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## Bagging the elusive Worth Avenue shopping experience

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It's a given that if you have, say, 100 grand to spare, shopping on Palm Beach's famed Worth Avenue isn't going to be an issue: Take your pick of stores selling designer dresses, multi-carat diamond rings, even luxury doggie sweaters.

But if you've got only 30 bucks?



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That's the challenge I gave myself recently, after discovering that Tiffany & Co. sells a set of two decks of playing cards for \$30. Did other Worth Avenue merchants offer similar token gifts? Would they even let a very scruffy reporter (posing as a very scruffy everyday Joe — not much of a stretch) into their chic emporiums to find out?

The short answer is yes and yes.

If anything, there appears to be a competition among the world's most exclusive retailers to offer the perfect signature low-priced trinket.

It may be Tiffany that started this trend. The merchant forever gained fame in the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, particularly for the scene in which social aspirant Holly Golightly (Audrey Hepburn) and struggling writer Paul Varjak (George Peppard) go into the flagship New York store and consider buying a piece of Tiffany's on the cheap — namely, a silver telephone dialer for \$6.75. (As gift items go, it's intended "strictly as a novelty," the sales clerk informs them.)

The idea: Even if a diamond ring is out of your reach, you could still live the Tiffany lifestyle.

These days, that means not just having the trinket, but also carrying

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the bag with the store's logo. Whether you're buying those playing cards or a \$1 million diamond ring, Tiffany will box your purchase and place it in its signature light blue bag all the same. So will any other high-end merchant. (And for what it's worth, Cartier's wrapping and bag may be even nicer.)

But what's in it for the retailer? After all, you can't afford to have a Worth Avenue address by selling playing cards.

"What they're doing is playing on their brand equity," says Arun Jain, a consumer-behavior expert at the University of Buffalo.

In other words, they're selling items that cost them next to nothing — last I checked, a deck of playing cards could be had for a few bucks — at a hugely inflated price by virtue of their upscale identity.

Jain says retailers like the idea of making any customer — even scruffy ol' me — feel they can afford something. After all, the retailer never knows if the customer will return one day and buy a higher-ticket item. "It's a foot-in-the-door strategy," he adds.

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