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Want grown-up, chic underwear? Just ask Elle Macpherson

Elle Macpherson really doesn't want to say anything negative about Victoria's Secret but she's a thoughtful woman of a certain age (52) and, like you and me, she knows there are other ways of looking seductive and sexy, without pouring yourself into a leopard-print thong and angel wings.

Not that she's a prude. When we meet for breakfast in London, she's wearing a white suit over a black bra. "Yeah, you'd think a white bra, or a nude one, wouldn't you? But I like to play around."

She's been playing with underwear since she was 19. Having arrived in Paris from her native Killara, New South Wales, she fell in love with French lingerie early on... Chantelle Thomas, Sabbia Rosa, with its exquisite lace and exacting corsetry. But none of it fitted her athletic, 6ft, 36C frame.

In the US and the rest of the world, Calvin Klein's unisex T-shirt underwear was taking off. In 1989, at a time when models weren't generally striking business deals, she signed a contract with New Zealand underwear brand Bendon and launched Elle Macpherson Intimates, "as a counter to Calvin Klein. I wanted the femininity of European lingerie, with an American fit."

Lacy, feminine, plunging and structured, Intimates was an affordable distillation of everything Macpherson had learnt trying to get on with French underwear and French men. "I kept marrying French men," she says wryly, referring to her marriage, when she was 22, to fashion photographer Gilles Bensimon and her long relationship with financier Arkl Busson, father of her two sons.

It was both financially and critically successful, yet two years ago she parted ways with Bendon. Bendon has since launched a line with Heidi Klum.

More fool Bendon. Macpherson's knowledge of her product has always



Soft-cup bra, £36, and briefs, £22



Bra, £40, and pants, £22. All Elle Macpherson Body at Selfridges. (cont)

been impressive, and never more than now, having just launched a business called Elle Macpherson Body, in which she has invested half the money. The rest comes from Simon de Winter, an Australian entrepreneur with underwear manufacturing expertise.

It would be nice to see it thrive, not least because Macpherson, although still in possession of a phenomenal body, somehow seems to sound like an everywoman. "Put my underwear into the hotel laundry? I'd die of embarrassment. I don't want to spend the money, either. I rinse it out every day in the shower with some gentle body wash or shampoo. At home I put it all in a lingerie bag on a gentle programme."

Middle-aged insomnia? She's been there - although, unlike most of us, she's turned it into a business, having just launched Super Elixir, a highly effective tea infusion containing medical grade valerian, that tastes much finer than it smells.

As for that age-defying body, it comes with its insecurities. "I still want my husband to think I look hot. I still worry about fat squidding out over the back of my bra, and side-boob..."

Having observed her two teenage stepdaughters (she's married to billionaire property developer Jeff Soffer), she was becoming increasingly struck by the welter of overly sexualised and "frankly not very flattering" product out there, before taking on Elle Macpherson Body. "I wanted to do bras that work under T-shirts, that feel appropriate with a school uniform," she says.

The new Elle Macpherson line isn't just T-shirt bras, but it is streamlined, fashion-conscious (she studied the colours currently in favour at Céline and Gucci) and feminine. "There are subtle and varied ways to be sexy, and an abundance of bows no longer seems to be one of them [she's replaced them with rose-gold rings that sit flat against the skin]. "Personally, I feel I have to try less hard in many ways now to be seductive, and I want to reflect



'I feel I have to try less hard in many ways now to be seductive,' says Macpherson

that more understated perspective in the collection."

Underwear is a highly technical undertaking, with a myriad of shapes and cups in B to G sizes. Straps have to be the right length and set far enough apart to make waists look narrower. Nipples must be correctly positioned,

the gauge (how wide the weave will open) should be firm enough to support but not so snug it's uncomfortable.

Every bra gets fitted on her body (then sized up or down). "I come from old-school corsetry. I know how to make what's called a cut-and-sew bra, and although there's a lot of new technology that makes lingerie much easier to produce, nothing beats knowing the traditional techniques."

Sporty trim bralet, £10, and briefs, £12 for pack of two (next.co.uk)



Yuma bra, £118, and Amy culottes, £84 (morphoandluna.com)



T-shirt bra, £25, and crepe pants, £12 (stories.com)



Silk, satin and lace nightdress, £340 (morphoand luna.com)



Have we reached peak jumpsuit?

It's only taken me a decade to come round to the jumpsuit. But now, like any late arrival, I'm in danger of becoming evangelical on the subject. From the number I see in the stores at all prices, it's shaping up to be a cornerstone of evening dressing this winter. So much more chic than the usual dog's dinner Christmas options.

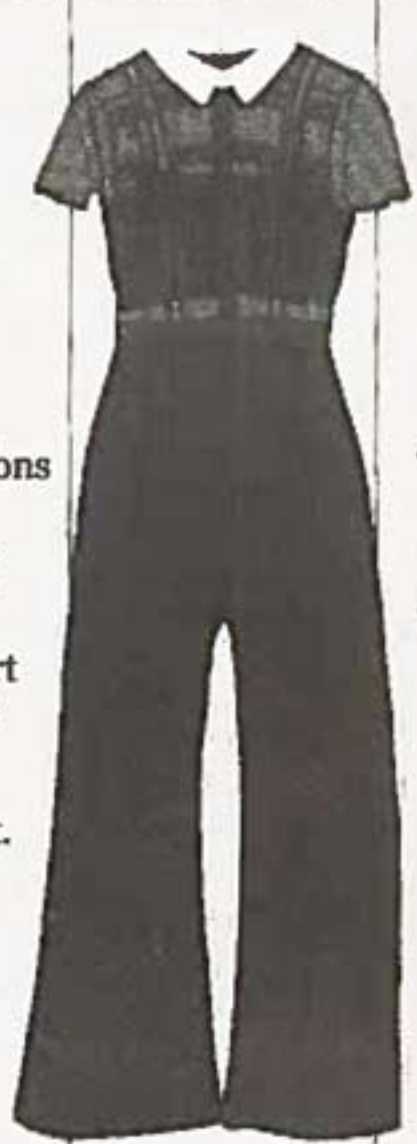
However, this being a 360-degree kind of page, I should give you some of the cons, such as the not-insignificant fact that Melania Trump wore a flowy white Ralph Lauren one at Trump's valedictory rally. If you're sufficiently directional to take that as a signal that the jumpsuit has reached critical mass and you must therefore burn all of yours, fair enough: you've probably been wearing them for a decade and it's high time you found a new staple.

political grounds, your sartorial options are going to be pretty sparse. Mrs T looks like a major fashion consumer.

There is, too, the going-to-the-loo palaver. That is a pain, I grant you, although this is obviously a small part of your day, the rest of which should be significantly simplified by your jumpsuit. Besides, what I'm really talking about is the evening jumpsuit.

So, back to the positives. It is a one-piece, ergo it is lengthening, slimming, and you don't have to worry about shirts and tops coming adrift. There is no finickity working out of proportions, because that's been done for you. It has all the virtues of a dress, with one major advantage: it is a pair of trousers.

This is key, since the most cursory observation of any room or street will



Self-Portrait lace panel jumpsuit, £280



By Malene Birger stretch-crepe jumpsuit, £375



Wide-leg jumpsuit, £65 (warehouse.)



Pleated-back jumpsuit, £199 (jaeger.co.uk)

thing about trousers is, they're a self-perpetuating solution. Once you've got into their stride, who can be bothered with the saga of tights and finding the right length coat that are part of wearing a skirt or dress in winter?

Jumpsuits can be elegant, formal, drapey, tailored... a strapless version in glossy fabrics has all the impact of a strapless column dress, but is more versatile because, being trousers, it has intrinsic athletic, daytime adaptability. Wear it under a jacket and you're appropriate but youthful for most dress codes - handy when you're not sure how snazzy up everyone else will be.

They're particularly chic when they're a slightly loose boyish cut. Should your waist be a strong point, make sure it looks as good belted. This one from Jaeger (£199, jaeger.co.uk), which comes with ties, ticks a lot of boxes. Theoutnet.com is another productive stomping ground. Add a whooshy satin sash if you're so inclined, or some statement jewellery. Seek out pockets, or striking necklines (Whistles has some tempting options). If you're small, wear them with chunky velvet platforms. If taller, they can look lovely, languid and ST (Stella Tennant)

#humblebrag

Seraphine boots, £225 plus 20% off this weekend (tedandmuffy.com)

If, like me, you've had a love-hate relationship with knee-high boots (tricky to pull on and off, don't work under trousers, etc), you probably haven't found the right fitting. Ted&Muffy's come in various widths, with heels you can walk in and styles that tread a line between fashionable and realistic. If you can't bear tights, these are the alternative - with

