

The bra whisperers

Making women feel better about themselves, one undergarment at a time

by Elizabeth Licata

SISTERS EMILY CONSTANTINE Doren and Holly Constantine Ortman know a secret we're all reluctant to acknowledge. Most women are wearing the wrong bra. The wrong size, the wrong style. "Properly fitting undergarments are a gamechanger," asserts Ortman. "When bras and panties fit well, they can make the rest of your wardrobe look fantastic. Conversely, a lousy bra can make a beautiful dress look ill-fitting."

Doren and Ortman cofounded the Allentown lingerie and sleepwear boutique Lace and Day in 2015. Both left serious careers; Ortman had worked as an urban planner at Empire State Development and Doren was an environmental consultant who had worked on research ships in Antarctica. In between consulting jobs, however, Doren spent a few years working at Sol, a internationally famous lingerie shop in Denver, and the experience was a life changer. When she moved back to Buffalo, after a stint at Ecology and Environment, she and Ortman joined forces and realized a dream that, by this time, both shared. They quit their jobs and became lingerie entrepreneurs.

The Lace and Day shopping experience is totally unlike the usual department store array of rack after rack with hundreds of bras. A carefully curated

selection of bras in all sizes (cups A-I) is kept upstairs, in the elegant fitting area of the Franklin Street storefront. This is where the magic happens, and it's not done with measuring tape. Doren and Ortman chat with customers first, to get a sense of their lifestyles and preferences. Then they assess the fit of the bra a customer walks in wearing and start the fitting process. If necessary, there's a seamstress on staff and the two experts are ready to deal with post-surgery issues, nursing moms, or other special situations.

It's an up-close and personal experience; as the website says: "Are we going to see your boobs? Yep. That's going to happen."

Doren and Ortman pride themselves on carrying brands that can't be found anywhere else, most from France and Belgium, and assure their customers that these beautiful, delicate confections have hidden structural powers. Their "calling card" bra is from Marie Jo, known for daisy-covered straps; other brands include Empreinte, Prima Donna, and Lise Charmel. These are fit-focused brands, but they're also gorgeous. As Ortman emphatically states: "You don't have to wear a boring bra." That's welcome news for women who have spent their lives in utilitarian—and probably ill-fitting—undergarments.

LACE AND DAY
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Emily Doren of Lace and Day works with a customer.