

WHAT • U • WEAR

by J. Ryckborst

Men dress like men, and women dress like women. Why?

Today's clothing primarily serves a social purpose. There is no essential reason which makes clothing necessary. No reason except to excite. When the two genders are readily distinguishable, sexual arousal is easier and more frequent.

Sexual differentiation in clothing has been so universal that it is taken for granted. Nevertheless, fashion has tended to the androgynous in recent years. We see shorter hair on both women and men, skirts and colorful shirts for men, work jeans for women, and so on.

Acceptance of androgyny (both sexes looking alike) was a reflection of a more liberal society.

But this raised problems. When the two

sexes start dressing alike it becomes much easier to 'make mistakes'. Initially androgyny was treated with disgust. Remember when you found out that Boy George was (gulp) a boy? When the costume of one gender starts looking like the other's, people feel uncomfortable. This is mainly a question of sexual orientation according to Flugel - the guy who wrote the book on clothing psychology.

Flugel ascribes to Kinsey's theory that "we are all potentially bisexual." Kinsey claims all people can be placed on a continuum somewhere between homo- and heterosexuality. But according to Flugel the fear of regression to a bisexual stage is always present.

The easiest way to guard against this is by exaggerating sexual differences through clothing. People want women to look like women, and men to look like men. In toler-

ant times the clothing of the two sexes may show a greater similarity than in a more conservative era. Androgyny is now on the decline. This may be reflecting a change in society's sexual politics.

The next wave in fashion may well stress the masculine and feminine. Women are already looking curvier in knits; there is an emphasis on leg and racy hosiery. Men are continuing to lift weights in pursuit of masculine muscle.

Next for women: 1950's pointed bras, hips, hourglass figures and longer hair. For men: who knows? Perhaps it will be men who grow their hair while women keep theirs short.

Whatever one gender does to its appearance will be the opposite of what the other wears. People want to be sure about what arouses them. When it comes to clothing, sexual differentiation is on the rise.



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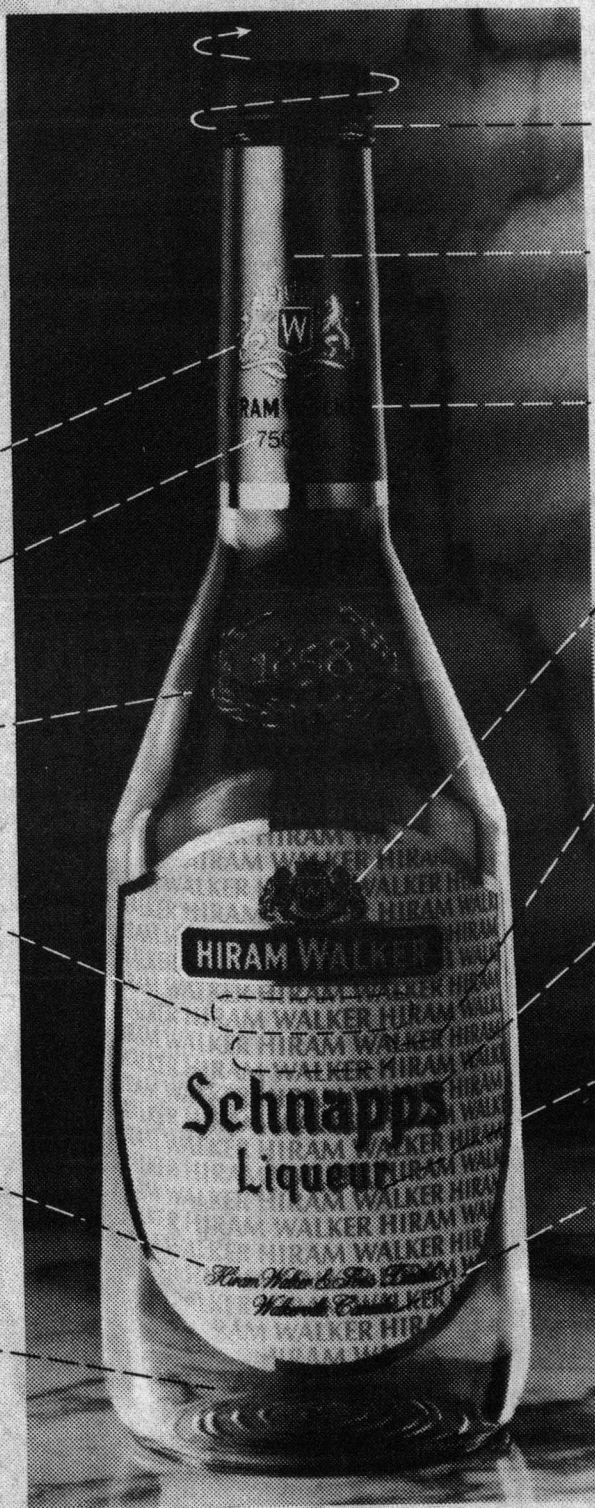
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