

Businesses prepared for last-minute rush

By **FANNIE SUNSHINE**
The Champion

With Christmas just around the corner, local retail businesses are gearing up for the inevitable last-minute rush of shoppers.

"It's been pretty steady for the past few weeks," said Graham Wing, manager of SportChek. "Weekends, especially Sundays, have been very busy."

The big sellers for the Christmas holiday have been winter jackets, t-shirts, hats and socks.

"We haven't sold many bikes and skis. Casual and athletic clothing makes up about 60 per cent of our business."

Mark Brancier, owner of Brancier Jeweller-Gemologist Inc., said the seven days before Christmas tend to be the busiest.

"Diamond and gold earrings are strong (sellers). New this year was the Italian charm bracelet, which we sold out of. The charms were very personal because you could create your own."

He said contrary to popular belief, sales of engagement rings aren't up more during Christmas than any other time of year.

"We sell a lot in December, but we also sell a lot in September and October. A lot of people think Christmas time is a popular time to get engaged, but girls today want their own special date to remember as that."

Mr. Brancier said he believes sales pick up overall when the weather reflects the norm for the time of year.

"The weather is a great influence. Snow makes people start to think of Christmas and hit the malls."

Frank Cicero, manager of Radio Shack, said he's expecting this week to be the big rush.

"Last week it started to pick up. There's always a rush of last minute shoppers."

Popular Christmas items this year included digital cameras, mp3 players, cordless phones, satellites and toys, he continued.

"Last year people were just starting to buy digital cameras. We knew they would take off this year because of the demand from the year before."

Electronic equipment has been the big seller so far this holiday season at Zellers.

"This time of year generally home entertainment electronics is popular and to a lesser extent home hardware appliances. Clothing is okay but sales aren't as brisk," said manager Matthew Dell.

PlayStation, XBOX, video games, DVD's, VHS movies, stereos and televisions have been flying off the shelves for the past few weeks, he continued.

"About two weeks ago was our first big surge. It was busier than usual on Saturday's and we expect (this) week to be busy with last minute shoppers finishing off their lists."

Mr. Dell said customers have also opted to purchase gift cards, which can be used at any Zellers, Home Outfitters or Bay stores.

"Some people aren't exactly sure what they want to buy someone so they purchase the gift card instead. It's been selling better this year than in years past."

Suzu Shier manager Shelley Niklas said sweaters have been a big seller as of late, as well as gift certificates.

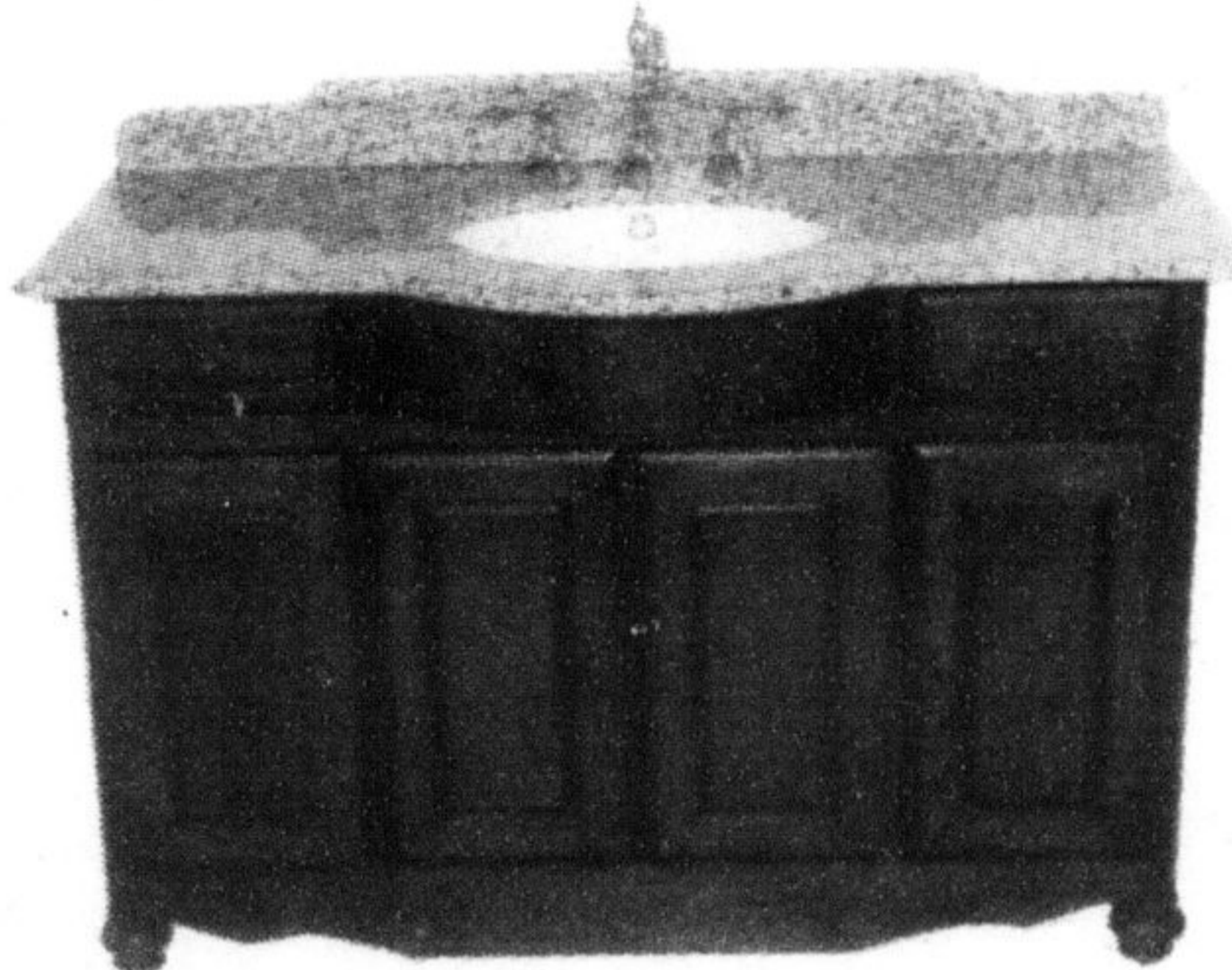
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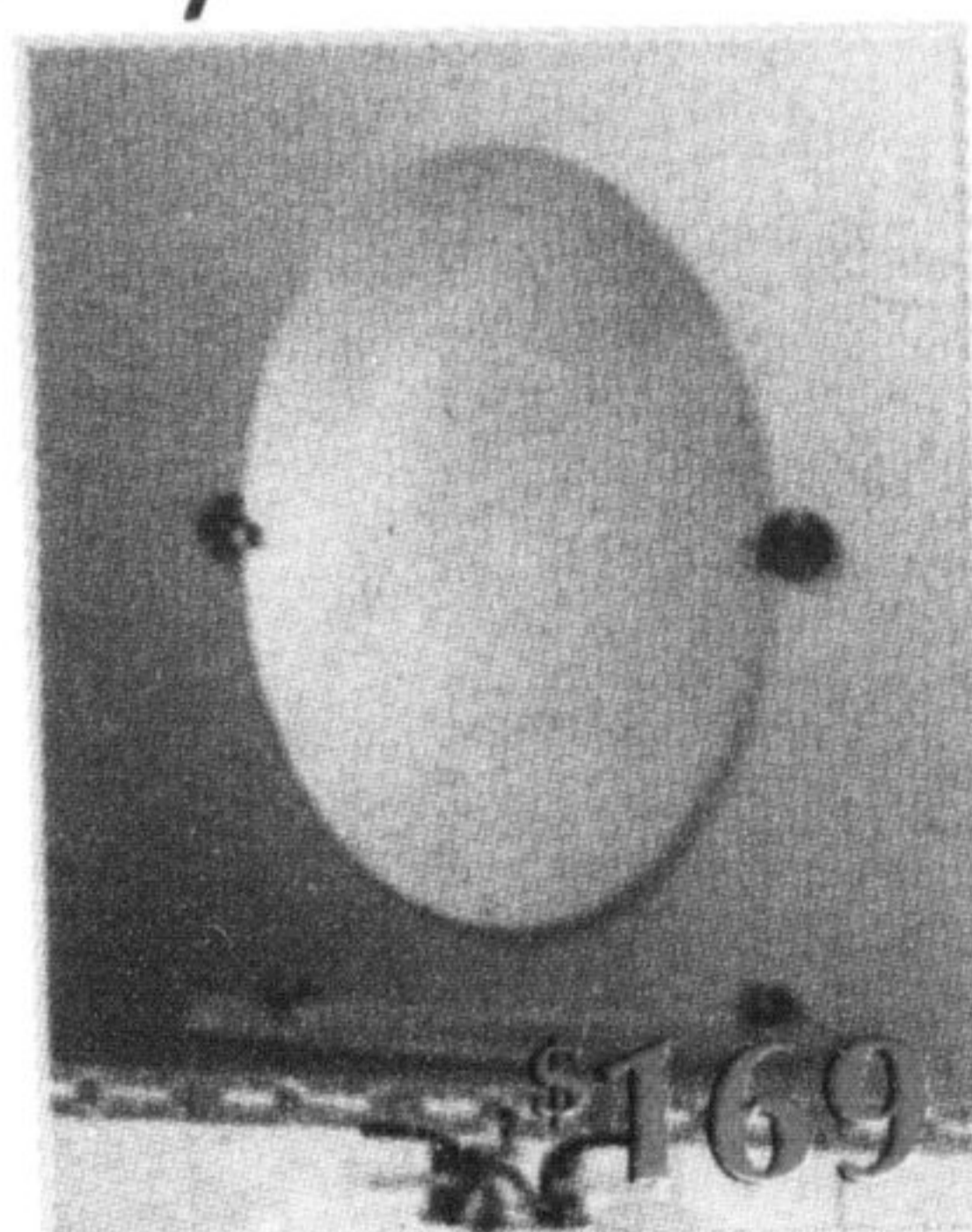
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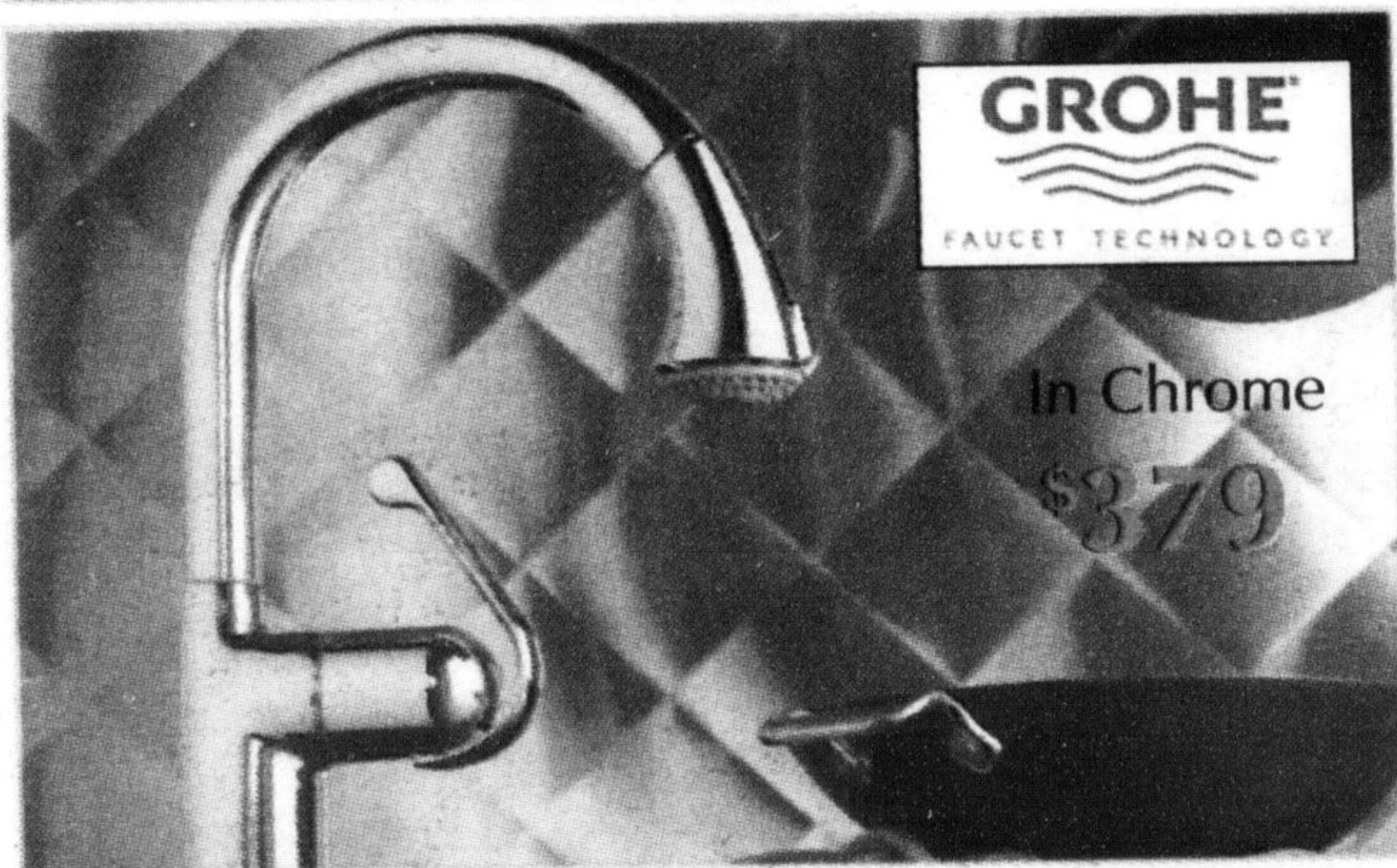
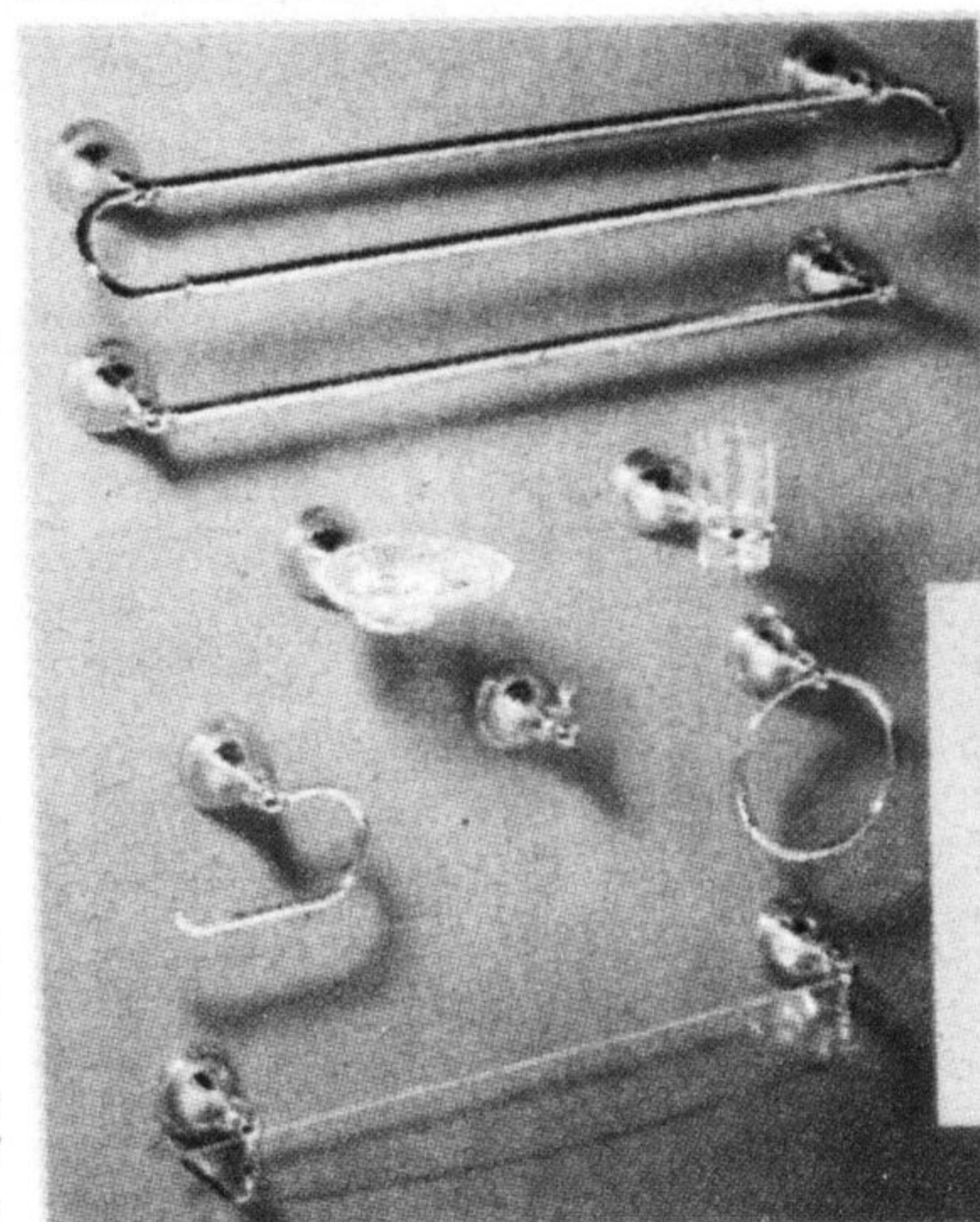
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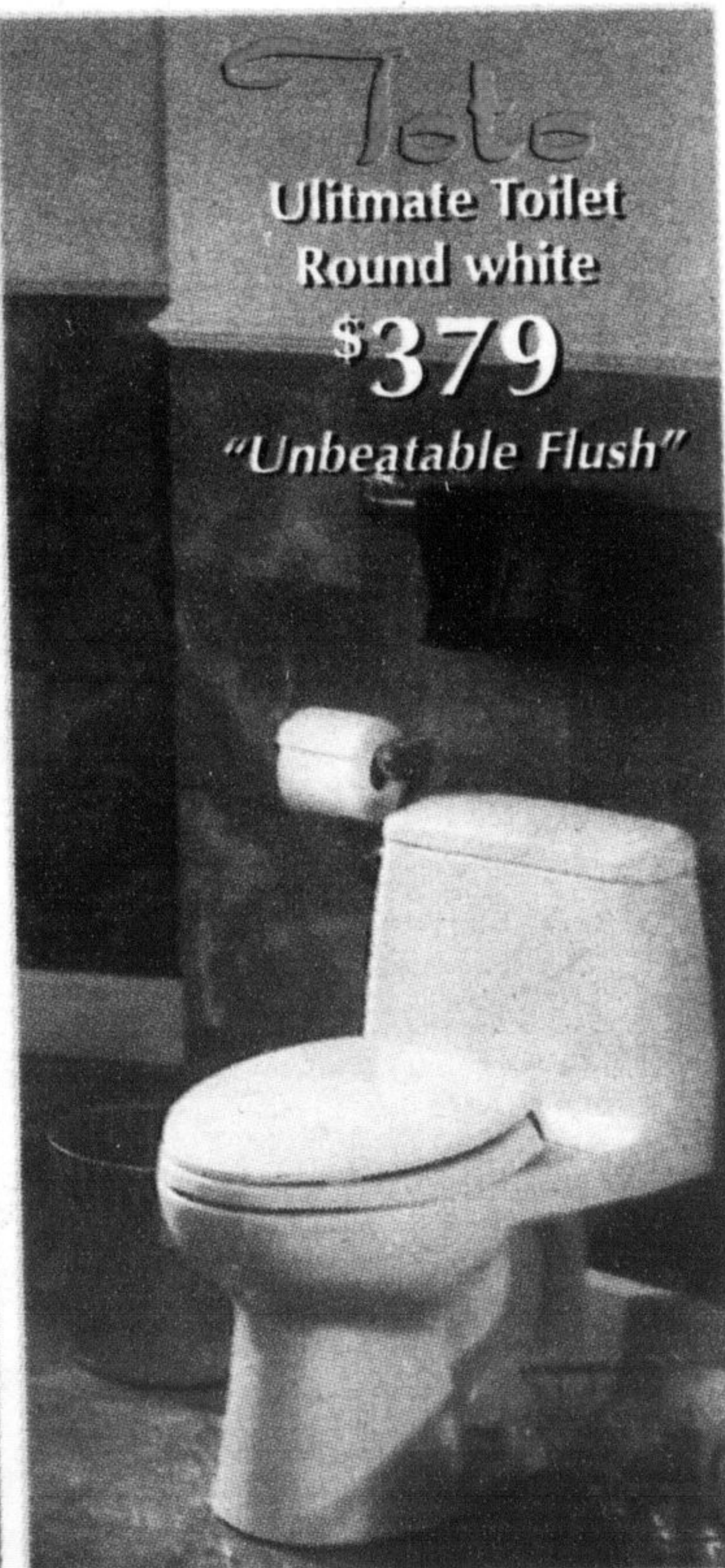


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