

Hartford Courant.

What Are You Wearing, Big Boy?

December 7, 2005

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They say inside every grown man there's still a little boy. But underneath every grown man's clothes, is there still little-boy underwear?

Now it seems so. While boxers may reign as the official "grown-up" man's underwear of choice, cutesy skivvies reminiscent of boys' undies are coming on strong. The tighty-whitey has been revved up with bright colors, colored-contrast seams and piping, and prints (camouflage, flying hot dogs and even little fire trucks). Think of them as Underoos for not-so-underage guys.

"Men are more comfortable in their skin. They're looking for whimsy and lightheartedness," said Eadie Kelly, director of merchandising for Undergear. "They don't have to necessarily wear serious underwear."

Serious is not the word anyone would associate with this new slew of bright, young 'uns, kiddie-style briefs and trunks that are making a splash in the men's underwear department. At Undergear (www.undergear.com), the hottest brands come in electric colors and clever prints. Go Softwear is showing sweet little briefs with bright piping. Unico offers briefs with '60s-inspired Pop Art graphics. Aussie Bum's BVDs look like grown-up versions of classic boy's underwear with white piping against bold colored cotton. At Freshpair (www.freshpair.com), men might like trying on a pair of Ginch Gonch "superhero"-style underwear that looks like something Superman, Captain Marvel and Spider-Man would enjoy slipping on (the company's motto is "love like a kid"). The internet underwear site also offers "Hawaii Five-0" briefs with palm tree prints from DT Underwear, sexy contrast-piping briefs from 2(x)ist, and Lo No Show Army Trunks (that look like grown-up versions of GI-Joe underwear) from C-IN2. And from a company called Baskit comes snug briefs with a contrasting color pouch and seam detail that accentuates, well, a man's basket.

"This may be something people aren't talking about, but they're absolutely buying it," Kelly said. "Men want as much fashion as women do. They've had their father's woven boxers or tighty-whiteys. Now there's a whole new gamut."

Make no mistake, Kelly said, these upscale undies are meant to be seen, not hidden. College kids are wearing them around the dorms and as loungewear (many of the brands



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also offer matching T-shirts). The popularity of men's low-rise jeans also is fueling the need for fun briefs that'll peak out from denim and may be conversation starters.

Some of this new grown-up little boy underwear is meant to be tongue-in-cheek, especially the colors and prints of Ginch Gonch. Some is meant to be nostalgic, especially the Superhero styles. But all the brands bring smart cuts and engineering into play, coupled with "modern" textiles like microfiber and cotton Lycra. These are definitely not Dad's BVDs.

"Men like sexy things, too. As much as a woman wants to be desirable to a man, men want to be desirable to their mates," Kelly said. "A lot of this stuff is datewear. You don't want a pair of holey white underwear on at that crucial date."