

Shopping & Style

Amsterdam's consumer passions Edited by Anna Whitehouse

Man, made

This city is brimming with boys-only pampering solutions. Mark Smith takes his wardrobe (and his body) for a head-to-crotch spring clean

Asset management

Whether via Wonderbra or more permanent means, women have long been boosting their boobs without opprobrium. Why should men be given (erm) a hard time for taking a similar approach to their loins? After all, cultural commentators have argued that the humble business tie is nothing more than an arrow pointing toward the crown jewels; now there's a product on the market that's less 'subtle semiotics', more 'permanent semi'.

Rob van Giels, the sales associate at Nine Streets men's underwear specialist Andrew Christian, tells us that the brand's €34.95 'Shock Jock' pants (with 'Frontal Enhancing Technology' – read: a padded crotch) are increasingly popular among men, both straight and gay, who frequent the city's underwear parties.

Since I've already endured such a fiesta in the name of 'journalism', I decided to test my newly loaned, electric blue, bulging briefs at the preen-arena that is Amsterdam International Fashion Week. I poured myself into skinny jeans and found the result to be pleasantly shapely, rather than pervily priapic. They didn't feel any different from regular pants.

None of the air-kissing acquaintances I encountered there commented on my augmented lunchbox, but then who goes around staring at men's



Shop stop: Velour

We're loving the 'Mad Men' inspired runway looks from Velour's Amsterdam International Fashion Week show. Now where did we put that Tom Collins? Velour, Huidenstraat 14 (210 0163/velour.se).



Left: bulge-boosting smalls by Andrew Christian

crotches? Actually, you'd be surprised...

When I told a female friend later what was due south of my spangly silver waistband, she told me that the first thing she checks out on a potential conquest is the lie of his loin. But then, as Van Giels himself pointed out, the pants aren't going to fool anyone for long, particularly if your goal is to have them ripped off by a pack of hungry fashion models.

Whether or not you're a 'grower' or a 'show-er', when judged across more traditional criteria, the pants are of fine quality and build, look fresh and fashionable, and certainly proved a pleasant change from my own antiquated H&M repertoire, which cost a tenth of the price. And I'll tell you one not-so-shocking thing for free: they made the cycle home more comfortable.

Andrew Christian Wolvenstraat 1-3 (626 8968/andrewchristian.com/retail-amsterdam.htm). Open Mon-Sat 11.00-18.00.

Facing facts

A friend recently pointed out that one of the joys of being in one's late twenties is that you get to experience breakouts and wrinkles simultaneously. That said, it seems the odd facial treatment can do much to clear the remnants of adolescence and fight the looming of middle age. My normal skincare regimen consists of little more than a slick of bargain moisturiser and the odd glob of Clearasil, but an hour spent in the company of beauty therapist Eefje van der Pol at her own men-only beauty centre in Oud Zuid demonstrated to me that skincare really is a science.

Mindful of men's analytical tendencies, Van der Pol explains every step of her signature facial (a not unreasonable €52.50 for 45 minutes) in terms of the skin's cellular structure and I have to say, it sounds more convincing than anything Claudia Schiffer has ever whispered to me from a TV ad.



Shop stop: OntFront

If you discover one Amsterdam store this year, make it OntFront. Owned by Liza Koifman and Tomas Overtoom, and stocked entirely with their sporty, bad-boy-done-good tailoring, we predict big things of this awesome concept.

OntFront, Haarlemmerdijk 121 (062 920 0849/ontfront.com).

In fact, one of Van der Pol's tailored tips is that I should stop using mass-marketed moisturisers, which, due to their excessive alcohol content, have the opposite-to-desired effect, parching my naturally dry skin.

From freshening toner to a divine-smelling 'post-extraction' soothing solution, Van der Pol favours the understated Dermologica range of products and, it has to be said, they reek (discretely) of quality. The salon itself is smart and unfussy; I'm offered a complimentary cuticle treatment as an exfoliating masque does its stuff and – in contrast to other establishments in the city – I feel under no obligation to buy products on departure. The only pressure she applies is with her perfectly manicured hands.

manMAN Beauty Care Roelof Hartstraat 13hs (670 7733/manmanbeautycare.nl). Open Tue-Fri 10.00-18.00, Sat 10.00-17.00, Sun 12.00-17.00 and by appt.



War paint

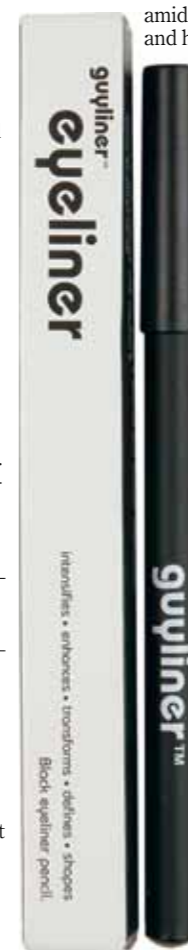
Let's not be ridiculous. Very few of us nowadays are thrown into a scutum-shrinking sexual identity crisis at the thought of slapping a bit of tinted concealer on an angry red spot before an important meeting. Want proof that men's make-up is heading out of the closet and into your washbag? Check out Guyliner, the fun range of grooming products on the first floor of high street behemoth River Island, which includes clear 'mascara' (€12) for that pretty boy look, a trusty lip balm (€8.50) and, of course, the eponymous guyliner (€12). Apply before bedtime for an artfully dishevelled effect.

River Island Kalverstraat 22-26 (330 2640/riverisland.com). Open Mon-Wed 10.00-18.00, Thur until 21.00; Fri, Sat 10.00-19.00; Sun 12.00-18.00.

Bringing sexy back

One of the major complaints in women's mags is the modern phenomenon of 'backne'. As the largest expanse of skin on anybody's body, the back inevitably escapes regular grooming attention because: a) we can't really see it without the aid of a periscope and b) well, it's kind of inconveniently located, isn't it?

If you're planning on go-



ing shirtless any time soon, you might consider the pioneering 'Back Facial' treatment at Strong Young Urban, the men's boutique city spa that happens to have a big ole motorbike parked amid its range of designer undies and high-end potions (they've really run with the not-for-pansies vibe).

Performed by beauty therapist and trained masseur Ian Ros in just 30 minutes, it's the perfect lunchtime luxury and incorporates all of the major stages of a regular facial,



that's to say the protracted application of steam, followed by a cleansing scrub, blackhead extraction, a reviving massage and moisturising aftercare. At €65, it's not cheap, but it's blissfully indulgent. I'll be, erm, back.

Strong Young Urban Vijzelstraat 125 (625 5515/syu.nl). Open Tue-Sat 10.00-19.00, Thur until 21.00; Sun 12.00-19.00.

Thank God it's Freitag!

The man bag has been going from strength to strength and this take on the messenger bag by Freitag is a future classic and eco-friendly, too. The ultra-tough tarpaulin material came, quite literally, from the back of a lorry, meaning each one is totally individual.

€130-€165 from 290 Square Meters, Houtkopersdwarstraat 3 (419 2525/290sgm.com). Open Tue-Sat 11.00-18.00.



Shop stop: Jefferson Hotel

It's not a hotel, but it's designed to look like one and you'll certainly want to check out the tightly edited selections from brands like Diesel Black Gold and Pimpaliciousliving. Jefferson Hotel, Elandsgracht 57 (330 7865/jeffersonhotel.nl).