

STYLE & TRAVEL

# The Low-Tech Security Threat: Pickpockets

*Continued from the prior page*

sense has declined, experts say, though there are still plenty of more-blatant thefts against tourists such as purse snatchings. And there are still hot spots for classic pocket pilfering, such as horse-racing tracks filled with cash-loaded bettors, Dr. Felson said. Boisterous crowds like at Mardi Gras in New Orleans, or crowded public transportation like San Francisco buses have also raised pickpocketing alarms.

Thieving techniques include unzipping a strolling victim's purse to lift a wallet or phone, and creating contact, such as by bumping into a victim or having an accomplice stop suddenly in front of a victim. The other thief behind the victim bumps into the person and removes a wallet from a back

## In the U.S., traditional pickpocketing has declined.

pocket. Thieves in Italy are known to use knives to slash open purses and even men's jacket pockets.

Creating diversions is also a common tactic. A thief may squirt something on victims, drop coins in front of them or show them a map and ask for directions to distract targets.

In November, San Francisco police detectives nabbed three men on a city bus. One was seen with a T-shirt draped over a shoulder—a technique to conceal the arm—and detectives followed, watching one suspect fail to open a woman's purse. They then saw the trio work together to steal a wallet, which was recovered.

In Russia, some bold pickpockets return a “found” wallet to a victim after having scanned credit cards to record numbers, according to a State Department report on crime in that country. The thieves hope the victim doesn't report the cards stolen so “further fraudulent charges can be made without immediate suspicion,” the report said.

Credit cards make inviting targets for thieves because even when canceled abroad, many still can be used for small purchases that don't require approval from central banking computers. American Express Co., MasterCard Inc. and Visa Inc. all said they don't track particular kinds of theft

when cards are lost or stolen.

It isn't clear that any single factor is behind the persistence and growth of pickpocketing and purse snatching in many cities. The ubiquity of closed-circuit cameras at airports has driven thieves away and onto trains and into other crowded areas. And growing use of the cameras across cities makes picking a pocket a less risky proposition than a flagrant mugging.

The simple fact that more people are carrying valuable and easily lifted items such as iPhones explains part of the increase. And today's more open borders make it easier for organized groups to orchestrate traveling networks of criminals, experts say.

The British Transport Police, which patrols trains and the London Underground says a substantial portion of the pickpocketing is done by these organized groups. Based on intelligence and covert operations, “over the last couple of years much of the profit from this criminality is sent back to the heads of organized crime networks abroad,” a BTP spokesman said. In August, London police brought in a team of seven Romanian police officers for a week to help spot and deal with “dippers” in town for the Olympics.

In Spain, where unemployment hit 24.6% in June, the State Department said it receives “thousands of reports from Americans who are robbed or victimized in a variety of scams each year.” That is a small percentage of the 1.2 million American tourists visiting Spain every year, but authorities warn some popular tourist areas are plagued with very active teams of pickpockets.

That doesn't mean there is necessarily a link between economic woes and an increase in crimes such as pickpocketing, experts say.

Indeed, Dr. Felson said prosperity brings out more tourists and more criminals—crime goes up when there is more to steal.

Even in cities considered relatively safe, compared with other urban areas, pickpocketing is a problem. In August, the State Department diplomatic security report on Guangzhou, China, noted it was one of the world's largest urban areas with comparably low crime, but there is income disparity and social friction.

“Pickpocketing on public transportation, in shopping areas and at tourist sites is quite common,” the report said.

## OBJECT OF DESIRE | Eclectic Tableware



**THE MIX-AND-MATCH TABLE:** Dana Cowin, editor of Food & Wine magazine (at left), with her 1952 Raymor by Roseville set, the first plates in her 500-piece collection.

Below, left: Ms. Cowin layers a hand-painted Emma Bridgewater egg cup atop an anonymous midcentury glass plate and a plastic French Bull dinner platter.

Below, right: For a black-and-white themed dinner, she combines designs by Marimekko, Fornasetti, Pieter Stockmans and others.



As 5 p.m. rolls around, the big question for most moms is what they will make for dinner. For Dana Cowin, it's how she will set the table.

About once a week, Ms. Cowin, editor of Food & Wine magazine, draws from her more than 500-piece collection to create the perfect place setting. Ms. Cowin, 52, lives in Manhattan with her husband, 12-year-old daughter and 9-year-old son. On weekends, they travel upstate to their house in Amenia, N.Y.

Ms. Cowin's plate collection, which ranges from traditional chintz-patterned dishes to plastic Target plates and bowls, grew, in part, from her love of entertaining. She usually doesn't display her dishes, preferring to show them off by setting them on her mirrored dining room table. “Eating is fun, plating is fun and creating a party is fun,” she says.

Ms. Cowin often hosts themed dinners centered around the plates. She will serve Chinese cuisine on her Asian-influenced blue-and-white dishes, or comfort food on top of her grandmother's old-fashioned

orange-and-brown Copeland Spode china.

One favorite theme: Black-and-white parties, set on ceramics by Jonathan Adler and Wanderlust, and china by Fornasetti. “It's very easy to do black-and-white food,” she says, citing risotto with truffles, charred eggplant, pork with a blackened herb crust and black-and-white cookies.

When building her collection, Ms. Cowin thinks about how food will look on each plate. Flat plates with large, shallow wells work best for serving dinner portions, and small, deep bowls help keep soups hot. Food shows particularly well on blue plates, she says (“No natural food is blue”), but can get lost on green and pale gray. (“It's like plating on dirty dishwater.”)

Her collection began in 1982, somewhat unintentionally, when her father gave her a set of Raymor by Roseville plates to adorn her first New York apartment. “I love how modern the shapes are,” she says. The contemporary white ceramic dishes feature an oval shape and a simple design, lending a modern feel to the 1952 collection.

Ms. Cowin held off buying wedding china for 12 years after she got married, until she found the right thing. What finally caught her fancy was a sleek, unadorned set designed by Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius for Rosenthal that she spotted at an estate sale in Sharon, Conn. (She bought the whole set for \$350.) It was complete until the first time she used it, when her friend's son cracked a plate over his head and broke it in half.

While she owns a few complete collections herself, Ms. Cowin enjoys layering her dishes. “I like to tell little stories. Mixing and matching helps me create a mood,” she says, setting a blue patterned bowl on top of an off-white Raymor serving plate with indentations for thumbs. One of her favorite pairings? A bright rainbow polka-dot plastic bowl on top of a transparent striped plate.

Ms. Cowin has never had her collection appraised, noting that its value is mostly emotional. “It's not a collection that's an investment. It's all about the pleasure that brings,” she says.

—Sanette Tanaka

Bryan Derballa for The Wall Street Journal (3)

# How do you create a man cave suited to a gentleman?



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## MARKETING DECODER | Healthy Hotel Rooms



**1.** Room lights are ‘sleep compatible.’ **2.** Antimicrobial coating on doorknobs and furniture like the nightstand resist bacteria. **3.** Sheets, towels and pillowcases will be of 100% natural materials and without dyes. **4.** Alarm clock has a light that slowly brightens to gently wake you up. **5.** Electromagnetic-field shielding is placed under the wallpaper that covers the heating and air conditioning systems.

Can a hotel room make you healthier?

The MGM Grand Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas thinks it can. As part of a major renovation, the 5,044-room hotel is launching 41 “Stay Well” rooms and suites next month that contain features it says will improve sleep, reduce allergens and promote healthy eating. The rooms, which will cost about \$30 more per night than a typical room, are the result of a partnership with Delos LLC, a New York real-estate development company that aims to infuse architecture with health-promoting technology.

Delos worked with an advisory board of eight doctors and researchers from Columbia University Medical Center in New York to plan the Stay Well rooms. (The Cleveland Clinic is also a partner.)

We ran some of the new rooms’ features by Sandra Adamson Fryhofer, past president of the American College of Physicians, and Steven W. Lockley, a sleep specialist and associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. Here are some of the features of the Stay Well rooms:

◆ **Room lights:** Most of the lights are skewed toward the red side of the color spectrum. (Lights that are too bright and blue are more likely to suppress the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin and disrupt shut-eye.) Night lights also veer red and are dim. “If you have a lower color temperature light, which means it has more red and less blue, that might be helpful in the few hours before sleep to

start to calm the brain down and have less stimulation,” says Dr. Lockley.

◆ **Antimicrobial coating on door knobs and furniture:** A dedicated cleaning staff also will use ultraviolet wands to sanitize surfaces in the rooms.

◆ **Air filtration:** Rooms contain two air filters. Housekeepers will use special vacuums outfitted with HEPA filters.

◆ **Carbon water filter:** Bathroom sinks will have filters that work similarly to the popular Brita brand used in homes. “That could be very reassuring to people when you go into a city and the water tastes a little different,” says Dr. Fryhofer.

◆ **EMF shielding:** These are meant to protect guests from electromagnetic fields, which are purported to disrupt sleep and contribute to disease. However, “studies are weak. It is precautionary,” says Dana Pillai, Delos's executive director of product development.

◆ **Healthy room service and minibar:** A special room-service menu will offer dishes designed by the Cleveland Clinic including organic steel-cut oatmeal and a tofu vegetarian sandwich. The minibar will contain raw almonds and coconut water, along with the usual alcohol and soda.

◆ **Take-home wellness programs:** Guests will receive a voucher to access three six-week online programs covering sleep, stress and healthy eating from the Cleveland Clinic.

—Andrea Petersen



**Vitamin C shower infuser:** A cartridge filled with vitamin C crystals aims to remove chlorine from water and ‘promote healthy hair and skin,’ promotional materials say. ‘This sounds a bit out there,’ says Dr. Fryhofer, an independent expert.



**Light therapy:** A bright blue bathroom light is meant to help you wake up and combat jet lag. ‘You might be able to get alert a bit quicker having more blue light in the morning,’ says Dr. Lockley, another independent expert.

MGM Grand (3)