

FOUNDATIONS IN VOGUE: 1953-1963

by

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Foundation garments are functional undergarments, which mold the wearer's body into the fashionable shape of the time. These garments include corsets, brassieres, girdles, "waspies," and "all-in-ones."

During World War II, the production of foundation garments was severely restricted in the United States and Great Britain, due to the amounts of steel and rubber used in their manufacture.<sup>1</sup> After the war ended, they rose to fashionable prominence, thanks to the ultra-feminine wasp-waisted silhouette of Christian Dior's "New Look" of 1947.<sup>2</sup> While the desired effect of these undergarments was to give a corseted hourglass look, new stretch fibers such as Lastex (introduced in 1929) and Lycra® (introduced in 1959)<sup>3</sup> made these twentieth century garments far less rigid than the boned coutil corsets of the nineteenth century.

One of the most fascinating things about looking at fashion photography featuring foundation garments is how explicitly the shifting shape of the fashionable body is communicated to the viewer. In many lingerie editorials, the editor will describe the new proportions that these undergarments will help you achieve in order to attain the ideal figure of the moment.

In the February 15, 1953 *Vogue* editorial, "For the New American Fashions: New Framework" (fig. 1), photographer Roger Prigent has posed the model in profile, forming an arc with her body. This C-shaped pose creates the fashionable body by rounding the model's shoulders, and emphasizing the curves from bust line into waist and back out to hip. The roundness of the pose also shows off the features of the garment itself—the model's exposed back, shoulders and décolleté are emphasized in her strapless, low-back brassiere.

It is also interesting that the model appears to be wearing nothing else with her strapless low-back brassiere. The garter straps follow her leg, as if they are attached to stockings, but the

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<sup>1</sup> Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2001), 157.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

<sup>3</sup> Eleri Lynn, *Underwear Fashion in Detail*, (London : V & A Publishing), 2010, 221.

stockings are nowhere to be seen. The only other accessory in the photograph is a draped piece of fabric, which forms a diagonal in the frame and wraps around the model's arm. This piece of drapery also serves to draw the eye to the sharp curve of the model's waist.

In the May 1, 1958 *Vogue* editorial, "Shape Revolution—From Within" (fig. 2), photographer Jerry Schatzberg has also posed his model in profile, in a modified C-shape. Again, this pose serves to deemphasize the shoulders, and emphasize the waist. However, this much more playful, standing pose with one leg out is also serving to communicate the swingy flare of the model's "trapeze" petticoat, which according to the accompanying description, "hold[s] the line from side to side (the trapeze swing), without puffing it fore and aft."<sup>4</sup>

Showing the model in profile also communicates the story of the new shape in brassieres, which "soften and round the bosom line" with "subtle young shaping."<sup>5</sup> The apex of the model's bustline is considerably lower than it was in photograph from 1953, and has a slightly more "natural" proportion.

The March 15, 1960 *Vogue* editorial, "The New Thread of Weightless Matter," photographed by Italian photography team Leombruno-Bodi featured girdles paired with helium balloons. The fashion news in this editorial was Lycra® spandex, the new, lightweight synthetic elastomer fiber. To illustrate how lightweight these garments were, the central photo pictures a panty girdle tied to a helium balloon, floating in the Manhattan skyline. The models in this spread continue this theme. They are each holding a bunch of helium balloons and looking skyward. These models are slimmer and straighter than those in the 1950s, and have smaller bust lines.

Lycra® spandex was a revolutionary development in undergarments. According to Eleri Lynn, Lycra® spandex is "three times more powerful than previous elastics with twice the recovery

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<sup>4</sup> *Shape Revolution—From Within*, *Vogue*, May 1, 1958, 179.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

power.”<sup>6</sup> These fibers make foundation garments capable of firm yet flexible shaping without excessive weight. The accompanying text to this editorial claims that the combined weight of the nine brassieres and girdles featured in the editorial was only one and three-quarters pounds.

In the February 15, 1963 *Vogue* editorial, “The New Curve in Lingerie”, this humorous photograph (fig.4) by Louis Faurer appeared. The model is posed standing straight, while holding the Sunday comics open, obscuring her face and upper body. All that is visible from the waist-up is a hand, an elbow, and the top of the model’s head. This helps to draw the eye to the garment being modeled, a lightweight, Lycra® spandex power net panty girdle.

The colorful comic strips on the newspaper echo the quirky multicolor confetti print on the panty girdle, which according to the accompanying text should be worn with “skimmy clothes—possibly southern clothes.”

The straight, crossed-knee pose of the model emphasizes the slim, youthful body, which was fashionable at the time. The introduction to the editorial describes the 1963 body as “[n]arrow but rounded, substantial, but at the same time slight, the body is the figure of the moment, and its condition, not its set of proportions is what interests.”<sup>7</sup> Along with the foundation garments, fitness was the focus of this spread, and exercise tips accompanied each photograph, so that the reader could firm up what her girdle couldn’t cover. This foreshadows fashion’s abandonment of girdles and most other foundation garments through the late 1960s and 1970s.

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<sup>6</sup> Eleri Lynn, *Underwear Fashion in Detail*, (London : V & A Publishing), 2010, 110.

<sup>7</sup> “The New Curve in Lingerie,” *Vogue*, February 15, 1963, 98.



Fig. 1. Roger Prigent, *For the New American Fashions: New Framework*, *Vogue*, February 1, 1953, 210.

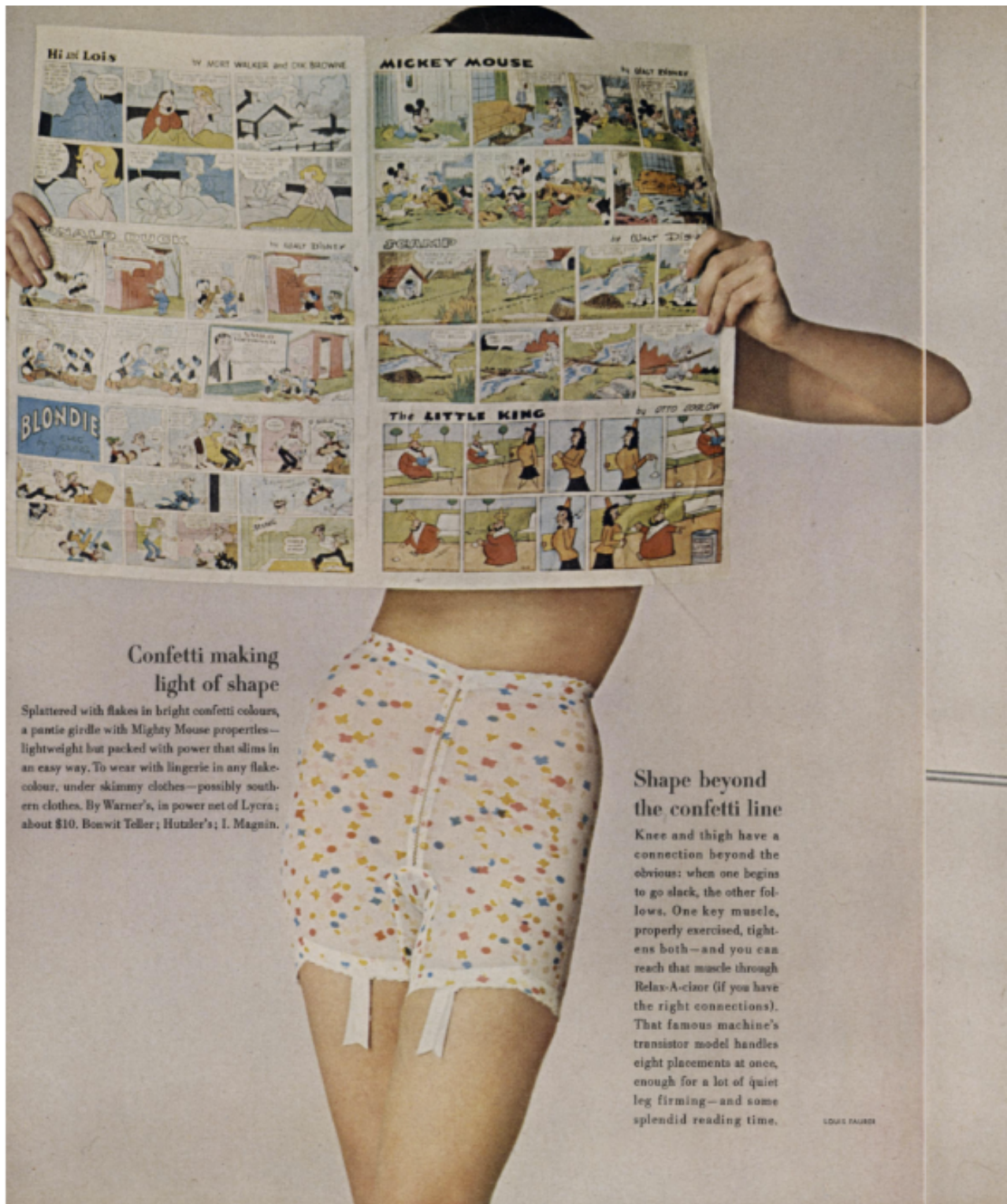


Arriving on the heels of the revolution in looks, the news of revolution from within. Among the supporting theories, these: *Chemise brassière*, facing page. Camisole-topped, shaped on the oval, it's by no means limited to chemiserie. What it does is to soften and round the bosom line—and the fashions that demand this kind of subtle young shaping are in the majority now. By Warner's, in a smooth nylon lace that won't cause a ripple under the thinnest silk. About \$6. Lord & Taylor; Rich's; Marshall Field. *Trapeze petticoat*, this page, with a new lateral action. The idea is to hold the line from side to side (the trapeze swing), without puffing it fore and aft. By Sramase, of pleated cotton-nylon-Dacron, bolstered from below by nylon tuffeta and a strip of horsehair lining. About \$13. Capezio shoes. Both: Lord & Taylor. Petticoat, also: L. S. Ayres; Frost Bros. The brassière with it, by Maidenform, has—besides the news of unisistent shaping—a new multi-stretch construction. Nylon lace with nylon and rayon leno elastic; \$6. Lord & Taylor.

Fig. 2. Jerry Schatzberg, *Shape Revolution—From Within*, *Vogue*, May 1, 1958, 179.



Fig. 3. Leombruno-Bodi, *The New Thread of the Weightless Matter*, *Vogue*, March 15, 1960, 136-137.



**Confetti making  
light of shape**

Splattered with flakes in bright confetti colours, a pantie girdle with Mighty Mouse properties—lightweight but packed with power that slims in an easy way. To wear with lingerie in any flake-colour, under skinny clothes—possibly southern clothes. By Warner's, in power net of Lycra; about \$10. Bonwit Teller; Hutzler's; I. Magnin.

**Shape beyond  
the confetti line**

Knee and thigh have a connection beyond the obvious: when one begins to go slack, the other follows. One key muscle, properly exercised, tightens both—and you can reach that muscle through Relax-A-cizer (if you have the right connections). That famous machine's transistor model handles eight placements at once, enough for a lot of quiet leg firming—and some splendid reading time.

LOUIS FAURER

Fig. 4. Louis Faurer, *The New Curve in Lingerie*, *Vogue*, February 15, 1963, 100.



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