

I'LL TAKE IT

Men's luxury watches and women's designer handbags to drool over

By **AMY GORDON**

*Self-indulge while in Puerto Rico
by buying eye-catching timepieces
and the latest chic bag*



Don't leave the island without treating yourself to an accessory that will be a forever reminder of your time on the Island of Enchantment.

Puerto Rico has always been identified as a destination for luxury in the Caribbean. Even back in the sixties heyday, the island was one of the most fashionable and glamorous island in the Caribbean. John F. Kennedy and Joan Crawford frequented what is now Ritz Carlton's newly luxurious Dorado Beach resort and one of America's richest family, the Vanderbilts, used to own the property now called the Condado Vanderbilt hotel.

So it's no wonder why the world's most upscale men's watches and women's handbag designers and brands have brought their signature style to Puerto Rico, catering to the most elite residents and visitors. From the cobblestone streets of Old San Juan to the ritziest shopping center, The Mall of San Juan, visitors can self-indulge in high-class, guilt-free retail-therapy.

In Puerto Rico, men can treat themselves to hardcore, vintage, collectible, eye-catching timepieces, and women can buy the latest chic designer bags that will turn heads and impress onlookers.

Timeless Elegance

Personal style and how a man carries himself make a strong first impression and it also lends to a man's overall ethos. But it's the watch that's the definitive man's style statement that has stood the test of time. And for men who value craftsmanship and quality, Puerto Rico is ideal.

Stretching from east to west to the north and south of the island, upscale retailers showcase extravagant timepieces. Casual buyers and experienced collectors find luxury brands in Puerto Rico like Rolex, Patek Philippe, Chopard, Harry Winston, and Girard-Perragaux, to name just a few. For their best customers, some local stores even provide white-glove service, offering limousine transportation to and from the venue and greet guests with flutes of champagne and other swanky amenities.

True watch connoisseurs know to get their wares at KURY Alta Relojeria in Plaza Las Americas which carries elegant timepieces from ritzy brands like Rolex, prized for its timeless form

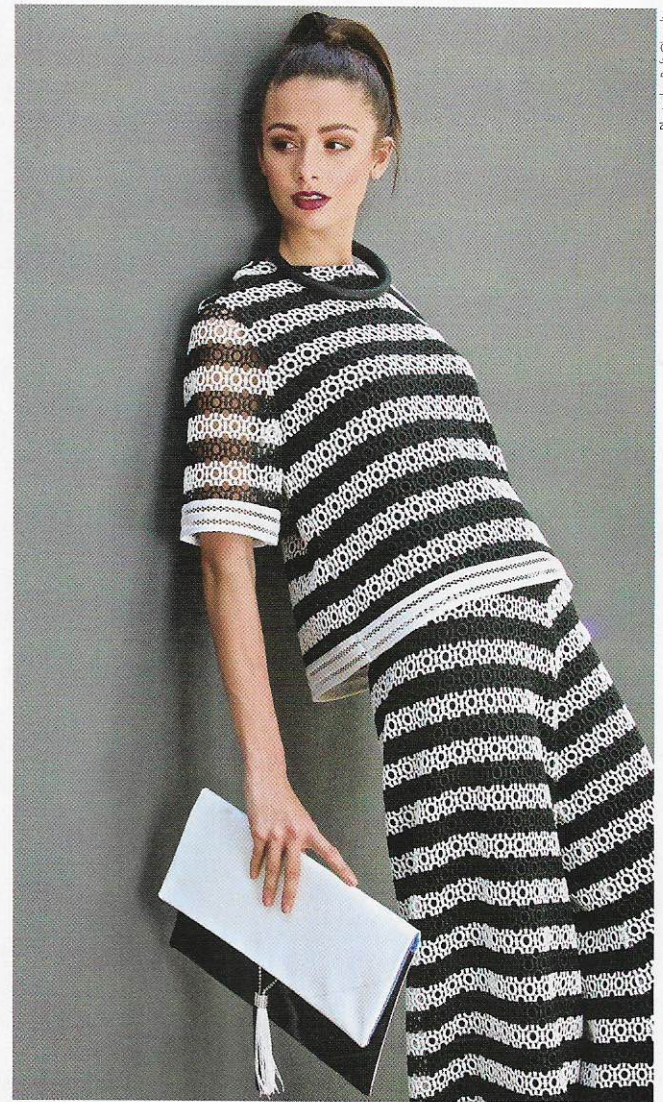
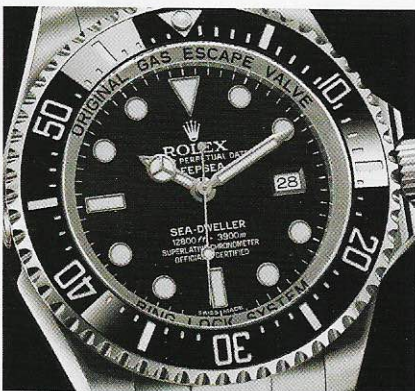


Photo by Rafi Claudio

The Una handbag brand by local designer Beatriz Sanchez is said to be a conversation piece and is available online, at luxury hotel boutiques and some upscale shops at The Mall of San Juan.

and function; Tudor, classic, sport, diving and heritage-inspired watches; Hublot, which represents the art of fusion and currently produces one of

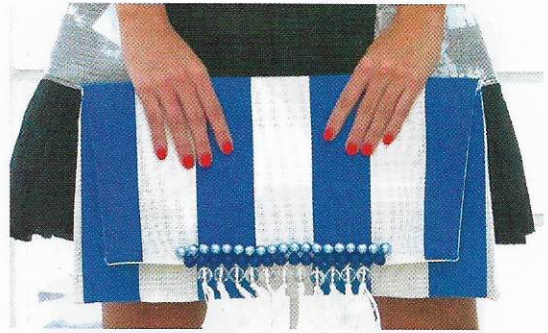
the world's most expensive watches; Breitling, inspired by aviation and has specifically constructed watches for divers; Dietrich, styled after the



KURY Alta Relojeria in Plaza las Americas carries elegant timepieces like Rolex and Breitling.



Purses designed by Beatriz Sanchez blend materials from Puerto Rico with more contemporary elements.



KURY Alta Relojeria is also recognized as an official Rolex retailer in San Juan.

Also over at Plaza las Americas, Reinhold Jewelers and Relojos y Relojos also focus on designer timepieces and modern accessories and the only Macy's department store in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean carries top tier watch brands like Baume & Mercier, TAG Heur, Victorinox Swiss Army and Movado.

For those aficionados keeping an eye on watch trends, the buzzword is smaller. The current demand, according to Puerto Rico retailers, is for smaller, more affordable watches based on pure design.

The days of the 42-45 mm watches have come to an end as the attraction to smaller timepieces, driven by the popularity of vintage continues to grow. And steel continues to be fashionable. A timeless design and the three-hander have made a comeback, according to the retailers interviewed by Bienvenidos.

That's right, watches that indicate only the hours, minutes, and seconds can be really exciting when they're well made.

For example, the Tudor Black Bay 36 mm and its cousin at Rolex, the slightly larger 39 mm Explorer, have made a good impression when they were released.

wonders found in nature; Cartier, one of the most iconic brands globally due to its popularity in the mainstream press and celebrity

culture; and TAG Heur, which is an abbreviation of 'Techniques d'Avant Garde' and known for its persisting sports-like look.



The Hublot brand currently produces one of the world's most expensive watches.



Prestigious retailer Club Jibarito in Old San Juan carries a variety of luxury watch brands that appeal to the serious collector.



A watch is a definitive man's style statement that has stood the test of time. And for men who value craftsmanship and quality, Puerto Rico is ideal.

Prestigious retailer Club Jibarito in Old San Juan carries A. Lange & Sohne, Audemars Piguet, H.Stern, Panerai, Roger Dubuis, IWC, Tudor, and other international brands that appeal to the serious collector for Haute Horlogerie timepieces.

Rest assure that Club Jibarito carries Vacheron Constantin, one of the oldest manufacturers of luxury timepieces where historical figures like Napoleon Bonaparte, Harry Truman, and Pope Pius IX were said to have worn their watches; and Zenith, known as the creator of the *El Primero* chronograph movement and its timepieces were worn by aviators during several early historic flights in Europe.

Jorge Bared Jewelers, another well-known outlet, which recently opened at The Mall of San Juan and stocks limited edition designs from exclusive brands like Locman Italy, Shelby, Michele, CT-Scuderia, and Baume & Mercier's *Classima* collection made from 18 karat red gold fitted with alligator straps and driven by self-winding movements, mostly visible through its sapphire crystal case back.

Elsewhere in The Mall of San Juan, Swiss crafted brands like Chopard, identifiable for its classic look and great craftsmanship, and Omega, the official timekeepers for the Britain's Royal Flying Corps in 1917 and American army in 1918, as well as Bulgari, which combines the essence of Italian style with Swiss precision and has numerous celebrity brand ambassadors, create timeless watches with stunning designs to cater to the upscale clientele.

Whereas Movado, with its stunning lightweight design and Victorinox Swiss Army watches, among others are sold at the island's only Nordstrom and Saks Fifth Avenue department stores at the Mall of San Juan.

Or, head to Condado to shop exclusively for Cartier and Montblanc at their designer stores. These magnificent watches are stunning accessories and impressive investments that will last a lifetime.

Purse Perfection

A great purse is more than just something people carry. It's a fashion statement, and Puerto Rico wants you to be seen out and about with a piece of scene-stealing arm candy.



Salvatore Ferragamo Italian handbags, sold at the retailer's boutique shop at The Mall of San Juan, are stylish with contemporary detailing.

Nowadays luxury authentic handbags are the not just for the well-to-do, celebrities and royals, but also for working women from all walks of life as well. And for those women who want to splurge and expand their ever-growing luxury collection of purses, handbags, and shoulder bags love Puerto Rico for its chic vibe and fashionable atmosphere. The small Caribbean island is packed with iconic exclusive fashion houses where bag-loving ladies can stock up on everything from oversized leather totes to bedazzled evening clutches perfect for sealing a woman's status.

Puerto Rico also boasts designs from local talent who take their inspiration from the island's people and places. With her line *Una* local designer Beatriz Sanchez blends materials from the Puerto Rico of her childhood with elements more contemporary to today's woman.

"I love Puerto Rico mainly because of the tropical flavor we have," says Sanchez. "You can always look casually elegant. Young Puerto Rican women dress classy but still in a tropical, summery, sporty way because of the weather." Sanchez's designs are meant to go from day to night, whether that means a lunch date, a day out shopping, or a cocktail party.

"You can use my bags all day long because they are like a conversation piece. I see them as artwork that you use to adorn yourself instead of wearing a bracelet or jewelry." Sanchez' handbags are available online at www.unadebs.com, at her workshop in Santurce, at boutiques in hotels like the Condado Vanderbilt in San Juan and the St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort in Rio Grande, Aaron Stewart Home in San Juan, and at upscale shops like Luis Antonio at The Mall of San Juan.



Carolina Herrera bag lovers can explore her latest collection at Plaza las Americas in San Juan.



Photos by Rafi Claudio

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For recognizable names, some of the most renowned handbag brands in the world operate stores in Puerto Rico, offering everything from exclusive, limited-edition and special artist collaboration designs to classic silhouettes and styles.

In The Mall of San Juan, ladies can browse and buy a plethora of exquisite purses of all shapes and sizes at Gucci, Kate Spade, Louis Vuitton, Tory Burch and Coach for the ultimate fashion accessory. These upscale outposts get to know their clientele's tastes and will even alert them when new inventory is scheduled to arrive so that they can be the first to wear them out and about town.

Also in The Mall of San Juan, high-end department stores Nordstrom and Saks Fifth Avenue stock a wide array of exclusive designer handbags sure to make a statement. Ladies who revel in luxury will be in heaven in the handbag sections, where they'll find the hottest designs from Chloe, Miu Miu, Fendi, Stella McCartney, Kate Spade, Marc Jacobs, and Alexander McQueen, just to name a few.

The easiest way to lift your spirits while vacationing in Puerto Rico is to up your bag game and this year's handbag trends according to industry experts are churning out a variety of standout options.

From drawstring stunners in all materials to a perennial cross-body bag craze to boxy bags in square or rectangular shapes. Let's not forget to mention that leading fashion houses and designers are cranking out furry handbags of different sizes and styles and the fanny pack is outpacing even cross-bodies. Just call to

mind the activities you can carry out with a fanny pack perched around your waist—starting from hands-free hot coffee drinking to cold ice-cream licking when walking down the street, not to mention the security of storing your mobile phone and money.

Another must-have trend is the



Giuseppe Zanotti purses can be purchased at The Mall of San Juan.



Italian fashion house Salvatore Ferragamo purses are sophisticated with modern and bold details.



Kate Spade New York handbags are conversation starters also found at The Mall of San Juan.



Dolce & Gabbana handbags are a new take on feminine classics.

backpacks but now the designers are encouraging its clients to carry them in hand from top handles absolutely ignoring those back straps. And once the clutches were meant for special events only with evening gowns and those days are gone. Clutches are now versatile enough to work for daily life and evening soirees.

We cannot forget to mention metallic shimmer and glimmer on stunning handbags. Silvery handbags have marched out from high-end brands like Chanel, Louis Vuitton and Gucci.

Deal hunters, should spend a few hours shopping in Old San Juan where you will find Coach, Dooney & Burke and Burberry outlet. These stores are a discount-shopper's dream, filled with high-end and luxury offerings at affordable prices. You can also visit the Coach, Michael Kors or Kenneth Cole outlets at Puerto Rico Premium Outlets in Barceloneta, approximately 45 minutes from San Juan.

Plaza las Americas, the largest mall in Puerto Rico and Caribbean, is a wonderful place not only to shop

but to meet friends, have dinner and check out a live event or movie. Here bag lovers can shop at the Michael Kors store or visit Carolina Herrera to explore the latest collection of handbag elegance designed by the lifestyle label CH.

Haven't quite found what you're looking for? No worries. Stop by Macy's at Plaza las Americas because this mega anchor department store has a wide selection of luxury bags from top designers like Michael Kors, Coach, Dooney & Burke, and Kate Spade, just to name a few.

For even more purse options, stroll the ritzy San Juan neighborhood of Condado known for its stellar shopping choices. Stop into Montblanc for buttery-soft leather, or snag smart clutches at Cartier.

Nowhere else in the Caribbean can match the high-end luxury shopping choices found in Puerto Rico. Don't leave the island without treating yourself to an accessory that will be a forever reminder of your time on the Island of Enchantment. And, for a true bag lover, it's all worth it. ☑



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