

# The Story of the Coffee Cup Sleeve

In the same building where you can see Vincent van Gogh's famous painting "The Starry Night" and Andy Warhol's "Campbell's Soup Cans," there is a simple paper coffee cup sleeve. You won't find it in the café at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), but it is part of the museum's collection along with famous art pieces worth millions. However, this coffee cup sleeve is special and deserves to be recognized as a valuable object too.

For many people, the morning routine is not complete without going to a coffee shop, waiting in line, and ordering coffee. They watch as the barista pours the coffee, puts a lid on the cup, and adds a cardboard sleeve around it. This may seem like a simple action, but without the sleeve, how would we enjoy our take-out coffee? In 2005, MoMA honored this smart design that has become a part of American coffee culture by adding a coffee cup sleeve to an exhibit called "SAFE: Design Takes on Risk." This exhibit showed products made to keep us safe. The sleeve is proudly displayed at MoMA, next to things like Post-It notes, Bic pens, and Band-Aids in a collection called "Humble Masterpieces."

Paola Antonelli, a curator at MoMA, explained why the coffee cup sleeve was included in the collection. She said it was a good, smart, and necessary solution for a common problem. "These simple objects are important designs that we should admire," she said.

The person who created the coffee cup sleeve is not an artist, but an inventor named Jay Sorensen. He invented the Java Jacket in 1991 to solve a common problem: hot coffee burns fingers. The idea came to him in 1989 when he was driving away from a coffee shop and spilled coffee on himself, burning his fingers. At that time, he was having a tough time as a realtor after his family-owned service station closed in Portland, Oregon. Although the coffee spill was unfortunate, it inspired him to think of a better way to drink coffee on the go.

Sorensen first wanted to create an insulated cup that could replace paper and Styrofoam cups, which were being banned in many cities. However, he had trouble figuring out how to package the cups, and he realized that not all coffee drinks needed insulation. Research showed that only 30 to 40 percent of drinks sold at coffee shops needed more than what the paper cup provided. Drinks like iced coffee and lattes didn't need it. So, he decided to focus on a different idea.

Sorensen can't remember exactly how he thought of the cup sleeve. "It just kind of happened," he said. He chose to use embossed chipboard for the sleeve because it was more affordable than corrugated paper. Starbucks later made their own version using more expensive materials.

He named his invention the Java Jacket. His first sale was from the trunk of his car to a coffee chain called Coffee People. A few weeks later, he went to a coffee trade show in Seattle and sold 100 cases in just 30 minutes. "I felt like a rock star," Sorensen said.

From then on, his success grew quickly. In his first year, he gained over 500 clients who wanted to help their coffee-drinking customers. Today, nearly 1 billion Java Jackets are sold each year to more than 1,500 clients.

Sorensen's idea was simple, and the problem was so common that he wasn't surprised by the demand. "Everyone around me was shocked. I wasn't," he said.

Although he is now very successful, Sorensen is not the first person to create a cup sleeve. Similar designs have existed since the 1920s. James A. Pipkin created a sleeve for cold drinks in 1925, and Edward R. Egger invented a "portable coaster" in 1947 for cups. Both were made to solve problems related to condensation on cold drinks.

There is a chance that regular paper coffee sleeves could be replaced by more eco-friendly reusable sleeves, or even an end to paper cups altogether. Sorensen is currently going through a patent renewal process. And does the inventor have any new ideas?