

# The guilt is too genuine when the fashion is oh-so-fake

**U**PON RETURNING from a trip to China, my sister shared many stories, pictures and, of course, luxurious presents of Balenciaga bags and Lacoste polos that were of the less-than-authentic variety.

In Shanghai, there was an open-air market (apparently it later got shut down) that provided acres and acres of close-to-the-real thing high-end clothes and accessories. Before she departed for Asia, I begged her to get me some goods. When I actually saw the gifts, I was excited, but a huge burden of guilt filled my sartorial psyche.

That aside, I decided to take the pair of “Gucci” horsebit loafers for a test run in San Francisco. I wanted to walk through the financial district and play the role of a frenzied, yet swanky, stockbroker yelling profanities into his BlackBerry.

The shoes felt a little snug when I tried them on, but I just thought I needed to break them in. That may have been the biggest mistake I’ve made in my entire fashion life.

At the end of the day, after walking many blocks in the city, I was in excruciating pain. When I removed the shoes, I as-



**Dino-Ray Ramos**

**DRESSED**

[dramos@angnewspapers.com](mailto:dramos@angnewspapers.com)

sessed the damage: numerous bleeding blisters on my toes, heels and soles of my feet.

I felt like the couture gods were punishing me. It’s like I had betrayed my real luxury goods by having an illicit affair with these second-rate shoes.

With guilt still lingering in my head, I needed help. I learned of a group that serves as a watchdog to help stop all this madness. The International Anticounterfeiting Coalition combats the piracy of not only luxury goods, but also autos, food, book publishing, software, entertainment and pharmaceuticals. According to the coalition, there’s an estimated \$600 million in sales annually of counterfeit products.

That’s a lot of blistered feet.

From my experience with what I now call my “Fucci” loafers, I have converted to the

religion of Anti-fake Fashionism. The whole ordeal reminds me the “Sex and the City” episode when Carrie was looking at a trunk full of fake Fendi purses and they were gazing up at her with the eyes of gimp-legged orphaned puppies. In my case, it was a pair of shoes.

In addition to my bloody incident, I am regularly seeing other acts of fashion fraud: plastic-bedazzled Chanel bracelets, Coach purses with a subtle ‘G’ instead of a ‘C’ and worst of all, a gaudy Louis Vuitton mah jong set that can be found on the corner of tacky and tasteless in the town of Kitschville.

All these items do have a dash of humor in them, but sad to say, some people actually buy them to look more stylish — and it does the exact opposite.

Are these faux luxury goods really worth it? Or are we just trying to amp up our images to impress those around us?

As I stand on my runway soapbox and cast stones at the atrocity of fake designer goods, I can sense many a reader rolling their eyes at my discourse. I can certainly understand your scoffing because I do find some pricetags on authentic brand names quite expensive, and I know I can’t



**A REAL (OR FAKE) LUXURY:** Actress Scarlett Johansson models a new Louis Vuitton purse, one of many brands copied by the fashion counterfeiting underworld.

afford them.

Sometimes I do splurge on an uber-expensive item, but that’s just because I have saved a hearty amount of pennies in my piggy bank. Then I balance that out with an \$8 bargain at the vintage store.

When it comes down to it, you are just paying for the respected brand name. And more than that, you’re paying for a piece of art. That said, you can’t buy style so there’s no justification for buying an insulting knock off.

I understand that some people can’t get enough of the fake stuff. They can do what they want. If they want to feel like an A-list celeb via a counterfeit item, then by all means they should do so.

But non-pretentious admirers of fashion appreciate the value of a good piece of clothing, and if they can’t afford it, they deal with it. Unfortunately, I had to learn the hard way.

I always find good alternatives (not fakes) to these items. They may not emit the fashion power of an Hermes Birkin bag, but at least I won’t have that fraudulent cloud looming over me when I use them.

No matter how well they are made or how uncanny the resemblance is, buying a fake is like having a relationship with a mannequin instead of a real person. These “street corner” items have no soul. You may have a fashionable and flashy appearance, but you’re not fooling anyone.

You can contact Dino-Ray Ramos at [dramos@angnewspapers.com](mailto:dramos@angnewspapers.com) or call (925) 416-4856. If you want to find out how to spot a fake or take a stance on your own runway soapbox, visit [www.insidebaya-re.com/fashion](http://www.insidebaya-re.com/fashion).