



staking a claim

Los Angeles-based hat and bag companies are becoming big players in the accessories category.

By Rachel Brown

Charlie Lapson

Showroom: 5670 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles

As a frequent traveler, designer Charlie Lapson has come to appreciate airports and planes as useful laboratories for studying handbags.

There, women push purses to the extremes by packing them full of necessities and shoving them into tight spaces. Lapson's multifunctional ideal is a bag that endures those pressures and stays beautiful. He constructs his bags, wholesaling from \$90 to \$500, to be highly practical. A large crocodile embossed Italian leather bag has zipper compartments for PalmPilots, pens and makeup, as well as a water-resistant nylon lining.

Bags popular with Lapson's loyalists, including Sarah Jessica Parker and Felicity Huffman, lie on opposite ends of the size spectrum: They're either "throw everything in but the kitchen sink" bags or small clutches. To fill the need for both, Lapson unveils around 17 new styles a month.

Lapson's handbags are sold in some 40 U.S. stores, but half his sales are through television home shopping.

"The best thing about a big travel bag is when another woman turns to the woman carrying it and says, 'I love that.' Then, you got it right," he said.



**Clutches
by Charlie
Lapson.**