



Petticoats, lingerie great undercover gifts

THERE'S LIABLE to be a bigger flurry of romantic gift hunters in lingerie than ever this Christmas, as petticoats whirl in to give traditional half slips a fluffy, lighthearted lift.

Frill seekers will find petticoats full-skirted and ruffy, and a perfect complement to princess lines, A-lines and the long, flowing skirts making waves in fashion this year.

At Christian Dior Lingerie, where petticoats are natural descendants of Dior's ballerina silhouette of the late 1940s and early 1950s, designer Carole Hochman is delighted with the return of crisp crinolines and full half slips.

"WHAT COULD BE more feminine and provocative than a tiny waist and slim bodice that accents the bust and hipline?" she said. "The fullness of the petticoat emphasizes that line, but in the gentlest possible manner. It's ladylike and teasing, all at the same time."

Petticoat-perfect looks run the design spectrum this year. French coutu-

rier Christian Lacroix, who designs for Patou, showed full evening skirts rustling with petticoats beneath, and virtually every major designer in America showed fuller skirts that call for fuller slips, from Geoffrey Beene with his extravagant satin bell skirts to Ralph Lauren's classic English gentry skirts with long, flowing lines.

Feathery, see-through laces look fresh in the new petticoats. They're taking their place alongside the warm, oatmeal muslins of the safari looks that continue strong this year in such collections as Outback Red and Liz Claiborne.

Unlike the laces, which are a secret pleasure, the muslins are meant to be seen as often as possible, peeking from under skirt hems, seen the full length of a loosened button-front skirt or on their own as a separate skirt.

There is in fact a long history of petticoats designed to be seen. Petticoats became well-established in the Elizabethan period, when the length, width and volume of skirts required petticoats for support.

FOR THE MAJORITY of women, the slips were simple and hidden, but for women of wealth, petticoats were sewn more grandly, with rich fabrics and ornamental treatments made for show.

In the 17th century, skirts were deeply slit or looped up to show petticoats of luxurious silks and taffetas. And when hoops came along in the 18th century, women developed a flirtatious technique of tilting the hoop to allow a small peek of lacy petticoats beneath.

In this century, nothing yet has quite equaled the impact of Dior's petticoated New Look of 1947, following the straight short skirts and severe looks of the war years.

An editor from Vogue described the palpable excitement of the showing: "We were witness to a revolution in fashion. Pleats whirled, silks rustled, petticoats peeped and the audience became ecstatic."

It's great to have the petticoats back again, but feminine lingerie is a

perennial favorite for Christmas gift-giving. A nationwide survey of women showed lingerie is the second most popular gift a woman hopes to receive from her husband or boyfriend, according to Allied Fibers.

SENSUOUS LINGERIE is more than underwear. Romantic nightgowns are the most purchased or received pieces of lingerie in women's wardrobes.

However, feminine undies — such as teddies, camisoles and tap pants — are also enjoying a resurgence as more and more women choose to wear these "special occasion" items everyday.

Like petticoats multipurpose garments with romantic flair, like pants sets and jumpsuits that double as sleep or loungewear, are also popular this year for gift-giving. In fact, more than 80 percent of the women in the survey felt that feminine lingerie in all forms is an asset to the entire wardrobe and art of the lifestyle of the well-dressed woman.

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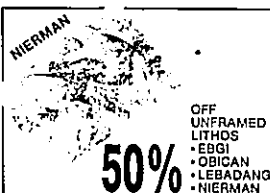
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