

Introducing the latest package deals

Shapewear, undergarments that are said to help wearers gain a slimmer appearance, is flying off the shelves

BY BELINDA GOLDSMITH
REUTERS, CANBERRA

Struggling to hide the love handles or muffin top for that holiday party? Underwear makers are finding the desire for a snap svelte silhouette has created a booming line for women, and now men, in shapewear.

Shapewear, or undergarments that help slim and sculpt a figure by holding it in, has become the fastest growing category in intimate apparel for women, with lines available in most major stores, but it is also now taking off for men.

Bra and panty maker Maidenform Brands Inc last month reported a quarterly profit nearly doubled from last year which CEO Maurice Reznik put down to innovation — namely shapewear.

Reznik said Maidenform has the largest market share in shapewear and he is optimistic in the continued growth of the category as shoppers globally battle bulging waistlines.

"I'm bullish on shapewear," said Reznik.

Trend trackers have dated the rise of shapewear back to 2000 when influential US TV talk show queen Oprah Winfrey declared her enthusiasm for a brand called Spanx.

US market researcher NPD Group has estimated that the market has tripled in the past decades to be worth US\$50 million in annual sales at the end of last year despite some women complaining that the tight-fitting garments can be hard to get on and off and can cause complications when it comes to using the bathroom.

But it is not just women using underwear to smooth out or reduce the bumps and lift sagging parts.

Men's shapewear is changing underwear for men, with vests, T-shirts and underwear used to slim down or even to enhance parts of their physique. Some even promise to help back problems.

Will Cleare, a father of two from Cambridge, England, was skeptical at first but tried a vest designed to give better posture and slim down his stomach for rugby. Now he's a convert.

"There's just no reason why you should feel embarrassed to wear it. You can either be open about wearing it or you can get people thinking



"Oh they've shaped up a bit," that's fine," Cleare said.

Australian-based company Equmen launched men's shapewear in January and is sold in Saks Fifth Avenue and online. The product is designed to appeal to males with means who might appreciate a product that could improve their golf swing, as well as their chances of appearing younger and fitter in a European suit.

"Using the latest high performance technologies and state-of-the-art designs, our garments are engineered to optimize and energize the body, from street to sport, work to weekend," says the company's mission statement.

British online retailer figleaves.com also launched a men's line this year and has reported higher than expected sales figures for men's shapewear. Initial buyers were mainly from the gay market but demand has spread to businessmen and sports figures, especially those struggling to exercise.

"Since May, it's come from nowhere really. It's about 10 percent of our men's underwear sales so it's doing really well for us," said Zoe Ellis from figleaves.com.

But some fashionistas remain uncertain about the men's shapewear market.

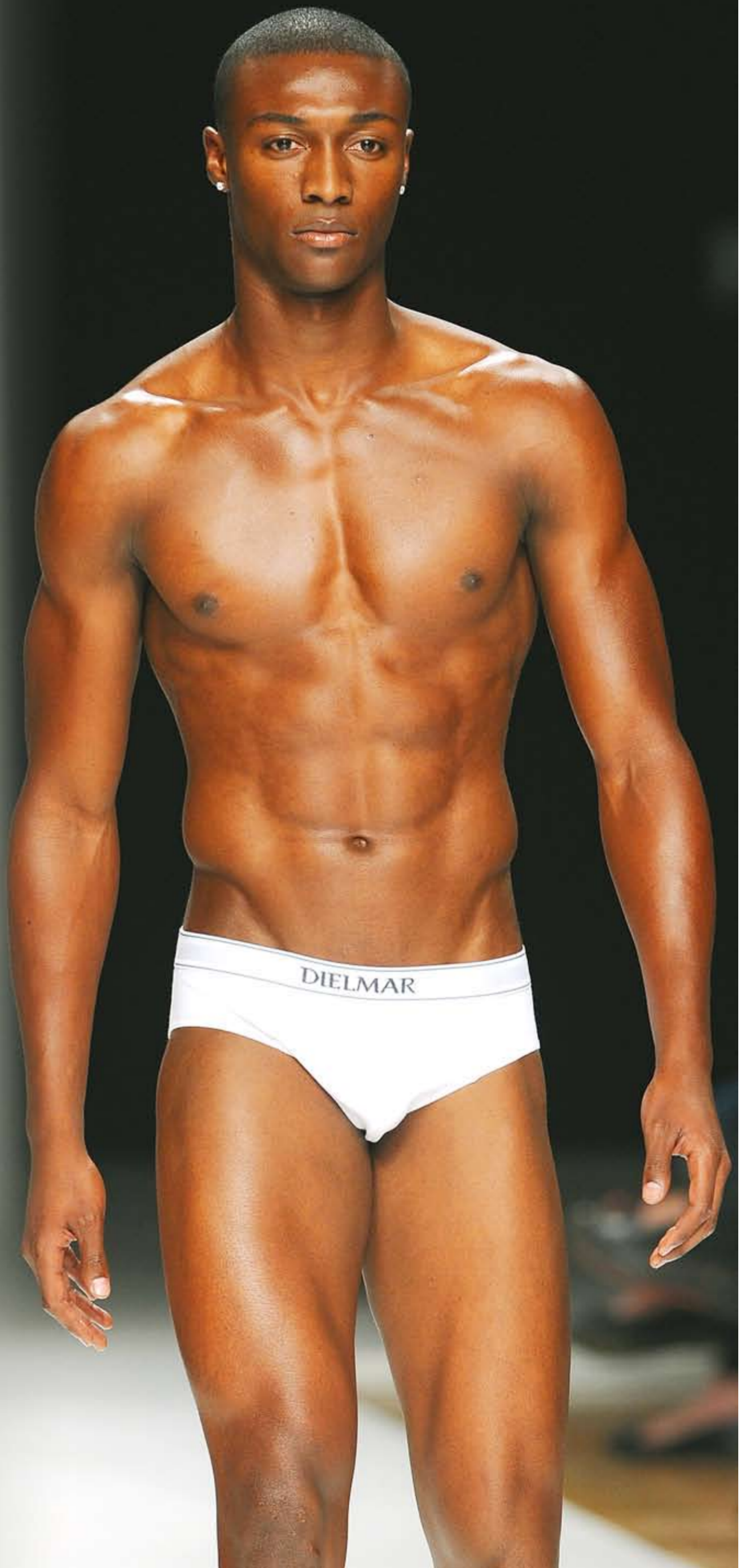
"The men's underwear market is very small so it could be a bit of a gimmick, a bit of a novelty," said Anna Santi, *Drapers Fashion Journal* Commissioning Editor and underwear expert.

"But at the same time, we've seen from a beauty point of view, we've seen a growth in men's grooming products so as a consumer product it could lend itself quite well to underwear."

Left: Models wear underwear made from a blend of Spandex, nylon and polyester. Stores are hoping to cash in on the lucrative men's underwear market by launching a throwback to the Victorian era, garments that shape the body.



PHOTOS: AP AND BLOOMBERG



Manila trash becomes hot London fashion item

The Philippine Christian Foundation provides a livelihood for families who scavenge the city's trash heaps

currently being shipped to boutiques in London, and the foundation was unable to meet demand.

"I had to turn down three shops in London ordering our products because we keep running out."

Walker said a deal to supply a major luxury chain was also in the works, while negotiations were underway with an American firm to produce shoes and slippers using discarded car tires.

Known in the local press as Manila's "angel of the dumps" for her work among the scavengers of Smokey Mountain, the 45-year-old single mother's tireless efforts have helped entire families rise above crushing poverty.

Relying mainly on corporate donations, the non-profit foundation provides livelihood projects, health services and free education to children of families living on the dump site.

Covering a sprawling area in Tondo district near Manila Bay and just a few kilometers from the presidential palace, Smokey Mountain has come to symbolize pervasive poverty in this Southeast Asian nation of 92 million people.

An entire colony of squatter families lives off the dump, which got its name from methane gas-induced black smoke

billowing from the mound.

While parts of the site have been leveled to make official settlements over the past decade, a large portion remains a permanent open dump for tonnes of daily refuse from Manila's 12 million inhabitants.

Before Walker set up her foundation, swarms of children and entire families would descend on the trash, scavenging for items to sell at junk shops.

The thousands of people living on Smokey Mountain had no other way out, and the few pesos earned from a day's grueling work were spent on food.

Many still do scavenge. But through Walker's efforts, a school was built, an abandoned warehouse was transformed into a livelihood center where hot meals were offered and the children were given a semblance of a normal life.

Then, when the global financial crisis hit last year and many donors cut back on corporate social responsibility work, Walker was forced to find creative ways to raise new funding.

She came up with the idea of turning trash into fashion accessories and began getting members of the community, mainly mothers, to

start sewing together ring tabs from aluminum cans into tiny purses.

She then expanded the project to include laptop and shoulder bags.

Other products soon followed — necklaces and bracelets from colorful magazines, and stuffed toys from readily available material from the dump.

"The magazines are cut into triangular shapes and glued and rolled, keeping the brightly colored part as the last part to roll so the beads are more interesting," Walker said. "The beads are then dipped in clear varnish and later assembled into jewelry."

The products were first sold to friends, but then found their way into a specialty store carrying eco-friendly fashion in Manila's upmarket Makati financial district. Soon, there were orders from shops in London.

"The mothers come up with their own designs, they are all very creative," she said.

At any given time, about 40 families are directly employed by the foundation, with each earning at least US\$65 a month — far more than they could earn from picking trash alone.

"This has helped me a lot because I can work and watch my grandchildren

go to school," said Martha Dominguez, 60, as she delicately put together a stuffed toy.

"We lived surrounded by trash all our lives, not knowing that we could have made it into money."

Walker said the project gave the people involved more than just income.

"There is a big social angle to the project. Many mothers consider mastering the techniques in making bags their biggest achievement in life," she said.

Proceeds from the sales are not enough to sustain the foundation's entire operations but they have helped fill a void left by the donor slump.

"We will never be 100 percent financially sustainable, but if we can aim to be at least 50 percent self-sufficient, then we can expand the work we are doing," Walker said, adding the long-term goal was for the organization to have its own boutique in Manila.

Meanwhile, Walker and her staff are busy trying to expand the fashion line.

"We are always taking in stuff from the dumps. Right now, I'm trying to figure out how to use old piano keyboards as a design on a hand bag," she said, briefly pausing before her eyes lit up. "Ahh, I need to drill holes into them first."



Models wear necklaces made from recycled magazine pages.

PHOTOS: AFP

BY JASON GUTIERREZ
AFP, MANILA

At a warehouse near Manila's infamous Smokey Mountain dump, slum-dwellers working for a British-led charity are turning rubbish into fashion items that are proving a hit in top-end London shops.

Under a dim fluorescent lamp, amid the constant humming of sewing machines, about 20 women cut pieces of cloth and other materials found amid the garbage to make teddy bears.

Others are busy putting finishing

touches to handbags and purses made from discarded toothpaste tubes, while glossy magazines are turned into colorful bracelets.

"This bag costs about 100 pounds sterling [US\$165] or more in London," said Jane Walker, a former publishing executive from Southampton who gave up her lavish lifestyle in 1996 to set up the Philippine Christian Foundation in Manila after seeing the plight of the poor here.

Walker said about 200 bags were