

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 POTKIEWITZ

In therapy, so many couples mention fighting while shopping at IKEA or while assembling what they buy there that clinical psychologist Rami Durvasula has started embracing the retailer as a tool for a communications exercise.

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.

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.

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.

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



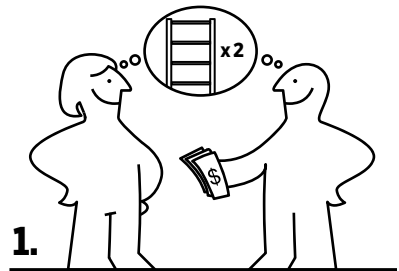
CLAYTON HAUCK FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Assemble With Care

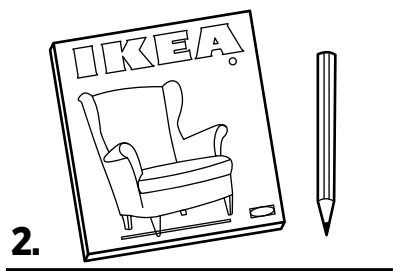
Remya Thomas and Jacob Varghese play with their 1-year-old daughter Anaya at a table filled with IKEA instruction booklets and tools. Their Chicago home was furnished with IKEA furniture, which they say provided an early test to their marriage. "I had never done any of this before, but I thought, how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



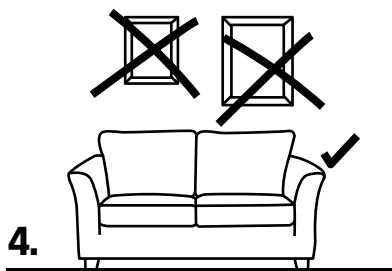
1. Decide what you will be purchasing and what your priorities are. Set a budget. Stick to it.



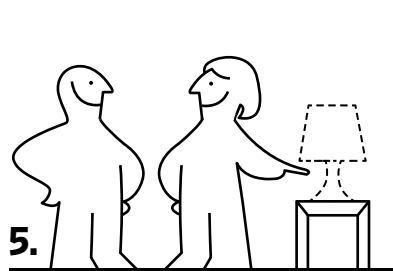
2. Use the catalog/website in advance of your visit and choose a style that you both can agree on.



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

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