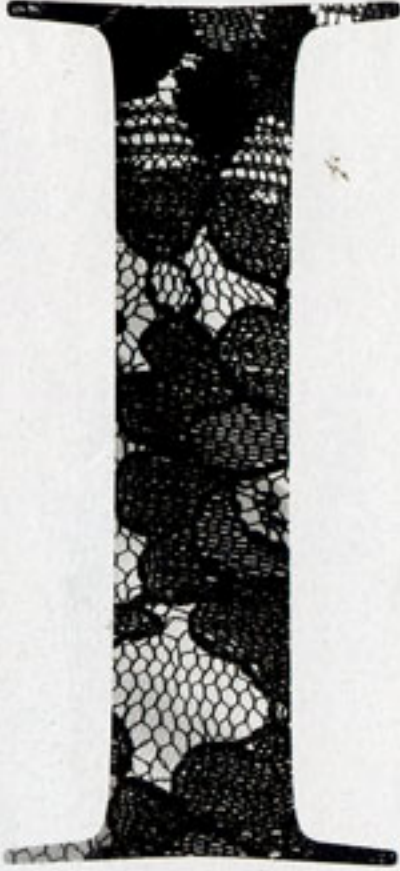


# Pretty Dirty Things

Excuse me, is that a whip in your Birkin?  
How sex toys and bondage play went from seedy  
to seriously stylish. **By Danielle Pergament**



I'm having lunch at the members-only Core Club in Manhattan, and Hayley\*, a high-profile publicist and the wife of a local politician, is talking about kink.

She is impeccably dressed in a black silk top, a body-hugging pencil skirt, and a ponytail artfully wrapped with a leather cord. Every inch of her is styled, from her delicate Cartier necklace to her pristine Birkin bag.

But Hayley is more interested in sex toys than clothes. "I could talk about vibrators all day."

As she says this, the general manager comes over to thank her, essentially, for gracing the Core Club with her presence. She responds demurely, makes small talk. But she doesn't lower her voice as he leaves. "Oh, and travel vibrators," she says, turning back to me. "You have to have one of those." I ask her whether she might be uncomfortable discussing such behind-closed-doors subjects in places more suitable to conversations about charity galas and how bad the traffic is in the Hamptons.

\*Name and some details have been changed.



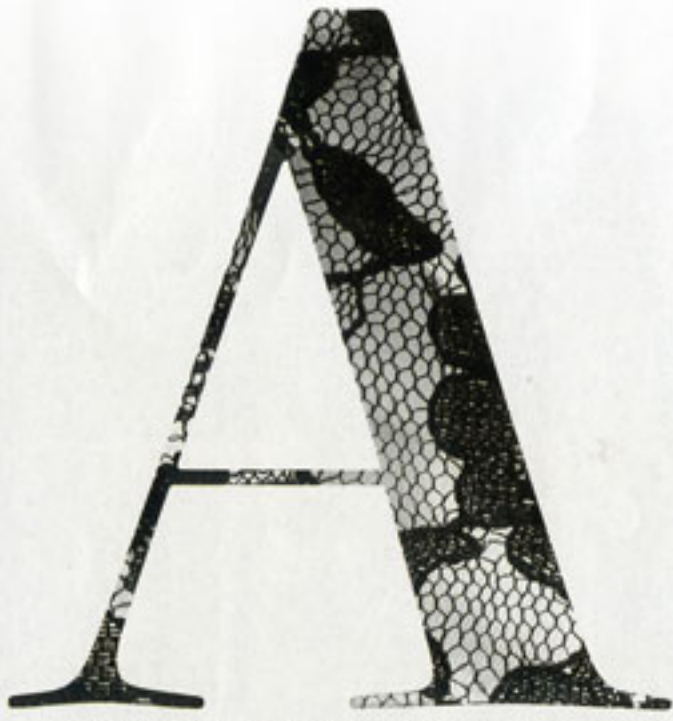


Two Pairs of Legs  
In Black Stockings,  
Paris, 1979



PHOTOGRAPHED BY HELMUT NEWTON





re you kidding?" she says. "There's not a woman in here who doesn't use a vibrator." A tablemate com-

pletes her thought: "Not to mention a whip or a blindfold." You could call it a sexual revolution: Over the past few years, women of a certain pedigree have been quietly (and sometimes not so) venturing into the world of kinky, high-end sex toys. Rihanna recently told *Rolling Stone* that she likes a little spanking. And Barbara Walters asked one of her cohosts on *The View* if she enjoys rough sex. We've moved past pole-dancing classes and into a world of BDSM (that is, bondage, discipline, sadism, and masochism) for sex, not just exercise.

You know the glass cases of whips and blindfolds that Agent Provocateur keeps on display? Well, it turns out they're not just for show. Companies like Kiki de Montparnasse, Coco de Mer, and Agent Provocateur have long attracted affluent customers, but now they're also drawing in affluent customers with a dirty side.

Go to any of those boutiques—or their websites—and you'll see the beautiful \$220 French lace demi bra right next to the \$390 nipple pasties. And keep looking: The display cases and cabinets are full of things that could be, in a different setting, priceless sculptures by Sherrie Levine, but in this case might be sold with a tube of lubricant. Then there are the bridles, bondage ties, cuffs, bodysuits made of latex, and masks. When these stores first started carrying kinky sex toys, it was more to create mood than profit. Not anymore.

"We can't keep our butt plugs in stock," says Allison England of Coco de Mer, not mincing words. (As a product trainer, England teaches the staff what the toys are for "and how to use them.") The British lingerie company carries \$300 Stella McCartney underthings and other standard lacy garments, but that's not to say its fetish gear doesn't sell well. "People are more interested in the wild pieces than ever before," says England. "But it's not seedy porn toys. If you're a lady who lunches, you want to know that you're going to get the quality you're used to. Some of our leather bondage—our cuffs, gag pillows, masks, and

harnesses—was crafted by Ilya Fleet. He was apprenticed to a master British saddlemaker."

Patricia\*, a 38-year-old advertising executive who lives in New York City, has amassed a small stash of crystal-handled whips and glass dildos, a collection she's spent thousands of dollars on, which is "nothing I can't leave out when the cleaning lady comes," she says. But she's minor-league compared to her friend. "Melanie\* and her husband have reins, bridles, the whole bit—ha! Get it? She does it for the same reason everyone does: to keep her marriage alive." (Despite assurances of anonymity, many of the women I spoke to referred to "a friend" as soon as the conversation went kinkier than vibrators and blindfolds. Melanie, however, is real. And declined to be interviewed.) Just like any accessory, these sex toys yield a certain amount of competitiveness among women. Who is more adventurous? Who is actually buying the \$995 Restraining Arts Kit? "We always compare what we have," says Patricia. "That's part of the fun of shopping for toys. One thing I know is that my friends are getting their money's worth out of this stuff." Hayley, for instance, chose to give up her vibrator "cold turkey for three months," she says. "It totally spoiled me—it got to the point where I couldn't get off without it."

***"Are you kidding?" says Hayley. "There's not a woman in here who doesn't use a vibrator."***

High-end erotica isn't new. What is new is how popular it's become. If you don't believe me, see how many women on your next flight are openly reading *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Vintage Books). The book—about a student and a bondage-loving billionaire—has broken all kinds of publishing records and flew to number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list, where at press time it still remained. "*Fifty Shades of Grey* is to publishing what Spanx was to the undergarment business," wrote Alessandra Stanley in *The New York Times*. A \$15.95 erotic novel is one thing. But demand for a \$13,500 Lelo Inez 24-karat-gold-plated vibrator is

quite another. Sure, the companies that make these luxe sex tools brag that they only use materials that are safe for the body—medical-grade gold, silicone, and even platinum. But it's more than that. The act of buying the toy becomes something altogether different if it happens in a beautiful boutique rather than a seedy head shop that sells bongos next to dildos and looks like you could contract hepatitis just by walking inside. A pair of metal handcuffs for \$12? A little raunchy. But a pair of Kiki de Montparnasse lambskin leather cuffs with "metal detachable claw connector for light bondage play" for \$225? Chic and naughty. "For me, kinky crosses the line into sleazy when it doesn't fit properly," says Sarah Shotton, the creative director of Agent Provocateur. "Leather needs to be soft; it needs to contour to your body to be elegant. That's as true of a pair of pants as it is of a playsuit." (Though the latter is prob-





*“For me,  
kinky crosses  
the line into  
sleazy when  
it doesn’t  
fit properly.”*

“First of all, we all have fake tits, so if we’re buying anything for the bedroom, we’re buying corsets to suck in the waist and show off the rack,” says Anne\*, a 52-year-old movie producer who has worked on several Academy Award-winning films. “And everyone in L.A. is drinking pineapple juice around the clock. There’s some enzyme in pineapples that makes your vagina taste good, and the juice bars in West Hollywood are always out of it. And we’re all taking [the hormone] DHEA: It makes you hornier than Hades. It was recommended to me by my massage therapist at Canyon Ranch.”

Following in the path of eyebrows and eyelashes, vaginas are the latest body part to become the focus of a mini industry. Treatments like vajaz-zling and vajacials may mostly be clever vag-vertising, but they’re gaining momentum. “When I started the com-

ably more expensive than the former—Agent Provocateur Soiree Cosima Corset bodysuit: \$2,990.) Like anything that can be sold, design matters. And in the world of kink, it more than matters. “All of our vibrators have a microchip,” says Donna Faro, director of sales and marketing at Lelo, the Swedish intimate-products company. Why would someone need a microchip in her vibrator? “Our Tiani model uses sensor motion technology and works on remote control, so a tilt of the wrist or wave of the palm activates variable power settings.” Of all places, the company found inspiration in Wii games. “You know how you can play tennis with sensor motion technology?” asks Faro. “It’s a similar thing.” Except that it’s an orgasm, not a backhand. Recently, the Lelo Tiani vibrator won the Red Dot design award—an honor usually bestowed to products by BMW or Bose or Apple. It was the first of its kind ever to win such a prestigious prize.

What’s high-end and desirable exists along a sliding scale. And it tends to break down along geographic lines: Women in New York City gravitate toward the toys; women in Los Angeles are more focused on their bodies.

pany ten years ago, we had a promotion: Bring a friend, get a discount,” says Cindy Barshop, owner of the Completely Bare hair-removal salons in New York. But the promotion didn’t work—seems women were too shy to talk about bikini-line hair removal even for a cash incentive. “Now, when women call for a bikini wax, we’ll ask them straight out on the phone if they want the treatment to include the labia and inner buttocks. Our entire language has changed. We don’t have to guess what the customer wants. And she knows what we’re talking about.” And what Barshop is talking about isn’t just hair removal—it’s also about decorating with feathers, faux fur, crystals. (One of the latest offerings is the Carnivale Bikini Wax, which includes waxing plus a feather adornment, for \$175.) It’s the era of bespoke bikini lines.

“There’s a woman in L.A. who is well known in the industry and famous for her dinner parties,” says Anne. “She’ll throw the most lavish party and wear the most gorgeous Dior dress—but no underwear. And she’s not just flashing her hoo-ha. She always has something going on down there: crystals, henna tattoos, feathers. *(continued on page 133)*



PROMOTION

# Beauty Everywhere



Get the app at [allure.com/go/tablet](http://allure.com/go/tablet).

Download the digital edition of *Allure* to get complete issues and exclusive videos delivered to your tablet each month.

## PRETTY DIRTY THINGS

(Continued from page 113)

Some people see it, some don't, but there's always a show."

For all the titillation of these products, the people who are buying the bondage rope at Kiki de Montparnasse (\$250) or the chain-embellished bodysuit at Agent Provocateur (\$2,990) are hardly the kind of women who wear Lucite heels and go on dates by the hour.

"I have customers who have black AmEx cards and are in the society pages," says Nina Helms, owner of Devine Toys in Houston. "Once the adult-toys industry realized they were missing out on a whole chunk of the population, they had to rethink their products. These women weren't going to buy those disgusting, vein-y dildos. And what happens? You have companies like Jimmyjane being sold at Fred Segal."

The high-end adult-toy company Jimmyjane is the Cinderella story of the industry. "I never set out to make sex toys," says Ethan Imboden, who worked as a designer for Nike and Motorola before he founded Jimmyjane. "But over and over, people would pull me aside and ask me about designing vibrators. These were women who wore Christian Louboutin shoes and carried Marc Jacobs bags, and their only options for vibrators were noisy, unattractive, and came packaged with porn-star images." According to Imboden, designers make a living because people want products to convey a certain lifestyle and taste level. "I made a vibrator that was silent and easy and compact and clean and simple," he says. "And the next thing I knew, it was sold in Louis Vuitton's private members' club in Tokyo. Kate Moss was seen buying one. We were in *Vogue*. The whole landscape changed when vibrators went high-end."

And according to the women I spoke to, it doesn't show many signs of changing back. "Can you imagine just missionary position all the time?" asks Patricia, whose personal fetish is being restrained with Hermès neckties. "I'll use my toys until I'm too old to have sex." ♦

LOWEST pH 5.5

No Parabens

sebamed

WRAP YOURSELF IN COMFORT  
Discover the Healing Power of pH 5.5



## Clinically Proven Results

- Non-irritating to sensitive skin
- Ultra mild formula gently nourishes
- Supports skin's natural barrier
- Soap-free and biodegradable
- ⊙ Dermatologist recommended in over 85 countries

Find Sebamed in the facial skin care and hair care aisle at

**CVS/pharmacy**



SAVE \$2.00

Redeemable only at  
**CVS/pharmacy**

ON ANY ONE (1)  
Sebamed Product  
Excludes trial size

Supplier: The offer entitles you to the face value of the coupon and to handling charges if it is redeemed by a customer at the time of purchase of the listed product. Coupon may require redemption with one gift card. Restrictions of the coupon are explained in the coupon. Offer valid through 12/31/12. Offer ends 12/31/12. Offer valid 12/1/12 - 12/31/12. Cash value .01¢. Not where used or restricted. Coupon void where prohibited. ©2012 CVS. All rights reserved. Offer valid only in the U.S. Offer ends 12/31/12. Offer valid only where indicated.

