Collaborations increase awareness, too.

Retail collaborations with Libertine on new novelty pieces styled Libertine Loves Leiber, selling exclusively at Bergdorf Goodman, and with Papyrus on a card collection of 16 iconic signature Judith Leiber bags called Judith Leiber X Papyrus, work to extend the brand's reach into new lifestyle categories and increase brand imagery and awareness in the marketplace.

#### Next?

The Judith Leiber brand is set for resurgence.

The ABG team is well connected to put product in the right place. Ms. Hilfiger brings category expertise and social media acumen to the mix, not to mention the crowd she mingles with husband and designer Tommy Hilfiger, model Gigi Hadid, et al.

THE JUDITH LEIBER brand is dusted off and relevant, with the same impeccable craftsmanship with 2017's whimsy.

To take a phrase from the robo diner theme, "POP! ZOOM! ZZZWAP!" There is plenty of room to grow for these emotion-packed couture clutches.

Please [click here](#) to download Judith Leiber's holiday 2017 lookbook



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