

# Fashion Outlook

## Duds for spuds

### Couch potatoes are dressing down

By Helen Burggraf

In the beginning there was preppy, with its Topsiders, Lacoste T-shirts and navy blue Brooks Brothers blazers.

Then came yuppie, a dress-for-success philosophy exemplified by custom-made suits, "power" ties and anything by Ralph Lauren.

Now, as the decade draws to a close, it appears the emerging socio-economic sartorial trend may be spawned by the couch potato.

Baby boomers have been marrying and having children ("new potatoes") at a rate unequalled since the early 1960s. Not only do married couples tend to stay home more than singles, but those with children find going out often ends up being more of an expense and ordeal than it's worth.

And the videocassette recorder is having a revolutionary effect on the way people spend their free time. More than half of the nation's TV households now have VCRs, and a recent Gallup poll found that one-third of all Americans consider watching television their favorite way to spend an evening.

"America has become older, more conservative, and far more home-oriented," observes Kurt Barnard, a New York-based retail consultant.

And as more baby boomers have children, their incomes — which haven't increased significantly in recent years — are suddenly stretched, leaving less money for frivolous clothing purchases.

Of course, knowing what the nation's couch potatoes wear while watching "thirtysomething" isn't easy. But Marshall Bank, president of Long Haul and a self-confessed CP, thinks comfort is the key.

Bank claims he recently got the idea of marketing Long Haul jeans to couch potatoes rather than just to long-distance truckers after observing the discomfort of some of his TV-watching buddies during a recent episode of "Moonlighting."

"One night, I noticed they were squirming a lot in their chairs, so we made a deal that I'd supply the jeans next time if they brought the snacks," Bank explains. The duds, which are made of stretch denim and are cut fuller than other jeans, were such a hit with his fellow spuds that Bank saw, in the flickering light during a commercial, a whole new market for his product.

As a result, all Long Haul jeans (except those sold in truck stops) now carry special hang tags that identify them as ideal for couch potatoes. Some stores are even offering them in genuine 10-pound potato sacks.

Also comfortable — and, therefore, experts say, almost certainly mainstays of the confirmed couch potato's wardrobe — are sweat pants, sweat shirts, T-shirts and jogging shorts. Despite the sedentary implications of the couch potato sobriquet, experts note that many couch potatoes also jog or otherwise work out.

Donald R. Sherman, senior vice president of Champion Products, Inc., suspects that couch potatoes buy their sweats and tees with the intention of wearing them while engaging in sports, and only later find them to be perfect for lounging about.

For decades, Champion, which is best known for supplying activewear emblazoned with sports-team logos, sold its products only through high school and college bookstores and sports stadiums. Three years ago, the company began selling to department stores and other couch-potato-friendly retail outlets.

While the couch-potato fashion movement may be far more widespread than, say, short skirts (remember them?), many apparel-industry executives fear being associated with something as practical and lacking in "newness" as sweats and tees. (A spokeswoman for The Gap, which has been trying to upgrade its fashion image recently, declined to be interviewed for this story out of concern that being seen as a purveyor of basic

sweats to couch potatoes might not be "the right image for us.")

Saks Fifth Avenue, which three years ago launched a line of private-label sportswear called "Real Clothes," also declined to participate, explaining that "the couch-potato angle is not really in keeping with our image."

However, when the Real Clothing line was first introduced in 1985, The New York Times reported that "(Saks) suddenly realized that while it was concentrating on fashion, people were ordering these basics from L.L. Bean and such places," and quoted the

store's fashion director as saying, "There's a lot of anti-fashion going on."

Barnard, the retail consultant, suggests that retailers may be a tad touchy about the couch-potato phenomenon, since it is partly to blame for their currently poor apparel sales.

"Couch potatoes buy these clothes, and then they don't replace them as often as they would clothes they'd wear outside the house," Barnard explains.

Said Lacroix: "When fashion is completely wearable, we're dead."

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Home  
Post Scripts



By Glenda Hughes, Sales Rep. **873-0300**

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I'm writing this column this week in direct response to a call I had from a client last week. It should inspire those of you who are considering entering into the profession of real estate, to wonder "why", and should give all of my colleagues a smile for the rest of the week!

My irate caller, with whom I have been working, on and off, for about a month, lives in the east end of Toronto, and had decided to move into our lovely community, provided of course, that I could find him a home in his price range. He is a first time buyer (one of my favorite type of people to work with, because they are usually so excited about buying their first home) and was working within the usual lower price bracket for his purchase.

Not a problem, usually, provided that people are patient and are willing to make some concessions in their criteria for this purchase. After several times out (one of which was his unannounced visit to town on a Sunday, contacting me, finding me ill, and me pulling myself together and arranging some quick appointments for him to look at) and locating some fairly nice properties within his price range.

Still, it was not exactly what he was looking for, so I arranged to keep in touch by phone, and have him come out to view homes as they came up. I called early in the week, to tell his wife about a new property that I had just seen, and thought it to be in his ball-park of price, location and amenities. The asking price was a little higher than his bottom line was, but certainly, not out of the question, and based on what was selling in town, I thought certainly worth a look at.

I answer the phone, late on a Saturday afternoon, to have this client accuse "me" of inflating the prices in Georgetown over the past month, pricing first time buyers out of the market, and furious with me for even calling to report a home out of his price range! Man, I didn't realize how powerful we real estate agents were! This man then even had the nerve to slam down the phone in my ear after ripping a strip off me! Thank goodness I am not overly sensitive and could see the humor in this call, and realize that the man was probably just frustrated at the seemingly endless rise in prices in the spring market. However, it did give me an opportunity to examine what the expectations are for some people.

We, as agents, are given problems to solve every day with our clients. Our clients usually put a lot of trust in us to provide them with answers and solve their problems. It is a challenging and a very rewarding business to be in. The biggest problem is that occasionally our clients do not trust us. In this case, this client did not trust my judgement about pricing on a home (without even viewing the property) and our communication broke down. The irony of this story is, that the home was reduced in price by \$10,000 within days of him calling me, putting the home, even under his bottom line of purchase price! This is the nightmare that reoccurs with real estate agents. This man has now lost a very lovely home, in a town that he wanted to live in, and well within his price range, all because he didn't trust his agent to have good judgement. He will probably go out now and vent his frustrations on another poor unsuspecting agent, and I can only hope that he or she is ready for an onslaught of verbal abuse. Such is the diary of a real estate agent - I hope you are smiling - and if you are buying in this market - have faith in your agent.

### Homes Sold Creatively

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Bank of Montreal	10%	10%	11%	10%	11	11%	11%	11%	12	
Canada Trust		10%		10%	11	11%	11%	11%		12%
C.I.B.C.	10%	10%	11%	10%	11	11%	11%	11%		
T.D. Bank	10%		10%	11%	10%	11	11%	11%		
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