

Underneath It All

Top trends in underthings include healthy materials, leakproof tech and sizing for all

BY SHERI RADFORD

Have you been wearing the same sad sports bra and granny panties since the start of the pandemic? Ditch those droopy drawers and treat yourself to fresh undergarments. You'll notice new—and necessary—developments shaking up the intimates department.

Chantal Carter was a wardrobe stylist when she first saw an issue. “The models were supposed to come with nude undergarments but the problem is, the nude was only for Caucasian skin. There wasn't anything for people who looked like me or darker than me.” Desperation led her to attempt a solution. “I bought a white bra and panty, and I found fabric paint in the store, and I painted it.” She remembers. “It was hard and it was crusty on my skin, but I had the look.”

Her creations have come a long way since that first prototype. Carter's company, Love & Nudes, produces bras and panties in an array of shades for BIPOC—honey, butterscotch, nutmeg and espresso. Other lingerie brands are, too, embracing diversity and inclusion by expanding their range of sizes—including Victoria's Secret, whose newest VS Bare Infinity Flex bra offers adaptive technology that allows for size fluctuation.

In its marketing campaigns, Knix features women ages 20 to 81 in sizes 0 to 22. The Canadian brand's WingWoman Contour Bra provides extra support (so long, side-boob) from 32A to 42G, while the LuxeLift Pullover Bra goes from 28A to 44G. The company's products are a hit with consumers and investors; Knix raised \$50 million in growth equity funding, just three days before founder and CEO Joanna Griffiths gave birth to twins. And, recently, model Ashley Graham was signed as global brand ambassador for its activewear line, which includes leggings and shorts in sizes XS to XXXXL.

Another brand offering an extensive size range is Aisle. The company makes period panties in XS to XXXXXL suitable for all menstruators, not just those who identify



as women. Styles range from a barely there thong to full-coverage briefs. When founder Madeleine Shaw first started, she found talking about such products was empowering: “It changed my entire perception not just of my period, but of my body as well. I'd really internalized the idea that periods were something shameful and kind of gross.”

Alexa Suter of Huha was also motivated by a desire to make women feel more comfortable, emotionally and physically. “I went through recurring UTIs for a while that made me hyperaware of the underwear I was wearing,” she says. “I felt most underwear made of synthetics exacerbated my symptoms and added to irritation around the sensitive regions.”

Huha's cute-but-comfy undies use breathable, sustainable, tree-derived fibres infused with zinc oxide, which is soothing and naturally antimicrobial. Suter's pleased to see more underwear companies finally using sustainable fabrics and discussing vaginal health—companies like B.C.-based After Evie, whose founder, Jessica Alfaro, created the brand of ethical undergarments out of



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her own struggle with body image, binge-eating disorder and mental-health issues.

“One of the ways [Jess] began to make peace with her body was to sit in her bra and undies and get comfortable seeing her stretch marks and tummy,” reads a bio on After Evie's site. “That led to doodling cute ... designs that would actually be comfortable and things she would want to wear.” Now the label, whose launch includes a set for “apple-shaped bodies”—aims to represent Black and Indigenous people (like Alfaro herself), plus-sized, disabled and marginalized bodies, plus “encourage those struggling with mental health to know that they are capable of doing all the things they dream of.”

For Montreal's Frank and Oak, Mother Earth is top of mind—even when it comes to her underthings. The brand recently launched 100 per cent sustainable intimates, with a trio of bottom styles and waist heights for various levels of coverage and made of organic cotton and spandex for breathability and movement. Bonus: both bralette styles are “pull on” for comfort—and use less trim!

No local shopping trip for new underwear is complete without a stop at Diane's Lingerie. According to owner Sharon Hayles, “We're still seeing the trend, as we did through COVID, that people are wanting comfortable. They're wanting non-wire. They're wanting bralettes.”

She's also noticed more customers “wanting to get back into lacy, pretty bras” with an eye-catching pop of colour. “We're moving back into embroidery and embellishments,” she says. For fall, she's seeing a surge of retro styles that are a bit architectural, geometric and Art Deco in design—“Roaring Twenties” looks that embrace “some fun, some femininity.”

Hayles has a tip for anyone unsure about current lingerie etiquette: “It's OK now to actually see your bra.” After all, she says, “There are so many with such great straps that you want to show them.” So go ahead and do so. Flaunt all these new styles—and, while you're at it, please toss out those sad and saggy pandemic undies. v

Pain-Relief Panties

The next time menstrual cramps hit, grab the Keep It Brief and the Original Heat Pack from Undu Wearables. Pockets in the front and back of these innovative panties hold specially shaped heat packs in place, exactly where they're needed most. Undu was dreamt up by three female entrepreneurs who wanted to address—in an affordable, ethical and discreet manner—a problem that 84 per cent of menstruators experience at some point in their lives. Unduwearables.com