

# Deconstructing the Bra

BY DANA ROBINSON

Explaining extravagance to your cross-over customers.

The bra has certainly come a long way from its humble beginnings, when a woman of means had only lace handkerchiefs and fancy ribbon to support her breasts (if somewhat feebly). Today, however, high-quality undergarment options abound. So, like deluxe timepieces and designer handbags, times are good for luxury lingerie.

**Black Satin Intimates** of Las Vegas reports that its **La Perla** bras retail for up to \$350. The most expensive bra at **Bellefleur Lingerie Boutique** in Seattle is a **Chantal Thomass** that retails for \$198. Both stores have repeat customers, who want nothing less than the best. But what exactly is the discerning customer looking for when preparing to plunk down \$200 for one piece of lingerie? A hell of a lot more than tissues and strings!

## A Woman of Substance

"We are using mostly haute couture fabrics," says **Laurence Jaillet**, managing director for **Barbara USA**, owner of **Ravage**. "When we use fabric, we're always going to use the softest one, the most elegant one." Ravage bras are constructed of a number of top-of-the-line fabrics, including silk, silk muslin, Chantilly lace, and mercerized cotton. "The real delicate laces are very difficult to find," says Jaillet. "And a lot of handmade finishing is still required. The combination of both the material and the color is always connected with haute couture and the highest-end fashion designers." Obviously, anything related to the word "couture" doesn't come cheap. Ravage bras retail between \$159 and \$230.

The decadent designs of **Janet Reger** start with premium textiles—an expensive component that is reflected on the price tag. Reger bras range from about \$120 to \$260. "The garments themselves are as precious to touch as they are to wear," says **Aliza Reger**, chief executive for Janet Reger. "The fabrics used are sourced mainly from Italian and French couture fabric houses to maintain the luxury level desired." In other words, they demand cloth that looks absolutely stunning and feels incredibly supple.



Courtesy of Janet Reger

## It Just Fits...

Anyone paying top dollar for a bra not only expects high-quality fabrics, but a perfect fit as well. That fit, however, does not come cheap—here's why: Luxury lingerie houses can sometimes spend years getting a bra from conception to the retail floor (at least a year and a half, according to Jaillet) and much of that time is spent just making sure that the bra fits properly. "We have a team in our home office of Paris, which is made out of 35 people that are just bra fit specialists," continues Jaillet. "People think of fitting as if it were a totally perfect technique—totally mathematical—and it's not, it's just the opposite." Jaillet relates that an international corporation like Barbara needs to create



Courtesy of Made by Niki

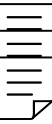
bras to fit women all over the world who have a variety of body types—a very labor-intensive task. "You have [the fitters] work on every single part of the bra, one by one, and then compare their results," says Jaillet. "Then [they] go again and just research, and research, and research."

**Niki McMorrough**, director and owner of **Made by Niki**, goes through a similar fitting process to ensure that her customers—who pay between £99-£5,000 for her bras—get the fit and support that they expect. "After I've drafted the initial bra pattern, I will fit the bra onto a model and make the necessary adjustments. This process doesn't stop until [the garment] is perfect, which may take up to five separate fittings." After the initial fittings, the bra is graded by McMorrough's out-of-house bra fit specialists. The grading process takes about one week, but there may be a waiting list of up to three months. The quest to get a perfect fit doesn't end there. Keeping in mind that just because a woman buys high-end lingerie doesn't automatically mean she's rail thin, Made by Niki offers up to 30 sizes, from 28F to 36D. Then, whenever possible, McMorrough has a sample made in each of the 30 sizes...and has them checked for fit again!

"The garments themselves are as precious to touch as they are to wear."  
—Aliza Reger

## Parts and Labor

Art is, of course, in the details, whether it's a piece that hangs on the wall or the body. The labor intensive brushstrokes from a masterwork painting aren't that different from the delicate details found on exquisite, high-end lingerie. They both involve an intense time investment that the end user pays for handsomely, whether it's the detachable Swarovski crystal necklace from Made by Niki's Rosary Collection (£152) or the stretch silk band supporting **Lavande SWK's**



Courtesy of Eveden

Claudia's All Lace Bralette (\$148). Perfection takes time...and money.

#### Small Rarities

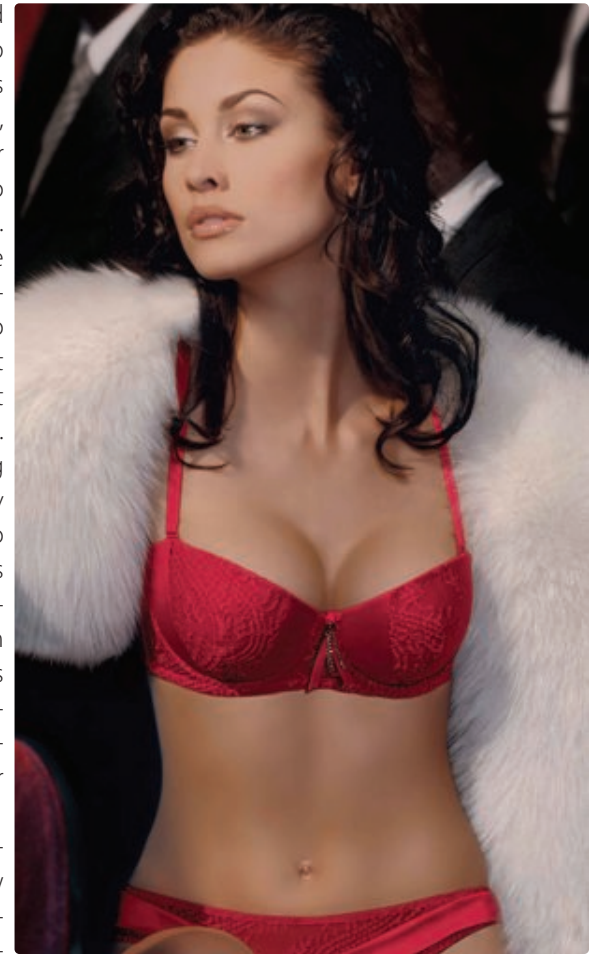
What else do luxury lingerie and fine art have in common? Rarity. Part of the price tag is attributed to the item's uniqueness. Producing lingerie on a smaller scale is more expensive for the designer and the price is carried on to the consumer. "The higher the quantity of something, the cheaper it can be," continues McMorrough. "The more exclusive and low-quantity it is—the designer has to pay a higher price in order to get those fabrics, and the designer has

to pay a higher price in order to have [the garment] made." Savvy customers should know that the Made by Niki Limited Edition garments are only available in quantities of 50.

The smallest components of a bra (such as fasteners, elastic, and interior support) all account for the cost of the finished product as well. A silk bra with European embroidery and lace will do your customers little good if the hooks break and the breasts aren't properly supported. "We do cup sizes up to a dou-

ble J in Fantasie, and we're doing a cup size up to an H in Fauve," says **Frederika Zappe**, national fit specialist for **Eveden**, referring to Eveden's many brands. "[Considering] what size breasts it needs to support, [the bra] needs to actually work and it needs to be sturdy—but still be luscious to look at. We can't use anything that's going to be flimsy and break off—there's no excuse for that." Bras under the Eveden umbrella are manufactured in Europe—from the fabrics to the hooks and fasteners—and the most expensive Fauve bra retails for about \$120.

Ultimately, your customers will decide how important couture fabrics, exclusivity, or superior construction are to their selections. If luxury is what they want, though, there are plenty of designers who are more than willing to step up to the plate and fulfill your store's needs. **1**



Courtesy of Ravage

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