



# Naughty and nice ... looking

*Originally sold in Europe, homegrown brand ShyingCat is building a market base for its designer corsets and role-playing costumes in Taiwan*

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Donald Trump's oldest children, Donald Jr, Ivanka and Eric, followed him into the real estate industry. Kate Hudson followed in the acting footsteps of her parents, Goldie Hawn and Kurt Russell. And Matteo Liu (劉彥成), the creator and designer of the ShyingCat line, is also carrying on his family business.

ShyingCat (www.shyingcat.com), which recently began selling roleplaying costumes and corsets in Taiwan, is an offshoot of the leather goods factory that Liu's father founded in 1987. The company originally manufactured baseball gloves, until the day one of their American clients came to them with an unusual request.

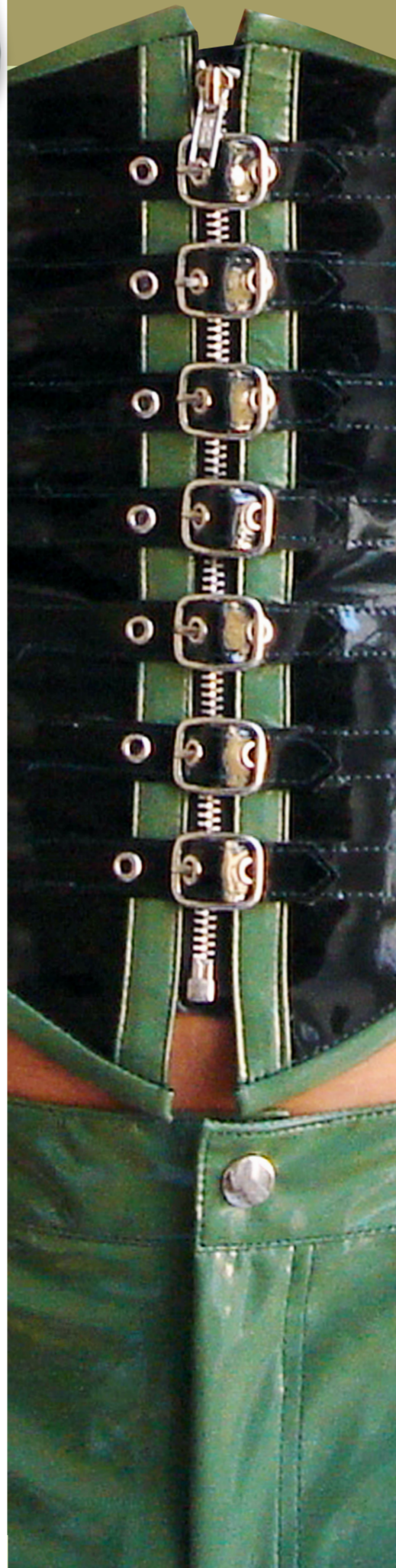
"They asked if we could also manufacture leather fetish wear," Liu says. "That's how we got our start, making undergarments out of genuine leather for them." Eventually the factory, which is based in Hsinchu City, added vinyl to its roster of materials and now designs and produces fetish wear and costumes for clients in countries including the US and Germany.

In 2005, Liu was studying in England when he attended Erotica, which bills itself as "the world's largest lifestyle show for freethinking adults" and features exhibitors from within the adult products industry.

"After I went to the show, I realized that products manufactured by our company aren't really represented in England," Liu says. "I thought that if we created our own brand, it would give us the opportunity to sell original designs in England and the rest of the European market." Liu dubbed his fledgling line ShyingCat as a homage to the coy and mysterious nature of felines.

Until this year the brand, which maintains an office and warehouse in London, was marketed solely to European customers. Liu originally did not sell ShyingCat in his home country "because Taiwanese consumers weren't really interested in our products," he says. The build-up of interest in cosplay, however, triggered an interest in ShyingCat's steel-boned corsets, vinyl role-playing outfits and lingerie.

"We realized we could cultivate a customer base in Taiwan, though our main customer base is still outside of the country," Liu says. "People asked us if we sold our products here, so we started doing that."



ShyingCat does not have a brick-and-mortar store in Taiwan yet, but its goods are available to Taiwanese customers through Chinese-language listings on Yahoo! Auctions (tw.user.bid.yahoo.com/tw/user/amy3318). English-language listings for merchandise shipped from ShyingCat's London base are maintained on eBay (stores.ebay.co.uk/shyingcat).

One ShyingCat naughty nurse outfit is in severe black, instead of the traditional white, but its swooping sweetheart neckline trimmed with an invitingly feminine row of dainty ruffles in hot red vinyl sends the message that all patients will get extra-special care. Other outfits include a camo-green army officer's outfit, which is available in both men and women's styles. Its flattering epaulets and sharply tailored breast pockets would pass the most stringent of uniform inspections.

Liu gleans inspiration for his designs from a variety of sources. "Sometimes designs will pop into my head just before I go to sleep, or when I'm watching a film," he says. He also follows events like Skin Two Rubber Ball, a gathering of fetish-wear enthusiasts in London, and Burning Man in Nevada to see if there are trends in the outfits worn there, which are often self-created by attendees. "When I attend events like those, I also talk to people there and ask them what they are looking for," says Liu, who frequently travels abroad to meet with factory clients.

The most popular role-playing outfits are nurse costumes for women and police costumes for men. "French maids and nurses are a perennial favorite, so we take those outfits and figure out how we can put our own twist on them," Liu says.

ShyingCat's roleplaying outfits and corsets sell equally well among the brand's European customers. On the other hand, Liu says that ShyingCat's Taiwanese customers buy more corsets because the humid weather here makes customers shy away from vinyl costumes, despite the current trend for clothing made out of vinyl, latex and other similarly sexy materials.

ShyingCat's corsets, which range in price up to about NT\$3,780, are made to be both attractive and functional and come in a variety of fabrics. Each piece is reinforced with steel boning and numerous eyelets and can reduce the waistline by up to 10cm, creating an exaggerated hourglass shape. A Victorian-style number made from a virginal white-on-white floral weave looks like it could have been passionately ripped off by Lady Chatterley's lover, while a shimmering black-and-metallic brocades, colorful vinyl or faux-fur trims put a more exotic spin on other corsets. Guys who would also like to be laced up need not wilt in envy; ShyingCat also makes corsets for men in an array of masculine colors and materials.

"We have corsets that are made specifically to be worn outside, with attractive fabrics, and then we have ones that are made to be practical and not just practical, but also comfortable," Liu says.

On the Net: [www.shyingcat.com](http://www.shyingcat.com)

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