

STYLE & TRAVEL

# PERSONAL JOURNAL.



## All Eyes on You

How to handle the spotlight **TRICKS OF THE TRADE | D4**



## A Sports Column To Swear By

**JASON GAY | D6**

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Thursday, April 23, 2015 | D1

# Can Your Relationship Handle IKEA?

The furniture retailer triggers particular types of arguments; therapists see the 'IKEA meltdown'

By **HILARY POTKEWITZ**

In therapy, so many couples mention fighting while shopping at IKEA or while assembling what they buy there that clinical psychologist Ramani Durvasula has started embracing the retailer as a tool for a communications exercise. The Santa Monica, Calif., therapist often tasks couples with putting together a large piece of furniture at home and reporting back on how it went.

IKEA, the world's largest furniture retailer with 367 stores in seven countries, can look like a domestic wonderland. Its walkable showrooms offer a path through sleek model bedrooms, kitchens, living rooms and children's rooms. Shoppers are encouraged to spend time sitting on a sofa and envisioning what their lives could be in these spaces.

And that's where couples' trouble often starts, says Dr. Durvasula, who is also a professor of psychology at California State University Los Angeles. "The store literally becomes a map of a relationship nightmare," she says. Walking through the kitchens brings up touchy subjects, like who does most of the cooking. Then you get to the children's section, which opens up another set of issues. And that's before you've even tried assembling anything.

Dr. Durvasula says constructing the small Nornäs coffee table is fairly undemanding. But a massive wall unit like the Liatorp? She calls that the Divorcemaker.

IKEA, based in Almhult, Sweden,

knows shopping for big items can be stressful and lead to arguments, says Janice Simonsen, design spokeswoman for IKEA U.S.

"While IKEA has no set philosophy on couples shopping together, we want everyone to have a good experience," she says. As for the company's furniture being used for therapy, she says, "We're just happy to be part of the process."

Though the company doesn't provide mediators or counselors, she points out that about 85% of its U.S. stores offer home-furnishings consultants, available by appointment, who can give design advice.

Ms. Simonsen spent five years as a furnishings consultant and compiled a list of guidelines for couples preparing for an IKEA visit, including agreeing on a style from the catalog before ever setting foot in the store.

"We've seen it all," says Mary Ann Barroso, a local marketing specialist and former kitchen designer at IKEA's Burbank, Calif., store. She points out that most of the time, couples come to IKEA because they're renovating a home or moving, which are already stressful situations. According to a 2013 survey conducted by home design site Houzz, 46% of couples doing remodeling projects together found the experience frustrating, and 12% of couples surveyed admitted that they considered separation or divorce during the renovation.

"If I felt a conversation was going to turn into an argument, I wouldn't  
*Please see IKEA page D2*



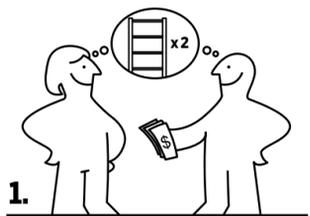
CLAYTON HAUCK FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### Assemble With Care

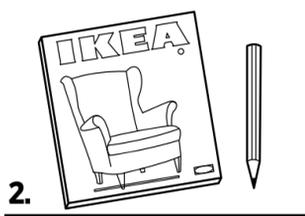
Remya Thomas and Jacob Varghese play with their 1-year-old daughter Anaya at a table filled with IKEA instruction booklets and tools. Their Chicago home was furnished with IKEA furniture, which they say provided an early test to their marriage. "I had never done any of this before, but I thought, how hard can it be?" Mr. Varghese says.

## Armchair Therapy

Janice Simonsen, design spokeswoman for Ikea North America, offers these guidelines to make shopping less stressful for couples:



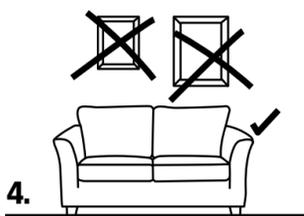
**1.** Decide what you will be purchasing and what your priorities are. Set a budget. Stick to it.



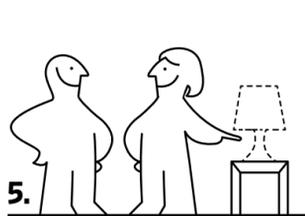
**2.** Use the catalog/website in advance of your visit and choose a style that you both can agree on.



**3.** To reduce stress, come in at a slow time, like a weekday evening.



**4.** Focus on the major purchases first: couch, armchair, bed, wall unit. Remember that a room evolves and doesn't have to be designed in a day.



**5.** Accessorize on another trip.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

# Come to Paris for a Deal on a Bag

By **NADYA MASIDLOVER**

Paris

When Los Angeles resident An Dyer planned a trip to Paris in January, scoring a new luxury handbag was top of her priority list.

Ms. Dyer, who splits her time between working in technology sales and blogging about fashion, didn't buy just one bag. She went on a shopping spree, snapping up bags from Chanel, Gucci and Louis Vuitton and reaping an unexpected windfall provided by the slide in the euro's exchange rate.

"The prices [in Paris] were better—I mean dramatically better," says Ms. Dyer. She had set aside 4,000 to 5,000 euros for her European shopping, but when she saw how much lower prices were than she had expected, she decided to spend more—for a total of about €8,000, or \$8,560—on luxury goods. "I couldn't pass it up," she says.

The fall in the value of the euro against the dollar and other currencies has exacerbated a glaring price gap between luxury goods sold in Europe and those sold in the rest of the world.

Some labels can now cost up to 30% more in the U.S. than in Europe after conversion of prices to comparable currency.

Six months ago—before the euro fell by more than 15%—the price difference was variable but on average under 10% and in some cases prices actually worked out to be cheaper in the U.S.

For instance, a Gucci "Jackie" soft leather hobo bag costs €2,500 when purchased at the label's own stores in Europe, the equivalent of \$2,675 at current exchange rates. Yet the bag retails in U.S. stores for \$2,990. Prada's Saffiano handbag sells for \$2,350 in the U.S., 33% more than its €1,650 (\$1,766) price tag in Europe. The gap has become a magnet for



Chanel raised prices on some handbags in Europe, including the classic flap bag, to help close a pricing gap between a weak euro and the U.S. dollar.

savvy travelers. Already, spending on tax-free shopping by U.S. travelers jumped 37% in the first three months of 2015, compared with the same period last year, according to Global Blue, a Switzerland-based firm that processes sales tax refunds for non-EU tourists.

Though U.S. nationals continue to spend disproportionately on souvenirs and gifts, they are increasingly showing an interest in watches, jewelry and leather goods and bags, says Duncan Skehens, a spokesman for Global Blue.

U.S. travelers have to declare their purchases when they return to the U.S. and pay the applicable duty.

Shoppers who aren't able to fly to Paris may turn to "concierge services," or personal shoppers who buy

products at stores in Europe and ship them to the U.S. or elsewhere.

Some consumers also shop for high-end totes through online resellers with websites like collector-square.com or therealreal.com. Though their main business is selling secondhand luxury goods, some also have a small proportion of luxury handbags with price tags still attached.

The currency divergence has created a dilemma for luxury brands. Drove of overseas shoppers in recent years have supported sales in Europe, where bags and other luxury staples typically have been somewhat cheaper than elsewhere.

But the current price gap, which is far beyond any historical norm, is fu-  
*Please see BAGS page D3*

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STYLE & TRAVEL

# The Price You Pay for Water and Food at the Airport

By SCOTT MCCARTNEY

Travelers view water as essential to flying. The need to avoid dehydration has been drummed into us. But is \$5 a bottle too much to swallow at the airport?

Water is by far the most popular at many stores inside airport terminals. Water sales have gushed since security rules began prohibiting passengers from bringing their own water through screening in 2006. You can bring empty water bottles and fill them once inside secure areas. Some airports are even installing bottle fill stations. But often people simply go to the airport newsstand or food shop and grab a bottle of water.

"Water is what our customers want. You need water, so that's our top-selling product," says Laura Samuels, spokeswoman for Hudson Group, the New Jersey-based airport retailer that has 705 locations in 57 cities.

The difference between airport prices and prices elsewhere can sometimes be as small as a couple of quarters. But it's an emotional issue for some passengers—yet another way they feel nickel-and-dimed while traveling.

Airport stores have long caught flak for inflated prices. Some airports write provisions into leases and contracts that retailers have to offer "street prices." San Francisco International and Dallas-Fort Worth International allow street prices plus 10%. DFW has imposed a cap of \$2.25 on the price of a 20-ounce water.

Airports Council International, an airport industry group, says its surveys in North America show airports most use street pricing or street pricing plus a percentage as a pricing requirement. The difference is still widespread enough to be irritating to many. And there's still wide variation. For instance, 24 coated Advil tablets cost \$8.99 at DFW but 28% more at JFK: \$11.49. Yet you can get 50 coated Advil tablets at a Duane Reade store in midtown Manhattan for \$7.79.

## RUNWAY ROBBERY?

Price checks for common items at four airports—Los Angeles International (LAX), Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) and New York's Kennedy (JFK) and LaGuardia (LGA)—found common goods costing more than equivalent products at a Manhattan drug store and L.A. convenience store.

 <p><b>Smartwater (20 oz.)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$3.63 LGA</li> <li>\$4.04 JFK</li> <li>\$1.49 N.Y. store</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Naked Juice Smoothie (15 oz.)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$4.06 DFW</li> <li>\$4.99 JFK</li> <li>\$5.29 LGA</li> <li>\$3.89 L.A. store</li> <li>\$4.29 N.Y. store</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Kind bar</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$2.69 DFW</li> <li>\$2.99 LAX</li> <li>\$3.49 JFK</li> <li>\$3.59 LGA</li> <li>\$2.29 L.A. store</li> <li>\$2.99 N.Y. store</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Advil (24 coated tablets)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$8.99 DFW</li> <li>\$9.19 LGA</li> <li>\$9.99 LAX</li> <li>\$11.49 JFK</li> <li>\$7.79 N.Y. store (50 count)</li> </ul>
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And water? A 20-ounce bottle of Dasani, which is priced at 99 cents at convenience stores, ranges from \$1.99 at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport to \$2.89 at JFK. Prices run as high as \$4.99 plus tax for a one-liter bottle of Smartwater at either New York airport.

"It's like double what you normally pay. It's basically a monopoly here, so what are you going to do?" Sam Arico of Los Angeles said just after buying a bottle of Smartwater at LAX for a flight to London to visit his girlfriend.

Dimitrius Collins, a Los Angeles musician on his way to Brussels, said most travelers assume they'll have to pay inflated prices at airports. "You pay \$3 for 25 ounces, and that's a lot for something you shouldn't even have to pay for," he said of water.

The latest ACI concession survey,

published in December, found that food and beverage spending at airports increased to \$5.68 per passenger in 2013 spending at duty-free, special and newsstand retailers increased to \$3.41 for every passenger who got on a plane. Both were up more than 25%.

Ms. Samuels of Hudson says pricing is a sensitive area for any company and she can't address particular prices at particular stores or how much water Hudson sells annually. She says in general airport shops are much more expensive to operate than other retail stores and so prices are going to be higher.

Airport stores are small, so there's limited space for inventory. They also require off-airport warehouses. Deliveries to stores are often limited to off-peak hours and have to be made in small containers, because every-

thing needs to pass through security screening. Employees have to be badged by airports and pass through security. All that adds time and cost, she says.

"We have double and triple and quadruple handling," Ms. Samuels says. "It's not like you can buy it at the bulk price that 7-Eleven is buying. Bulk is the big thing."

She also notes that while Hudson and other airport retailers don't have the lowest prices on goods, they often aren't the highest. Sports arenas often charge at least \$4 for a small bottle of water \$7 or more for a large soda in a souvenir cup. Hotels and amusement parks often have higher prices on staples like bottled water, Ms. Samuels notes. "We're not there to gouge the customer," she says.

At JFK, five Hudson stores in Terminal 8 had coolers with prices

clearly displayed for juices, soft drinks and other purchases. But there were no prices for water bottles in the coolers in any of the five Marketplace stores. Clerks knew that the smaller Smartwater bottle was \$4.40 including tax, and the larger was \$5.43 with tax. But the lack of signs on the best-selling item could make it tough for jet-lagged or non-English-speaking travelers.

Nearby in the same stores, walls are covered with salty snack offerings. A large sign says \$4.99. But when an 8.75-ounce bag of Chex Mix is rung up, it's priced at \$5.49 plus tax. It turns out the small print under \$4.99 on the sign says "up to \$9.99."

Hudson Group's Ms. Samuels says the company isn't trying to deceive anyone. "Our business is to serve the customer. We're not in business to cheat the traveler," she says.

## BAGS

Continued from page D1 eling a flourishing parallel market of people who buy handbags in Europe and resell them overseas.

This makes many luxury marketers uneasy. "Customers are buying real Hermès products in an environment which is not Hermès," said Guillaume De Seynes, an executive director at the French firm.

Hermès, maker of the prestigious Birkin and Kelly bags, is taking a close look at its pricing policy in light of recent currency variations, Mr. De Seynes said.

More than other brands, Hermès has long had to contend with parallel trade, also known as the gray market, as customers look for alternatives to retail, where there are often waiting lists to buy the most prized Hermès bags.

The currency gap is giving U.S. customers even more motivation to seek other channels: While retail customers in France now will pay at least €6,700 (\$7,169) for a coveted Birkin bag, an entry-level model of the bag retails for at \$11,000 in the U.S.

Chanel disclosed last month it would slash prices in China on some bags, raise prices in Europe and freeze prices in the U.S. The decision



From left: Gucci's 'Jackie' hobo bag costs the equivalent of \$2,675 in France and \$2,990 at retail in the U.S.; a Louis Vuitton Speedy 30 costs \$733 in Paris and \$970 in New York; the Prada Saffiano costs \$1,766 in Europe and \$2,350 in the U.S.; the Hermès Birkin costs at least \$7,169 in France, versus \$11,000 for an entry-level model in the U.S.

sparked a stampede, and certain models sold out in many stores across Europe in advance of the April 8 price hike.

Rima Abas-Fidalgo is a personal shopper and buyer of luxury clothes and accessories in Paris for overseas clients, who pay her a commission. She says her job has become more difficult as companies try to curb reselling.

Brands "do everything so that people like me can't buy for others," she says. Brands are also cracking down on the number of bags one person can buy from any one store.

Rema Awad, a 33-year-old lawyer

in New York who is planning a trip to Paris in May, said she was "hysterical" to discover that her plan to buy a new Chanel jumbo black Caviar flap bag with gold hardware in Europe was hitting the hurdle of the price hike.

"My husband put in calls to American Express asking, 'How can I get this handbag for my wife?'" Ms. Awad says.

The company put her in touch with Ms. Abas-Fidalgo before the price hike took effect. In March, Ms. Abas-Fidalgo went into the Chanel store in Paris and picked up the bag for €3,950 (\$4,227).

Currently the bag costs €4,750 euros (\$5,083) in Europe and retails in the U.S. for \$5,500.

Other big luxury houses don't appear inclined to follow Chanel's lead, suggesting the price gap isn't about to disappear. Many large sellers of pricey goods prefer to continue generating volume sales by catering to tourists visiting Paris, Milan and elsewhere.

Louis Vuitton recently hiked the price of its Speedy 30 monogrammed canvas bag in Europe by 4% while keeping the price steady in markets such as the U.S. and China.

Even after the increase, though, a

customer in New York still will pay almost 30% more, with the bag costing \$970 there, compared with €685 (\$733) in Paris.

Louis Vuitton's parent, luxury juggernaut LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, says it has no plans to harmonize prices globally.

Firms shouldn't make "emergency" decisions, regarding currency effects, said Jean-Jacques Guiony, chief financial officer at LVMH, which also owns Céline, Fendi and other luxury brands. "What currencies have done, currencies can undo," he said.

—John Revill contributed to this article.

## Ask Teri Columnist Teri Agins answers readers' questions

**Q:** I've gotten up the nerve to wear Bermuda shorts in orange this summer (me: male, age 42—average build and no gut!).

How do I wear bright shorts and maintain a masculine look so the guys I hang out with won't

make fun of me if I wear them to a baseball game, for example.

—C.K.

**A:** Ordinary guys have evolved when it comes to wearing trendier sportswear. Your orange Bermuda shorts are easier

to pull off than you might think, as are shorts and pants in lime green, yellow, purple and camouflage prints. Pants in strong colors can look sophisticated, smart and not goofy if you wear them with confidence and a sense of style.

Start by pairing your orange shorts with a button-down, short-sleeve shirt in madras plaid and a woven leather belt. (Plaid shirts look hip with pants in a bold solid shade.) Or wear your shorts to the baseball game with a high V-neck T-shirt in white or most any other solid color—or with the usual polo knit shirt.

### Strong-colored shorts and patterned pants are easier to wear than you might think.

Whichever shirt you choose, keep it neat and not oversized. Study the proportions and length of Roger Federer's tennis shirts.

Pants with gingham checks or batik prints are stylish. Guys, the key here is to stick with a classic shirt—short sleeves, or rolled-up long sleeves in a cream linen, for example. Toss on a navy blazer for dressier outings. Wear slip-ons, Topsiders, loafers or sandals without socks.

Men can grab practical fashion ideas on Pinterest.com, where you're looking at clothes on regular guys—and not models—in many of the posts.

Email askteri@wsj.com.



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