

Great Bags Come Back to Rittenhouse Square

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

When the Pennsylvania Guild Fine Craft Fair comes to Rittenhouse Square every Spring, I always look for the **GreatBags®/Maple Leather Company** booth, where Seymour Mondshein and his wife, Lisa Martin, exhibit their handbags, backpacks and fanny packs made of leather, tapestry and nylon. I own three of these handbags, so I usually take one of them to visit its cousins. These handbags never wear out – after many years they look brand new.

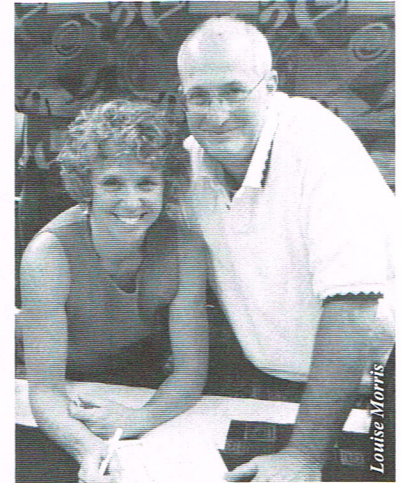
If the handbags are so indestructible, I asked Mondshein, then how does he get repeat business? To which he laughed and said, “Each bag has 10,000 zips in it.”

GreatBags® are custom-designed from an array of styles, fabrics and patterns. Buyers are mostly city women, ages 12 to 80, who want lightweight, safe, and durable bags with lots of pockets and zippers, not easily robbed, and beautifully designed. Sixty-thousand people have purchased these bags.

Explaining his philosophy, Mondshein says, “As a designer I strive to create work of lasting beauty, designs which are both durable and functional... I use only the finest materials available and the highest levels of craftsmanship.” Each year, Mondshein talks to thousands of women about what they want in a bag and designs new styles. Those of us who know these bags recognize one instantly, and exchange information about how many bags we have and how long we have had them.



French Satchel Tote 223 in Kandinsky-inspired fabric with ballistic nylon.



Lisa Martin and Seymour Mondshein

The son of a European-trained furrier and Holocaust survivor whose craft saved his life, Mondshein learned to make small leather pouches in his father’s fur shop in Newark, New Jersey. While attending the College of New Jersey, Mondshein made these leather pouches in his dorm room and sold them on a blanket in the student center, then at the Golden Nugget Market in Lambertville, and later at the 1973 American Craft Council Craft Show in Rhinebeck, New York.

While still an undergraduate he interned at a tannery, and learned about manufacturing by traveling with sales reps to handbag companies. After college he continued his course work in design at the

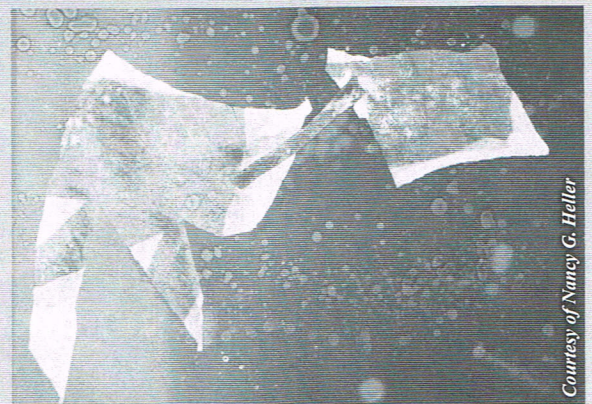
New School, the Fashion Institute of Technology, and Parsons School of Design in New York City. His first studio was in Hopewell, N.J., followed by a factory space in Lambertville.

Now GreatBags®/Maple Leather Company has a showcase and studio in the renovated chicken hatchery of Cane Farm, 14 Raven Rock Road, Rosemont, N.J. Mondshein exhibits at about 20 U.S. regional crafts shows each year, including Lincoln Center and the American Crafts Council. The Philadelphia Museum of Art and several local stores sell these bags, and you can purchase them online at www.greatbags.com.

CCCulture

Jules Heller Prints on Exhibit at Jefferson Blood Donor Center

Art historian, professor of art history at the University of the Arts, and Center City resident **Nancy G. Heller** has donated prints by her late father, artist **Jules Heller**, to Jefferson Hospital. Jules Heller (1919-2007) was a pioneering American artist, author and teacher who spent nearly seven decades exploring all sorts of printmaking and papermaking techniques. Heller was Founding Dean of Fine Arts at both the Pennsylvania State University and York University in Toronto, Canada; he also served as Arts Dean at his alma mater in Arizona. Heller was an artist-in-residence in Mexico, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and northern Argentina, and the recipient of many awards. His work is represented in prestigious public and private collections. The donated prints are on exhibit at the Jefferson Blood Donor Center, 111 South 10th Street, Gibbon 1114 (ground level). <http://www.julesheller.net>.



Jules Heller's "Beastie III," 1982, monotype.

Courtesy of Nancy G. Heller