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Style & Design

Mamie Eisenhower's Judith Leiber-designed inaugural clutch is now at the Smithsonian.



The designer and a vintage leather creation inspired by a Sonia Delaunay painting.

retired, and living on Long Island – informed the anniversary collection of 50 pieces that represent a glittering tour of New York City, homing in on iconic landmarks 1963-style: Checker cabs, Times Square, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Metropolitan Opera House, and other emblems of the Empire City.

The styles and shapes nod to some Judith Leiber archival details, but are updated with adjustments to the proportions and other modern twists. Available in August,

commemorative bags will feature extra-special raw materials, including gold-plated, chunky, flat-back crystals. The collection will range in price from \$1,995 for smaller pieces to \$15,000 for small-batch “heritage-edition” bags.

An anniversary collection isn't the only commemoration marking a half century of Judith Leiber in New York. A retrospective of the designer's creations from 1963 to 2004, titled *Judith Leiber, an*

GO During the mid-twentieth century, the bucolic farmlands and private beaches of Springs, New York, an unincorporated hamlet of East Hampton, inspired many of America's great artists. Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, and Willem de Kooning all found inspiration in and around Springs, as did Judith and Gerson Leiber after buying a home there in 1956. In 2005 the couple opened

The Leiber Collection, a small museum that houses hundreds of Judith's creations alongside Gerson's expressionist and cubist paintings, sculptures, and prints. Outside, Gerson's garden, meticulously sculpted for more than 50 years, features shrubby mazes and site-specific artworks. From May 25 through September 1, the museum will present a retrospective of the designer's handbags

from 1963 through 2004 to commemorate Judith Leiber's 50th anniversary. *Free; Saturday and Sunday, 1 to 4 PM, and by appointment at 631/329-3288 or info@leibercollection.org. 446 Old Stone Highway, Springs, New York.*

Find Judith Leiber bags at Neiman Marcus and eponymous boutiques in Beverly Hills, Las Vegas, New York, Delhi, Jakarta, and Seoul.

(MAMIE EISENHOWER) NINA LEEN/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES. (BAG AND PORTRAIT) THE LEIBER COLLECTION



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Style & Design

American Journey: From Artisan to Fashion Icon, runs through Labor Day weekend at the Leiber Collection, a museum on Long Island founded in 2005 by Leiber and her husband, Gerson.

THE STORY OF JUDITH LEIBER'S ASCENT through Manhattan's Garment District has become almost as legendary as her designs. Born Judith Peto in 1921 in Budapest, she was first sent to England to study chemistry but later received rigorous training in the craft of handbag design simply because the Hungarian artisan guild was open to Jews while most other professions excluded them. Her family survived the Nazi occupation by claiming Swiss citizenship through the help of a friend. In 1945 she met Gerson Leiber, an American GI, on his second day in Budapest. They fell in love, married, moved to New York, and began pursuing artistic careers, he as a painter and she as a handbag designer within the Garment District's high-production cycle.



The New York-inspired 50th-anniversary collection's Fountain – Grand Army Plaza (\$6,395) and (right) Chanin Building (\$4,495).

Fifty years later, fashionable women around the world collect minaudières of all styles – especially novelty shapes such as teddy bears, flowers, and all manner of ephemera.

After 17 years the couple founded Judith Leiber Inc. with \$15,000, working out of a tiny New York loft and selling her creations through a Madison Avenue showroom as well as select department stores, such as

Bonwit Teller. Leiber's exquisite modern shapes reflected the strong architectural lines and graphic motifs seen in New York City's art, architecture, and landmarks. Her now-famous minaudières were initially

COURTESY JUDITH LEIBER

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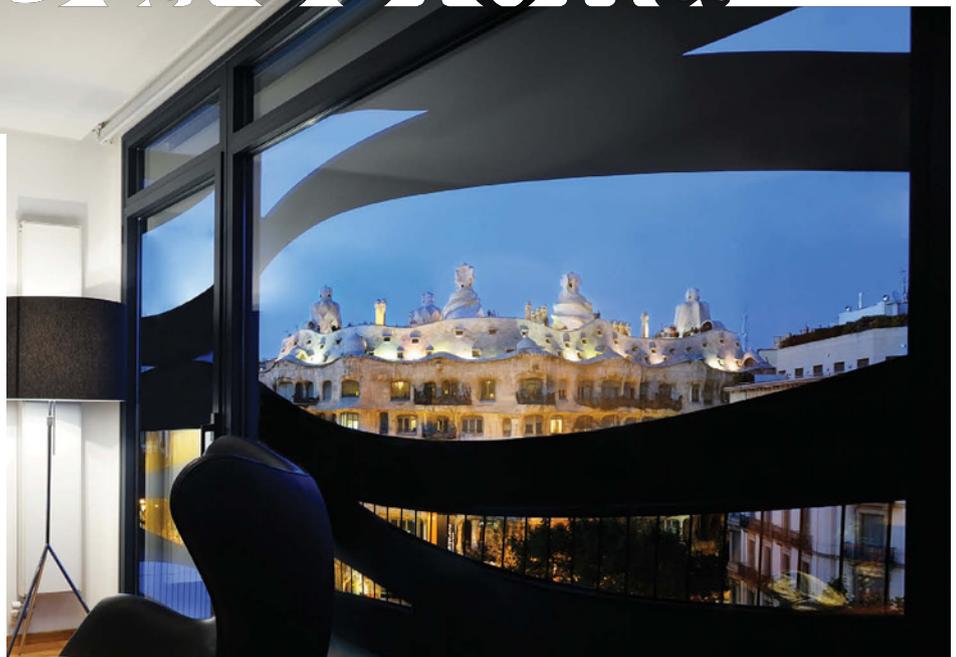
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Kerry Washington with a Judith Leiber at this year's SAG Awards.

born from a mistake: A manufacturer in Italy sent a flawed casing, and Leiber masked it with a smattering of crystals. That first minaudière – a glittering teardrop traced with crystal embellishments – echoed the lines of the Chrysler Building's scalloped art deco spire, piercing the sky just blocks away.

Fifty years later, fashionable women around the world collect minaudières of all styles – especially novelty shapes such as teddy bears, flowers, and all manner of ephemera. After the Leiber Collection, the Taubman Museum of Art in Roanoke, Virginia, boasts the largest assemblage of Leiber's handbags, all donated by the late philanthropist Rosalie Shaftman. And the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum displays a number of designs commissioned by longtime fan Barbara Bush. (To date, Judith Leiber has created handbags for almost every first lady since Mamie Eisenhower.)

Earlier this year, Judith Leiber LLC was acquired by a brand development company that has hinted at expanding into footwear and even bridal collections – all rooted in the label's strong heritage. Wherever the next half century takes the brand, its history of artisanship, wit, and timeless silhouettes will proceed it. VI

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