

The Wonder Post



UPLIFT OR UPKEEP?



The Wonderbra's Engineered Silhouette and the High Cost of the Male Gaze.

THE GEOMETRY OF CONSTRAINT

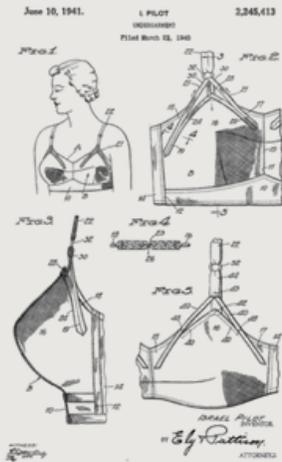
TECHNICAL ARCHITECTURE

The 54-Piece Skeleton: Louise Poirier's 1964 design utilized a complex architectural puzzle of fabric to force tissue into a specific "projected" shape.

Precision Tension: Innovation shifted from "holding" a body to "molding" it, effectively treating the female torso as a malleable engineering material.

The Architecture of "The Plunge": Engineering the center gore to be as low as possible prioritized deep-cut fashion trends over actual physiological breast support.

Material Standards: Non-stretch lace and heavy padding were used to create a "permanent" silhouette that refused to move naturally with the body.



"The first WonderBra was an American invention, created by Israel Pilot's D'Amour Foundations in New York during the late 1930s. He coined the name "Wonder-Bra" for a brassiere that featured his patented V-shaped diagonal slash shoulder strap attachment. This strap, combined with a bias-cut cup, provided women with a comfortable and expandable garment during World War II, when elastic materials were rationed for military use."

Alexis Walker, Associate Curator, Dress, Fashion and Textiles,
McCord Stewart Museum

THE CANDELLE COMPANY

The Montreal-based manufacturer of the WonderBra brand is little known, even within Canada.

"They worked with outside textile experts, chemists and a sculptor, who was commissioned to create breast-shaped metal moulds." (EncycloFashion, 2004)

You've never seen anything like it!

THE TIMELINE

1939-1955

Establishing the Brand

The company removes the hyphen to create the "Wonderbra" brand in Canada. During WWII, the bias-cut design becomes a functional innovation, providing comfort and expandability when elastic materials are rationed for the military.

1961

The Birth of the Model 1300

Under Nadler's direction, designer Louise Poirier creates the Wonderbra Model 1300. This plunge push-up bra features 54 separate design elements and becomes the "archetype" of the modern push-up bra, offering a dramatic new silhouette.

Late 1960s

Market Adaptation

As the "bra-burning" feminist movement and the sexual revolution take hold, Larry Nadler uses focus groups to understand changing female identities. He learns women want "less bra," not "no bra," leading to lightweight innovations like the "Wonderbare" line.

Early 1990s

The Global Resurgence

The "underwear as outerwear" trend and plunging necklines of the 90s bring the 1960s-style push-up back into high fashion. Sara Lee (which acquired Canadelle) takes the brand global, reclaiming the UK license from Gossard in 1994.



1939

The Strategic Pivot

Moe Nadler founds the Canadian Lady Corset Company in Montreal. Believing the brassiere market offers more stability than women's outer garments, he licenses the "Wonder-Bra" trademark and a patented "diagonal slash" strap from American inventor Israel Pilot.

1950s

The European Influence

Moe Nadler begins traveling to Europe to find new styles. He discovers the pigeonnant (pigeon-breasted) half-push-up style, which inspires a shift from purely functional garments to those focused on "uplift" and silhouette.

1964-1968

Expanding the Reach

The company begins licensing the Model 1300 internationally, including to Gossard in the UK. In 1968, the company officially changes its name to Canadelle Inc. to reflect its evolving identity beyond a traditional corset maker.

1974

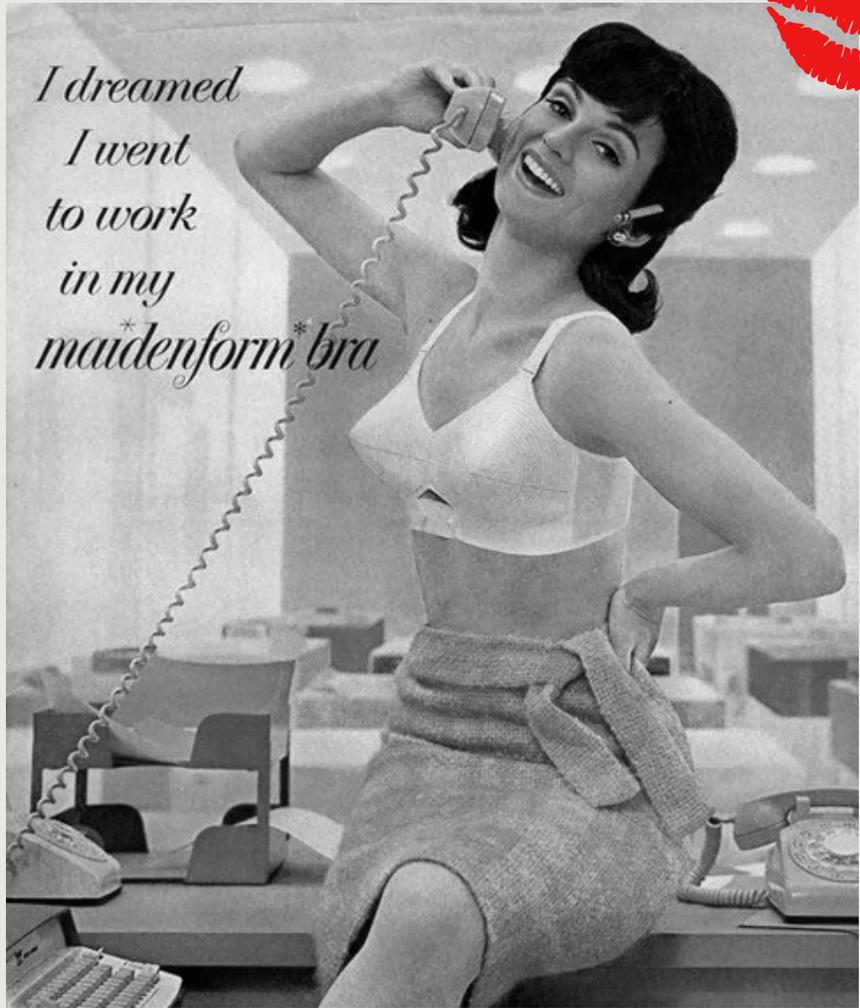
The "Dici" Youth Sub-Brand

Recognizing that younger women associate the Wonderbra name with an older generation, Canadelle launches Dici. Using new hot-fabric molding technology, they create seamless bras sold in iconic dice-shaped boxes to appeal to a younger, freedom-seeking demographic.

1994

The "Hello Boys" Phenomenon

The launch of the "Hello Boys" advertising campaign featuring Eva Herzigová turns the Wonderbra into a global cultural icon. The innovation completes its diffusion, moving from a functional "problem-solving" tool to a symbolic "beauty enhancer" and vital fashion accessory.



THE MARKETING OF OBJECTIFICATION



POLITICAL & ECONOMIC

How the brand sold "confidence" while actually selling "stare-ability."

The "Hello Boys" Controversy: The 1994 billboard campaign is cited as a peak historical moment of public sexualization of women for corporate profit.

Traffic as a Metric: The brand famously used the distraction of male drivers (and subsequent car crashes) as a "success metric" for their campaign's impact.

Cleavage as Commodity: Intellectual property and patent battles over the "push-up" design turned a biological feature into a proprietary, taxable marketplace.

“The first bare bra to fit.
Really fit.”

- Wonderbra Fall 1965

THE Cultural Legacy SILHOUETTE TRAP!



The Engineered Norm: The Wonderbra helped establish an "unnatural" shape as the baseline requirement for being considered "well-dressed."

False Empowerment: The map deconstructs the 90s narrative that being hyper-visible to the male gaze constituted a form of feminine power.

Normalization of "Fixing": This innovation paved the way for more invasive body "engineering," such as cosmetic surgery, by framing the natural body as something to be "fixed."



Long Story Short

The Wonderbra stands as a masterclass in the "domestication" of a radical innovation, yet its legacy remains a complex intersection of genuine technical liberation and the commodification of the female form.

On one hand, the Wonderbra's diffusion represents a triumph of user-centric design. By evolving from the restrictive "diagonal slash" of the 1930s to the 54-piece engineering marvel of the Model 1300, the brand solved a functional problem: providing structural support without the orthopedic aesthetic of traditional corsetry. Its ability to survive the "bra-burning" sentiment of the 1960s by pivoting to the lightweight "Dici" line proves that its success was rooted in a nuanced understanding of women's shifting desire for bodily autonomy, offering "less bra" rather than "no bra."

However, a more critical lens reveals that this "innovation" was equally a masterpiece of psychological marketing that narrowed the definition of the ideal silhouette. The shift from the functional comfort of the wartime era to the pigeonnant (plunging) aesthetic of the 1990s reflects a move toward "underwear as outerwear." While the brand marketed this as empowerment, it simultaneously solidified a specific, high-maintenance standard of beauty. The "Hello Boys" campaign of 1994 serves as the ultimate paradox: it achieved global saturation by reclaiming the male gaze as a tool for female confidence, effectively turning a private garment into a public performance.

Ultimately, the Wonderbra's diffusion is the story of an innovation that succeeded by masquerading as a revolution. It gave women a new tool for self-expression, but it did so by ensuring that their "freedom" remained firmly encased in a highly engineered, commercially curated shape.

Some Fun Facts About Bras!

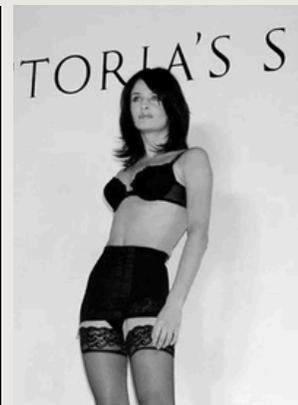
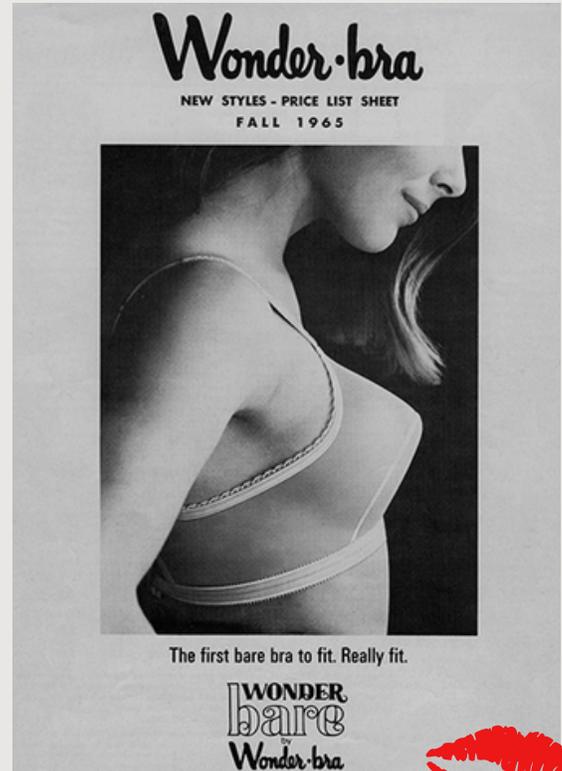
- The original Wonderbra patent featured a "diagonal slash" at the base of the straps. While designed for comfort, it became a literal lifesaver during World War II. Because the design relied on the physics of the cut rather than the fabric's elasticity, the brand flourished when rubber and elastic were rationed for military use.
- One of the most persistent myths in feminist history is the "bra-burning" at the 1968 Miss America protest. In reality, no bras were actually burned. Protesters threw "instruments of female torture" (bras, girdles, and false eyelashes) into a "Freedom Trash Can." They planned to burn the contents, but the boardwalk authorities wouldn't grant a fire permit!
- In the late 1960s, the bra industry panicked as the women's liberation movement grew. However, Wonderbra's CEO, Larry Nadler, used early focus groups to discover a nuanced truth: women weren't protesting the bra itself, but the constriction of 1950s shapes.
- The iconic Model 1300 (the 1960s push-up that changed everything) wasn't just a piece of clothing; it was a feat of micro-engineering. It consisted of 54 separate elements, including a three-part cup, precision-angled underwires, and specific padding placements. This complexity is why it remains the "gold standard" blueprint for almost every push-up bra sold today.



SHE SAID, HE SAID...

Let's see how well you understood today's paper with a quiz!

	TRUE	FALSE
The "Wonder-Bra" name was originally a Canadian invention from the 1930s.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The "diagonal slash" design was popular during WWII because it used less elastic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The famous Model 1300 push-up bra is made of over 50 distinct design elements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hundreds of bras were publicly burned during the 1968 Miss America protest.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The "Dici" brand was created specifically to market to older, traditional women.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Louise Poirier is the mind behind the 1961 "archetype" push-up bra.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the 1960s, market research showed women wanted to stop wearing bras entirely.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The "Hello Boys" ad campaign was once blamed for causing car accidents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Wonderbra was the first garment to ever use "hot-fabric molding."	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Wonderbra's global success in the 90s was tied to the "underwear as outerwear" trend.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



FREE THE NIPS (FROM THE MALE GAZE)!

True or False Cheat Sheet

1. False (It was an American trademark licensed by a Montreal firm.)
2. True (The cut provided stretch when rubber was rationed for the war.)
3. True (It contains exactly 54 separate components.)
4. False (They were thrown in a "Freedom Trash Can," but never lit on fire.)
5. False (It was a "youth" brand designed to feel modern and seamless.)
6. True (She engineered the Model 1300 under Moe Nadler.)
7. False (Research showed they wanted "less bra," not "no bra.")
8. True (The billboards were considered a "distraction" to drivers.)
9. True (This tech allowed for the seamless look of the 1970s.)
10. True (High fashion trends made the push-up silhouette a public statement.)

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"Market Adaptation and the 'Dici' Youth Sub-Brand." Historical record of hot-fabric molding technology and 1974 market expansion..