



Clockwise from left: Gurkha twill and saddle leather rucksack, \$1,195. Brooks England water-resistant cotton and leather Pickwick backpack, £205. Giorgio Armani deerskin and cuoio leather backpack, £1,850



Given that the oldest backpack ever discovered dates back to roughly the same period as the earliest known uses of the wheel, putting a name to the bright spark who invented it is a tricky business. What we do know is that, in the time between “Ötzi the Iceman” setting off on his doomed trek through the southern Austrian Alps with a primitive, wooden-framed carrying device, and Giorgio Armani presenting a crocodile-skin rendering of the same basic principle in its autumn/winter 2015 collection some 5,300 years later, the backpack has come a long, long way.

Much of the ingenuity behind its evolution can be attributed to the military – the first external-frame “knapsack” with hip belt was patented in the US by Major Henry C Merriam in 1878 – but now, it’s the world’s more ingenious menswear designers who are turning what were once purely practical items into genuinely stylish accessories. More than that, we’ve now reached an era in which an array of backpacks can even be deemed boardroom-friendly.

Take the Dunhill Chassis (£825, pictured overleaf), for example. Made of carbon fibre-printed cowhide with gunmetal-finished hardware, elegant top flap and buckle strap and two phone pockets, it would be as much at home in the modern oak-panelled conference room as Major Merriam’s creation would have been in

BACK IN BUSINESS

Can backpacks ever cut it in the boardroom? **Nick Scott** weighs up the growing band of contenders



Clockwise from main picture: Lost Property of London leather Arlington rucksack, £398. Ermenegildo Zegna grained calfskin backpack, £1,000. J Panther Luggage Co Courier Ruc Case, £610. Dolce & Gabbana calfskin and jute Sicily backpack, £1,300. Dunhill cowhide Chassis rucksack, £825. Alexander McQueen studded leather backpack, £1,195



Three-way briefcases can be carried as either a briefcase, shoulder bag or backpack

the officers’ quarters in Fort Laramie, Wyoming. The same goes for the Arlington (£398, pictured above right), a tanned leather, equestrian-style rucksack – the larger version of which fits a 15in MacBook – from upcycling company Lost Property of London, as well as Giorgio Armani’s deerskin and cuoio leather backpack (£1,850, pictured on previous page) with rolled closure, and Ermenegildo Zegna’s grained calfskin backpack (£1,000, pictured far right) in black with chevron lining, internal padded compartment for laptop and pockets for smartphone and charger. London craft leather-goods company Troubadour’s stunning offering (£1,325) is also large enough to fit a 15in laptop, while remaining as boardroom friendly as PowerPoint and muffins.

Yet opinion remains divided as to whether a backpack – of any style – should be worn in the formal corporate environment. “Any piece of luggage you have to carry on your back can cause your suit to sit badly and ruin the drape,” says Jeremy Kirkland of Hong Kong’s menswear clothier The Armoury. “So we would always recommend a gentleman’s briefcase.”

Italian tailor Luca Rubinacci would seem to agree. “A gentleman should hold a bag for day-to-day use and wear a backpack at weekends,” he decrees. Others suggest a convertible backpack is the way forward. “Porter from Japan has some nice three-way briefcases [about £440] that can be carried either as a briefcase, shoulder bag or backpack,” says Mats Klingberg, managing director of London independent men’s outfitters Trunk Clothiers. “As you

approach work you can take the backpack off and convert it to a smarter-looking briefcase.”

Harry Beattie, owner and co-founder of online menswear outfitters Opumo, advocates a similar solution. “Traditionally, backpacks and formal suiting shouldn’t be paired, but the exception to this is when a bag blends backpack functionality with the elegance of a briefcase,” he says. “The Courier Ruc Case from J Panther Luggage Co (£610, pictured below centre) allows you to turn up to a meeting with a briefcase and go home with the comfort and convenience of a backpack without compromising on style.”

However, Olie Arnold, style director at Mr Porter, embraces an all-out, straps-on-cashmere approach. “In recent years, the backpack has evolved from schoolbook bag to a luxury accessory fit for the boardroom,” he says. “It works best on those who prefer a contemporary look – so opt for a slim, minimalist, leather backpack. The trick is to use it only for essentials – laptop, smart device, notebook and so forth – and avoid overpacking. Gym kit belongs elsewhere.” Specifically, Arnold recommends Maison Margiela’s full-grain leather backpack (£800) and Shinola’s grained-leather Runwell (£815), which shares its name with the Detroit brand’s popular wristwatch.

While there’s no clear consensus on the subject, concerns about the drape of one’s



Ampl's SmartBackpack will power gadgets on the go, with an app showing charging progress without the need to open a zip

suit being compromised by a backpack – more than it is, say, by a bag with a shoulder strap – are valid, but can be allayed by a few simple rules: pack light, set the straps even in length, check them regularly, and there's no reason not to take the plunge.

Meanwhile, if your company boardroom happens to be of the beanbags-and-foosball variety, with a casual-smart dress code to match, Alexander McQueen's studded backpack (£1,195, pictured on previous page) fits into an edgier work look (check out the skull zip-pulls), as do the Gucci Signature (£1,250, pictured top), with its intricate heat-debossed pattern and padded interior iPad sleeve, and the Brooks England Pickwick (£205, pictured on opening page) in water-resistant cotton with leather trim. Equally at home in the trendy start-up milieu is Ampl's SmartBackpack (about \$299), which – once it's ready to ship to customers (slated for next year) – will power and protect gadgets on the go, with an app showing the charging progress inside without the need to even open a zipper.

Dolce & Gabbana's Sicily backpack (£1,300, pictured on previous page) made of jute canvas reinforced with calfskin and Matt & Nat's Dean (£140,

Clockwise from top: **Gucci** Signature backpack, **£1,250**. **Matt & Nat** Dean backpack, **£140**. **Berluti** calfskin Horizon backpack, **£2,150**



pictured bottom right) in olive are ideal for dress-down office cultures during summer months, while the new autumn/winter 2016 version of Berluti's Horizon (£2,150, pictured bottom left) in calfskin is perfect for work environments in which any hint of formality is anathema.

Backpacks have clearly reached a new apex stylistically, and now seem as suited to the boardroom as they once did to the barracks. ♦

LEADERS OF THE BACKPACK

Alexander McQueen, 9 Savile Row, London W1 (020-7494 8840; www.alexandermcqueen.com). **Ampl**, www.ampl-labs.com. **Berluti**, 43 Conduit St, London W1 (020-7437 1740; www.berluti.com).

Brooks England, 36 Earham St, London WC2 (020-7836 9968; www.brooksengland.com). **Dolce & Gabbana**, 53-55 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7495 9250; www.dolcegabbana.com). **Dunhill**, Bourdon House, 2 Davies St, London W1 (020-7385 8817; www.dunhill.com). **Ermenegildo Zegna**, 203-204 Sloane St, London SW1 (020-7201 7000; www.zegna.com).

Giorgio Armani, 37 Sloane St, London SW1 (020-7235 6232; www.armani.com). **Gucci**, 18 Sloane St, London SW1 (020-7235 6707; www.gucci.com).

Gurkha, www.ghurka.com. **J Panther Luggage Co**, www.jplc.com and see Opumo. **Lost Property of London**, 50 Cross St, London N1 (020-7704 9064; www.lostpropertyoflondon.com).

Maison Margiela, 22 Bruton St, London W1 (020-7629 2682; www.maisonmargiela.com) and see Mr Porter. **Matt & Nat**, www.mattandnat.com. **Mr Porter**, www.mrporter.com. **Opumo**, www.opumo.com. **Porter**, www.yoshidakaban.com and see Trunk Clothiers.

Shinola, 28 Foubert's Pl, London W1 (020-7734 5402; www.shinola.co.uk) and see Mr Porter.

Troubadour, www.troubadourgoods.com. **Trunk Clothiers**, 8 Chiltern St, London W1 (020-7486 2357; www.trunkclothiers.com).