

WHAT I ATE FOR LUNCH

Delux is still divine in the daytime. Just leave room for dessert, L2



MAN OF THE CLOTH

Roland Mouret's new collection highlights best of the designer's skill, L4

FAST FASHION



KEITH BEATY/TORONTO STAR

Sisters Karen and Angela Samuels own Voluptuous, a chain of Toronto stores for plus-size women.

GROOMING

Has the razor blade lost its edge?

As most men embrace the bedraggled rock star look, Gillette and Schick sharpen their game

DAVID GRAHAM
LIVING REPORTER

The razor blade, it seems, can't catch a break.

As men recoil from the daily grind of shaving in favour of beards and stubble, it stands to reason that razor blade sales are falling.

The poor economy has out-of-work men sporting what's known as the "unemployment beard." And although the financial outlook seems brighter, the razor's future looks, well, dull — for various of reasons.

A lot of men have a love-hate relationship with their razor

"The population of teen boys (aged 12 to 17) will be stagnant from 2009 to 2014," according to a study by U.S.-based trend forecaster Mintel, "which may result in a continued slowing of growth in sales of toiletries to males."

That's not the only bit of trivia that bodes poorly for the razor industry: Don't forget the enormous number of baby boomers about to retire, leaving their shiny Bay St. offices so they can languish in hairy splendour in cottage country.

Add to that the fact that, although most men will continue to shave as they age, they may shave less often because "hormonal changes in older men create slower hair growth, resulting in less-frequent shaving," the Mintel study notes.

Finally, while office culture dictates a clean shave as the only option for men, Hollywood and the sports and music industries provide ordinary men with sexy, powerful images that make untended facial hair a real possibility. See: David Beckham's scruff, Conan O'Brien's burly beard and the on-off relationship most rock stars have with shaving.

Andrea Evans of Elite Model Management in Toronto estimates 75 per cent of clients who book men ask for the scruffy look.

"It's called dirty chic — a rebellion against the metrosexual," Evans explains. "A lot of men took heat for being too groomed." Now they are celebrating their manliness with furry faces.

RAZORS continued on L5

Voluptuous dolls

Sisters bring fast-fashion trends to curvy girls, fearlessly challenging style wisdom along the way

DERICK CHETTY
FASHION REPORTER

Sexy Bolder You. These three words mean big business for Angela and Karen Samuels.

The words are displayed prominently in Voluptuous, a chain of stores in Toronto that sells trendy fashions in sizes 12 to 20 and is owned and operated by the sisters.

But what sets the four Voluptuous stores apart from other purveyors of plus-size apparel is their unabashed, enthusiastic embrace of fast fashion trends cut for the curvy girl.

Style pundits have always issued a litany of fashion don'ts for larger women:

Avoid loud prints; they'll only make you look bigger, they're told. But at Voluptuous, the florals are big, bright and bold.

Skinny jeans are only for skinny girls.

Yet here, you'll find racks of them, and even jeggings, cut for curvy thighs.

A one-piece jumpsuit should only be worn by the tall and lean.

FASHION continued on L6



Denim jumpsuit, left, \$85. Tunic dress, right, \$57.50.

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10 years in, Hollywood calls

FASHION from L1

In this trend-crazed emporium, the one-piece comes in a variety of colours, including purple satin.

The Jamaican-born Samuels sisters started the company 10 years ago with a single store. Today, they compare their four locations (in Dufferin Mall, Scarborough Town Centre, Square One and Vaughan Mills) to super-trendy favourites like Costa Blanca: the clothes are cheap and cheerful, but curvaceous. "Traditionally, plus-size was not trendy," says Angela, 40, who is a statuesque size 14 and a former plus-size model. "But we want girls in high school to look like their peers. We want women just entering the work force to look like their co-workers. We want women who want to go to clubs to look like the other girls at the clubs."

"I always felt that being plus-size, you're going to stand out anyway. So if you're going to be seen, I want you to be seen in a nice light."

Her sister Karen, 37, says, "We're just like the skinny girls — we come in pear shapes, hourglass shapes, top heavy or bottom heavy. That's why we like to use the word voluptuous rather than plus-size. This is a woman who is young, vibrant. She is ready to work, ready to party. She is exactly the same."

It's a sentiment shared by one of their best customers, Sheena Snively of *MTV Live*.

"I can be a size 20 and wear sexy clothes just as well as someone who is a size 2, 4 or 6. I can even rock it better," she declares.

The Samuels sisters are trying to dispel the notion that plus-size girls can't or shouldn't wear trends.

"I feel it's working because the fashion industry is now noticing the curvy woman," says Karen.

The fashion world, which has come under much scrutiny in recent years for promoting

the ultra-thin body type, has begun to show signs that the scales are tipping the other way. Influential designers Miuccia Prada and Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton featured curvier models with ample bosoms and rounded hips in their runway shows for the fall 2010 season.

The edgy fashion glossy *V Magazine* dedicated a recent issue to plus-size models, and model Crystal Renn, a healthy size 12, graces the cover of the June 2010 issue of *Glamour* — in a bathing suit no less.

While it's commendable that popular culture is embracing varied body types, there are still hurdles to overcome — as Lane Bryant, the U.S. retailer of plus-size fashion recently learned.

Major networks refused to air one of the chain's commercials — featuring a buxom brunette in a red bra and panties — because it was too racy.

"It was nothing different from what one sees on the beach or on television shows like *90210*," Karen Samuels says of the commercial, which can be seen on YouTube. "Except on those shows it's a size 2 woman with size D implants, and

no one has a problem with that."

This is just one of the double standards the Samuels sisters have faced. One of their biggest struggles has been getting Voluptuous into established malls, notes Angela. "A lot think we are not their target market, that we don't belong there because what we do goes against what a traditional plus-sized store looks like."

Whether or not that's true, the sister act has tapped into a lucrative niche. Even in the tough economic climate of 2009, the company did over \$2 million in sales.

They plan to expand ("Our ultimate goal is to go to Yorkdale," says Angela) and are preparing to enter the biggest shopping arena: online sales. They hope to have an e-commerce site — voluptuousclothing.com — up and running by June.

"We have customers who come from Montreal and even Winnipeg to shop at our stores," says Karen. "This is the best way for people across Canada and North America to get a piece of us."

THE SAMUELS SISTERS did not come by this mini empire easily.

They're two of six children brought to Toronto from Jamaica by a single mother. She raised them in the tough Jamestown

neighbourhood in Rexdale.

Craving a better life, their mother gathered all six kids and moved them to Calgary during the booming oil years.

"That was one of the best things my mom did, moving us to Calgary," says Karen. "It was a wealthier city. We weren't, but our neighbours were. Right across the fence was these mansions, and Angela always dreamed of going to live across the fence. She always said, 'And you're coming with me to live across the fence.'"

Once the sisters finished high school, their mother moved them back to Toronto and moved, again, into a tough neighbourhood: Jane and Finch. "We knew that was not for us. We aspired to be something because we still wanted that big house," says Karen.

While Karen went to study legal office administration, Angela became a social worker.

Angela began to think of the freedom of owning her own business, while still helping others. "I didn't want to be behind the elephant always picking up the dump," she says. "I wanted to be in front of the elephant, leading and showing the way."

Angela remortgaged her house, and the sisters set

about opening the first Voluptuous store in a Toronto mall.

AS THEY PREPARE to expand their business, Hollywood has come calling for the Samuels sisters.

When Angela, a mother of two, was on a buying trip in Los Angeles in May, she received a call from television executives at ABC. The network wanted to discuss a reality show based on the sisters' lives and business.

The execs had seen Angela and Karen on an episode of *Party Mamas*, the Slice network reality show. The episode in question featured Karen's preparing for her daughter's sweet 16 birthday.

Now, a Toronto production company has shot a demo chronicling the lives of these two sisters. It's appropriately titled *Voluptuous*.

"Angela and Karen are such amazing characters and they are dynamic as sisters," says Jim Kiriakakis of Buck Productions. "The drive of this (show) would be about the sisters' struggle to sell their concept of dressing plus-size women in the same styles as those women seen in fashion magazines today."

No matter where television takes them, the Samuels sisters will not forget why they entered fashion.

"The sky is the limit for us now," says Angela. "We'll leverage all the opportunities presented to us to help push our message to the forefront — which is making the plus-sized woman sexy."



From left: Lace cocktail dress, \$69. Dusty rose strapless dress, \$75. Black dress, \$69. Black and white peasant top, \$49.99; dress pants, \$49.99.

Loyalty Can Be Costly

Shopping Around Still The Key To Saving On Car Insurance

How Much Is Your Loyalty Discount Really Worth?

If you're like most consumers, you worry that switching insurance companies means losing your "loyalty discount". The truth is that switching insurance companies may cause you to lose your loyalty discount (if you had one in the first place), but that doesn't necessarily mean you'll pay more for car insurance or that you can't save a bundle in the end. The fact is, some insurance companies may provide a small discount on your premium if you've been with them for a long time — but that small discount can quickly become irrelevant if another company has a rate for you that is significantly less than what you're currently paying. After all, what good is 5% off of an annual rate of \$1,500 (a \$75 savings) if you could pay \$1,100 (a \$400 savings) with another company?

How Much Do Rates Really Differ Across Companies?

The rates charged by different insurance companies to insure the same driver, with the same car, for the same coverage, can vary by hundreds and even thousands of dollars. And with so many insurance companies providing car insurance in Ontario, odds are you are not currently insured with the company that offers the best rate for your driving profile. This is where InsuranceHotline.com can help by providing an independent, unbiased rate comparison from over 30 top insurance companies to find you the lowest rate available for your profile. Even better, once your lowest rate is found, InsuranceHotline.com can connect you with a licensed insurance broker or agent to seal the deal. It's Fast, Safe and FREE.

What If My Current Insurance Company Finds Out I'm Shopping?

Sadly, the misguided fear of repercussions from their current insurer is what keeps many consumers from taking action and shopping around. The truth is that your insurance company has no way of knowing if you are shopping around for a better rate. In fact, even if they did know you were checking out your options, you cannot be penalized in any way for trying to find a better deal.

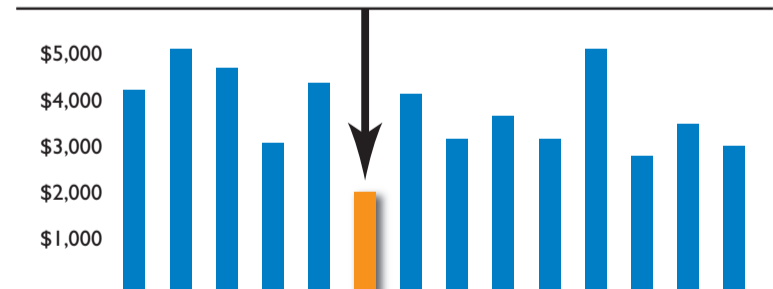
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