

Who says a laptop bag can't match your outfit?

BY TAMARA KOMUNIECKI

KUBE COMPUTERS

2921 Cambie St., Vancouver,
604-873-KUBE,
www.kubecomputers.com

British craftsman William Morris once advised: "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful."

Back in Morris's day, this might have been an either/or proposition, but now it's standard to demand that even the most mundane items fall into both categories. Except, it seems, when it comes to computers and related paraphernalia. Nothing makes a fashionista's buck screech to a halt faster.

But that's only because big-box stores continue to offer equipment that is sometimes neither useful nor beautiful, say Vancouverites Georgina Kwei and Mirek Havelka. The partners opened Kube Computers in March to help customers looking for stylish yet functional solutions.

"Our slogan is 'fusion of quality and style,'" Kwei says. "We wanted to be a place where you could go and get your questions answered and get a quality computer or a laptop with exactly the solutions you need. The style part comes from me being a woman and being in technology for so long, and knowing that there are more stylish solu-



Kube carries stylish computers and accessories. KUBE

tions out there."

Kube sells fashion-forward workstations, Web cameras and monitors in colours and configurations not found easily elsewhere, such as the bright red Kube Juggernaut for gamers and power users, which features a temperature gauge and decibel meter (from \$900). The Kube Bug line is especially attractive for those with small home offices: Products are designed to save on space while maximizing computing power (from \$610).

For laptop lovers, Kube also features a wide range of stylish bags by designers such as Talene Reilly, Melissa Beth and Crumpler, a Canadian label. One of the most popular bags for women is the Oxio Sheen-

ko, from a New York designer. Sophisticated grey fabric is accented with red and white trim and exterior pockets for a playful yet businessy look (\$129).

"If it's in my living room, I want it to look like it fits in with the rest of my decor," Kwei says. "And if I am carrying my laptop, I want that bag to match my outfit. You're spending so much on your clothes, why carry a black nylon, boring and bulky laptop bag?"

For men, the Crumpler Considerable Embarrassment is anything but - the slight sporty messenger bag comes with a built-in laptop sleeve and is available in a range of colours, from staid brown to bright green (\$100).

While attention is paid to looks, Havelka says Kube is not a shallow shopping experience. He tries to learn his customers' true needs, and works to find a computer that will fit them - a buying experience that might be lacking at a larger store, he says.

"Fundamentally what's missing is truth - you don't get the information you need to make a good buying decision. You get a lot of marketing jargon and fluff that various companies tell you to sell their product. You can flood the air with jargon and technical mumbo-jumbo that people don't understand, but we try to get in touch with how they think, what they need, and communicate the important details to them."

This attitude carries through to Kube's repair services: no geek talk here. Wendy Stibbards recently lost three years worth of photos and many work-related files when her hard drive crashed. Told by one company that her photos and data were irretrievable, she took her system to Kube.

"My sense was that they understood the significance of the loss, and would do whatever possible to help me," she says.

"They were able to recover all of the contents of the hard drive, for \$70. What was the best thing was that ... there was no sense that my problem was a bother to them."

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