THE HANDBAG REIMAGINED

PILOT PROJECTS
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### REFLECTIONS

- "Somebody is using it."
- "I don't know who."
- "I don't care."
Today’s handbags come in all shapes, sizes, and forms. And whether it’s to complete an outfit or to simply hold one’s things, they provide value - functional and aesthetic - to their wearers. But what if another ability could be added to the handbag’s value set, an unfulfilled one that solves size problems and enhances personalization for its wearer?

Seeking to address these ideas, Pilot Projects’ founder Scott Francisco created a team to focus on this problem. His vision was to develop a flexible, functional, and personal accessory that could be worn in a variety of ways. The team’s goal was to design an accessory that could be customized to fit the needs of its wearer.

The Design Process

THE HANDBAG REIMAGINED

The project was broken down into several micro-projects, each requiring the team to hone their skills and learn new ones. The team worked with designers, strategists, and craftspeople to create a solution for the problem.

PROTOTYPE I

PROTOTYPE II

MARKET RESEARCH COMPILATION

PRODUCT SHOTS

PLANNED ROUTE

ONGOING MARKET RESEARCH

COMPLETED MICRO-PROJECT

Design Process: Skill Set
These eight words summarize the creative and technical skills gained from this internship. Each micro-project required its own specific utilization of one or more of these skills.

The design process was not a linear process. It involved numerous backtracking and referral to previous project pieces. It required approaching the project from a systemic point of view — that is, acknowledging the process as a flexible, holistic one, in which every part within would be an evolved form of previous ones. Of course, along this winding road to design solutions, there were many challenges and serendipitous discoveries...

"YOU SEE THINGS; AND YOU SAY, ‘WHY?’
But I dream things that never were:
AND I SAY, ‘WHY NOT?’"
—George Bernard Shaw

CLUTCH. TOTE. SATCHEL. CROSS-BODY. Today’s handbags come in all shapes, sizes, and forms. And whether it’s to complete an outfit or to simply hold one’s things, they provide value - functional and aesthetic - to their wearers.

But what if another ability could be added to the handbag’s value set, an unfulfilled one that solves size problems and enhances personalization for its wearer?

In The Handbag Reimagined, we approached the handbag through an architect’s perspective — that is, understanding design results to be composed of several layers, with each being highly susceptible to change.
Project Description
It was then time to put pencil to paper and let abstract ideas evolve into hand-drawn sketches. These two-dimensional representations of the innovative concept allowed for a better understanding of its limitations and possibilities. It provided for the testing of multiple design trajectories and potential solutions. Sketching is a quick, cheap, and easy way to develop and play with rough mock-ups of more intricate design schemes.

Responsibilities
Intern responsibilities with this project were to translate the employer’s new approach to handbag design into understandable hand-drawn sketches—to effectively communicate his ideas using an interplay of text and visual images.

What I Learned
Throughout this process, I developed skills in drawing conventions. I learned how different means of visual presentation—such as orthographic, axonometric, and isometric projections, perspective view, cross-sections, elevations, and plane—communicate different stories of how something works. I learned the importance of scale, consistency, and hierarchy in conveying a three-dimensional object from various angles.

WHAT NEED is not being met and what do people find value in? This is what must first be considered when designing for the ultimate end user. We examined the kinds of handbags already in existence and determined their use and aesthetic values, then identified an unanswered capacity in handbag design: size adjustability. We were excited by this design challenge, which, if solved, can disrupt today’s industries by potentially creating entirely new ones.
Main Elements

belt: thick and approximately 3” wide - made from durable leather
beltlets: the horizontal pieces of the basket shell - approximately 3/4” wide - made from a thinner leather
suspenders: the vertical pieces of the basket shell - approximately 1” wide - made from a thinner leather
pouch: removable and attaches to the belt via clasps - hangs inside the basket - made from canvas, with the bottom reinforced by leather

How It Works

Basket
The exterior of the bag takes on a basket-like form: a system of crisscrossing "beltlets" and "suspenders" which allow for size adjustment. We envision these pieces to be made of firm, durable leather and to be completely removable, such that the wearer can mix-and-match colors and play with spacing and alignment.

Pouch
A removable pouch can be secured to the "basket" shell by attaching it to the stabilizing "belt". As we acknowledge the different budget constraints of consumers, the pouch will be available in various materials, such as soft leather, burlap, or canvas. The pouch is ideal for holding cellphones, wallets, etc., but the space which falls between the pouch and the "basket" may also serve as a chamber to store larger items, such as tennis rackets and yoga mats.

Beltlet-Suspender Interplay

Suspenders, which hang from the belt, have two layers which are stitched together every 1”. The resulting gap provides a slot through which beltlets can be slid easily through.

Two possibilities: suspenders are "fixed" to the belt, or hang loosely to allow for sliding (as shown on the left).

Exploring All Possibilities

On the left, considering possible results of how the bottom of the bag will look: on the right, considering the possibility of the bag taking on a more cylindrical form.

Sketching Tutorial
Quick lesson drawing con from Scott i.e. "exploded v how to cram the "threaded" beltlet through suspender.

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Project Description
Like sketches, prototypes are used to communicate design intent. In Project II, the first physical draft of the design was created. Its main purpose was to serve as a “proof” of the overall design concept, as it was important to gauge the feasibility of expectations before proceeding further. Prototype I, constructed from crude materials in order to accommodate for quick iteration and easy exploration of design alternatives, also served as a visual reference to better assess the aesthetic qualities of the handbag.

Responsibilities
Intern tasks included sourcing appropriate materials and translating hand-drawn sketches into an initial physical form. Regular critique sessions were arranged with the employer, during which the prototype was reviewed and revisions were suggested.

What I Learned
Evolving from a two-dimensional canvas to a three-dimensional one required “learning-by-doing” and utilizing both right- and left-brained thinking. I learned how the prototyping process reveals new design challenges but also leads to serendipitous discoveries. Upon bringing the design to life from rough pencil sketches, I realized that many of my initial assumptions were wrong, and that there were still many design concerns I had overlooked.

Discovery
A pillowcase cover serves as a surprisingly superb “pouch”!

MATERIALS
BOX CUTTER, SCISSORS, RULER, CONSTRUCTION PAPER, GLUE, PAPER CLIPS, DOUBLE-SIDED TAPE

Intern in Action
Exploring prototype adjustability and discovering that some revisions must be made. Prototype I also reveals unaddressed design considerations, such as “how will the suspenders be meeting at the bottom of the bag?” “What is the appropriate size for beltlet spacing?” and “Will the suspenders be fixed or non-fixed to the belt?”

Construction paper was secured by glue and double-sided tape, with variations in paper color and thickness utilized to represent different handbag parts. Paper clips were also used to mimic the fastening ability of a belt buckle.

Construction paper was secured by glue and double-sided tape, with variations in paper color and thickness utilized to represent different handbag parts. Paper clips were also used to mimic the fastening ability of a belt buckle. MATERIALS: BOX CUTTER, SCISSORS, RULER, CONSTRUCTION PAPER, GLUE, PAPER CLIPS, DOUBLE-SIDED TAPE.
Project Description
Prototype I was advanced to a nylon webbing version, or Prototype II, in order to provide designers with a more functional model, one that’s a closer representation of the envisioned product. Having such a working prototype at hand allowed for further validation of previously proposed design solutions.

Responsibilities
Intern responsibilities included sourcing materials, positioning and attaching suspenders to belt, stitching suspenders, weaving beltlets through suspenders, attaching buckles to belt and beltlets, stitching leather to canvas for pouch, attaching straps, meeting with employer for critiques, and revising versions of Prototype II.

What I Learned
This project was especially illuminating to me, especially as a strategic designer. I learned how to use a leather sewing machine (threading the machine, winding a bobbin, etc.); the composition of various kinds of nylon webbing; how nylon webbing works to support weight of great extremes; the different types of fastening hardware (such as double-D rings, belt buckles, and seatbelt buckles) used with nylon webbing; and hand-stitching methods. I also visited my first trim and fabric stores. To complete my responsibilities for Project III, I had to know how to budget my time while juggling various tasks and learning entirely new skill sets.
Reviewing Prototype II at Pilot Projects: Analysis with Scott always leads to new discoveries.

Above: Noting that the blue color of beltlets clash with the intended aesthetic appearance of envisioned product.

Below: Testing the ease at which beltlets slide through suspenders in order for size adjustability to be quickly achieved.

In Use: Critiquing the relationship between the bag and a human form; here, beltlets and suspenders were arranged to give the bag its “maximum” size, to be carried as a tote.

The Bag Sans Pouch: Analyzing the basket shell in use - considering how it holds large objects - and the unique, “semi-see-through” nature of the bag’s exoskeleton.

Side Note: Clasps had to be used to hold the suspenders in place along the belt - how would we solve this problem in the final product?
SURVIVAL IN THE CAPRICIOUS LUXURY GOODS INDUSTRY requires the maintenance of a sustainable competitive advantage. Our’s: There’s nothing quite like our product out there.

We took a well-known commodity - the handbag - and took it a few steps further, injecting the familiar with a touch of innovation...

But now the question of “How can we tell this unique story to consumers..?”

Moodboards: Moodboards of well-known fashion brands were first constructed to better understand these brands’ promotional strategies and the type of customer who favors their products. This allowed us to consider which direction we wanted to take our brand’s image. Would the young, urban, grunge-loving shopper be someone who’d buy our product? Or would it be the professional, middle-aged jet-setter, who favors the both functional and stylish sportswear collections of Michael Kors? Or maybe our product would attract an older and wealthier clientele - the sophisticated, affluent customer who is drawn to the classic designs of Chanel, for instance.

Image Sources: alexanderwang.com, michaelkors.com, chanel.com

Retailers: Different brand names cater to different lifestyles and personalities. I remember from my months spent interning at a design house that buyers from different retail stores would rarely select the same assortment of styles. This is because buyers know their specific clientele - not only these customers’ fashion aesthetic, but also their income range, age group, ethnicity, and maybe even their personal beliefs. Above is a shot of a thorough Excel document that explored major retailers with New York locations - categorizing them as either “Department Store” or “High-End Boutique” - as well as popular e-tailers.

Handbag Styles: What kinds of handbags are designers designing? As the majority of handbag will be constructed from high-quality leather, we focused our research on designers who offer leather handbags in their product assortment, such as Phillip Lim, Ann Demeulemeester, and Belstaff.

Project Description

Strategic designers must work at the intersection of business acumen and creativity. Now that value had been created through ideation and prototyping, the next step was to capture, communicate, and deliver value - that is, to consider pricing, product placement, and promotional tactics, respectively. The result: a marketing strategy which (a) thoroughly examined the current marketplace setting; (b) created a profile of our target customer; and (c) provided blueprints for the possible trajectories of promotional implementations.

Responsibilities

Intern responsibilities included creating mood boards, researching existing handbag designers and retailers, organizing findings in Excel format, and developing an overall demographic and psychographic profile of the target customer. A potential final advertisement for the product was also conceptualized and created.

What I Learned

I’d juggled many roles throughout this design process, and Project IV now required me to think as a marketer as well as a storyteller. I learned how to utilize the Internet - from fashion news platforms to e-commerce Web sites - as a research tool. I also learned how to integrate findings into coherent presentational forms. I learned how to consider social, cultural, and demographic trends when designing a marketing strategy for a new product. It was especially important, for instance, for me to acknowledge the various factors influencing consumer purchasing behavior when creating an advertisement. Finally, when it came to creating the ad, I used watercolor pencils for the first time.
MATERIALS: watercolor pencils, watercolor paint, watercolor brushes, watercolor paper, watercolor pencils, charcoal, graphite pencils, tracing paper, Adobe Photoshop

The goal is to communicate in a visually stimulating way the multi-functional abilities of our product. The ad invites the viewer to guess: *Is this the same bag?* by hinting at such a possibility through the symmetries found in the two scenes.
Project Description
Product photography is just as important as advertising campaigns in enticing customers to buy a product. These photos need to communicate a product’s aesthetic elements as well as its functional capabilities. This requires shots of the product at various angles—essence, “styling” and positioning the product as if one were working with a human model.

Responsibilities
Intern responsibilities included creating a miniature studio space in which to shoot Prototype II; “styling” the prototype; using a digital camera to photograph the prototype; and Photoshopping resulting images.

What I Learned
To me, Project V was the most challenging. Never having dabbled in photography before, I was learning a completely new skillset. I first had to read up on how to use a digital camera—how to adjust its various settings, the different results I’d achieve from natural versus artificial light, and so on. Then there was trying to grasp the vocabulary of a photographer—what terms such as “shutter speed”, “aperture”, and “ISO” meant, for example. I learned how faster shutter speeds “freeze” movement, how a camera’s aperture setting controls the size of the area through which light passes through the lens, and how the ISO speed is another determinant of camera exposure. Of course, even with this knowledge in tow, I still needed to do much photo editing in Photoshop, as my resulting photographs were obviously by a beginner.
Post-Photoshop: White backgrounds were enhanced, photos were cleaned up, and “blue straps” were changed to grey in order to better capture the intended color scheme of the product.
Current Status

Prototype: As of now, the size of Prototype II’s “basket” can only be adjusted either by length or by height. We had envisioned our product to be capable of adjusting in size by all dimensions. We continue to strive to find a solution.

Looking Back as an Intern

What I will treasure most is the hands-on nature of this project, and how my employer took on both the role of mentor and instructor during my semester with Pilot Projects. I wore many hats as an intern for the company - enthographer, researcher, business thinker, strategic designer and storyteller - and was challenged to incorporate right- and left-brained thinking into a innovative assignment.

“A DESIGN ISN’T FINISHED UNTIL SOMEONE IS USING IT.”

- BRENDA LAUREL

PILOT PROJECTS

“Pilot Projects is a design company - a dynamic collection of professionals who co-create inventive, tangible, fully functional and sustainable solutions to compound problems. We focus on citizen-powered projects at the intersection of culture and infrastructure.”

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