



Leathers for leathergoods

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Ask people to name a leathergoods article and they will most likely answer "Handbag" or "Wallet". This answer is probably what most of us would say, but when you start digging you soon realise just how many different products are made from leather. There are literally hundreds of products out there being sold as leathergoods.

Why so many? Well it really isn't too hard to explain. Just take a trip into an electrical or electronics retailer. On sale you will see laptops, palmtops, cell phones, portable CD/DVD players and digital cameras. These are the "must have" gadgets for this generation.

However, you need a holder for all of these products, and just by chance these are available in leather. So we have technology advancing all the time and offering new ways for leathergoods to be used. The trick is to make sure that the leather holder looks attractive so it gives perceived added value to the product. Isn't it always better to have that newest of gadgets in a well crafted and fashionable leather holder?

Leather goods - the finishing touch

If you look back in time you will see many instances where leathergoods complemented other products. The dreaded packet of cigarettes could be kept in a leather holder on your belt - and still is for some people. Likewise, the cigarette lighter made as an accessory for cigarettes may also be kept in a leather holder.

Glasses and sunglasses were, and still are, major sellers that should be kept in something to keep

them clean and offer protection. They are ideal candidates for a leather holder, and, as a fashion item, leather adds that final touch.

Depending upon who you are, the car may be thought of as perhaps the greatest and worst invention of the 19th and 20th centuries. Nevertheless, the car really opened up opportunities for leather, not just for the seats but also the nice little things. The leather key holder is the most obvious. That document holder kept in the glove compartment, or the leather driving cap and gloves for real style.

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1. The Valentine's Day Heart Mirror from Smythsons of London, in white calf leather featuring a red heart design.
2. Mulberry CD case in tan harness leather
3. Roberts revival radio covered in white Matt Glove Mulberry leather.
4. The Panerai Luminor Sealand series of OP111 calibre certified chronometer watches, as offered by the English gunmaker, Purdey.



Utilitarian and exotic

All through history we find articles that have been made from leather being used for items ranging from the utility to the exotically decorated. Remember the Alamo; well Jim Bowie would have needed leather sheaths for those knives of his, though they didn't bring him much luck on the day. And the Mexicans would have needed leather holsters for their guns. How many of the horses would have had leather saddles on their backs? What about the leather water canisters that they would have needed? And how about the craftwork, embossing and design built into these items of necessity to add individuality. How many more items could we think of, just from this episode in history – no doubt many more.

Perhaps the invention of money was the greatest source of satisfaction for the makers of leathersgoods, after all, how many of us have a wallet or purse made of leather? So, even money cannot escape from the leathersgoods market. With literally billions of wallets and purses in use in the world, this really has been a great invention. Even with a shift toward card payments we still need a leather holder.

Value for money

Where are we today with leathersgoods? It really depends on how much you are willing to spend. If you buy a wallet from a street vendor for a couple of euros then you cannot really complain when the finish rubs off in your back pocket or the stitching comes undone. That handbag you got for twenty euros suddenly starts taking on a whole new appearance as the corners rub off. Just to add insult to injury the first time you go out with it in the rain, it looks like it has a bad case of the measles. For a lot of people this is not a problem: that bag would have been out of fashion in a month in any case.

The choice of raw material and the technology employed in the processing will determine the quality, and selling price, of the finished leather used to make the products. This provides a very wide choice for the leathersgoods manufacturer, who in turn is influenced by many factors. The product style, its construction, texture, end use, performance and the market segment at which it is aimed will thus determine the source.

Larger products such as handbags may require larger panels, which are difficult to cut from lower quality hides and skins.



1. Set of travel brushes in leather holder by Ettinger, London.
2. DAKS key-ring with gold and silver wire-embroidered coat of arms held within stitched leather frame.
3. Smythson of London travel backgammon set in red goatskin.
4. Nintendo Gameboy deerskin pouch by Mulberry, London.

However, small items such as key fobs will consume small pieces of leather which can be cut from around the defects in a lower grade leather, or utilise off-cuts from cutting larger components.

Cattle hides, sheep and goatskins are the most commonly used. However, when high quality articles are made from exotic skins such as ostrich and crocodile they require greater skill in designing the article and cutting the components to obtain optimal value when matching different panels in the construction.

Opportunities for tanners

So what are you getting for the higher priced products? If you are paying upwards of a thousand euros for a bag, you expect that it will last for a few years at least. The sophisticated quality controls required during manufacture of the leather for these products is extensive, with a whole host of testing machinery being needed by the tannery.

It soon becomes apparent that not everybody can make these leathers. It can take years for a tannery to become a chosen supplier to a leathersgoods fashion house. Not only must its leather pass the physical requirements but the tannery must also gain its customer's confidence in its ability to supply a consistent product. This calls for a substantial monetary and time investment from the tanner with no guarantee that they will gain the business.

However, for tanneries that have invested and gained business, the rewards can be high. ☺