

fashion

BY CONNIE TAMOTO

sultry SILHOUETTES



Lace yourself into local designer's custom corsets for a body-boosting experience



NO one ever said fashion was comfortable. Whether it's cramming your toes into the latest stiletto heels, putting up with a constant itch from that cashmere sweater or squeezing yourself into your skinny jeans, it's just the price you pay to look good.

And it's not like this discomfort is something new. Women — and men, for that matter — have been going to great lengths to look good for years and years.

In China, women's feet were bound to make them stay small and more attractive, itchy wigs were worn by English aristocracy, and more recently, pointy-toed shoes have made many of our lives a living hell.

And while several of these painful fashion trends are little more than painful memories, there is one constrictive item that has stood the test of time. The corset is arguably up there when it comes to uncomfortable garments, and its history in the world of fashion dates way back.

The first corsets, which are characterized by boning or ribs inserted into the fabric to hold it stiff, or were worn by women in 1,700 BC in Crete as a form of support. The corset made its mark in England in the Middle Ages in the form of a kirtle, a tunic-like garment worn over a smock.

Corsets in the 18th and 19th centuries featured lacing in the back, with a busk (a hooked or buttoned opening) in the front.

Corsets continued to be widely worn until the invention of stretch fabrics made girdles popular and bras became the support garment of choice. But the corset made a big comeback in the '80s when it again became fashionable to wear sexy lingerie — not as underwear but outerwear.

Here in Winnipeg, corsets can be found in the undergarment section of just about every department store and fetish shop.

If you want something a little special, however, there's a local designer who decided she had enough of her career as an ecologist and began to follow her true passion — creating corsets.

Elizabeth Joyce has been designing corsets for Winnipeggers for the past few years. Her line, Callisto Couture, ranges from simple to extravagant — it will cost you in the range of 600 bucks for a custom design. Why corsets? Joyce says she finds the garment fun, celebratory and elegant, and she also liked the idea of creating a garment that would challenge her skills as a seamstress.

Each of the custom corsets created by Joyce is made from hand-woven, naturally dyed silk from around the world. Her corsets also incorporate beading, lace, hand embroidery and other embellishments.

So the big question is, do they really hurt to wear? "I prefer to keep my mid-section free of constrictions and have never worn a corset, but according to Joyce, it may seem intimidating at first, but once you put on a properly fitted corset, the only thing you'll feel is a sense of empowerment and self-confidence.

The corset not only sucks in that little Buddha belly you may have accumulated over the years, the support also makes you stand up a little taller, thereby injecting a little boost of confidence into your step.

For more information on Elizabeth Joyce's custom corsets or to contact the designer for consultation, log onto www.callistocouture.ca.

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