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NEWS STORY

# 'Everyone needs a good spanking now and then'

## Designer Tom Ford heads down a slippery fashion slope with the Gucci Spanker

**Dorothy Woodend**  
Special to the Sun

Saturday, September 20, 2003

FETISHES I There are a few universal truths in the world - - you can never step in the same river twice, bagels need cream cheese, sex sells.

One of the most consistently successful salesmen is that naughty monkey Tom Ford, who has variously brought us Sophie Dahl's naked writhing for Opium, seven inches of male nudity for M7 cologne, and monogram-trimmed Gucci pubic hair.

Now you can slap down your money and pull down your pants for Tommy boy's latest objet du scandal, the Gucci Spanker.

"I think everyone needs a good spanking now and then," said Ford in a recent article. "There are quite a few people I'd like to spank."

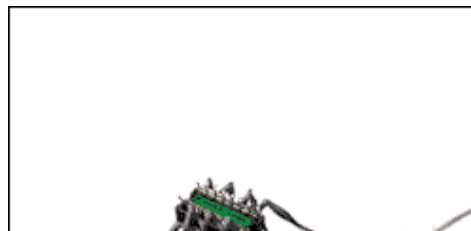
Ever since a picture of the spanker appeared in Esquire, Gucci has been inundated with calls seeking information on the not-yet-available



CREDIT: Stefano Rellandini

'There are quite a few people I'd like to spank,' Tom Ford says.

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leather strap (it's due to arrive in all major Gucci stores in early September but may sell out before it even hits shop floors.) The spanker retails for about \$195 in calfskin, but for the more decadent it also comes in crocodile. Ford, who uses porn like the rest of us use warm milk, is usually at the cutting edge of fashion, but this time he is simply at the tip of one big kinky iceberg.



The Gucci Spanker is only the latest in a flood of designer sex toys taking upmarket stores by storm. Liberty, a traditional British department store, recently raised eyebrows by launching a designer vibrator called "The Bone" created by OBE recipient Tom Dixon (there's currently a six month wait list to buy one). In Paris, Sonia Rykiel Woman features a line of erotic goodies for those who want to be bad, as does London's Coco de Mer, a very upscale sex store, launched by Sam Roddick (daughter of the Body Shop's Anita). Even Victoria's Secret is flogging leather and chains, with a tough new collection called Rock Angel that features zippered leather thongs, chain-mail minis and studded bras and tank tops, ranging in price from \$50 to \$1,200. Paging Betty Page.

Fashion's dalliance with elements of S&M chic has been around a very long while. Helmut Newton, whose sadomasochistic shots of models wearing saddles dominated the bondage flavoured fashion shots of the early 1980s, has been joined by blond überphotog Ellen von Unwerth and her new book *Revenge* (Twin Palms 2003). Chock full of saucy misses in frothy knickers getting their sweet cheeks scored with the lash, this coffee-table book references classics of kink like *The Story of O* or *120 Days of Sodom*. The usual set pieces and props are all there -- a gaggle of easily corrupted innocents, a wicked Baroness, black garters, riding crops and an age-old story of crime and punishment.

The French have *The Marquis de Sade*, the Germans have their polymorphous perversity, but the English are the leaders in spanking. The Victorians were the first purveyors of spanking chic, and the underground magazine *The Pearl* is still pretty hot stuff, some 120 years after it first appeared on the streets of London. Even in this seen-everything done-everything age, the stories it contains bring a blush to the cheeks, both sets. *The Pearl* contained serialized novels, short stories, poems, jokes, and gossip with a heavy interest in flagellation, as well as homosexuality and bisexuality. References to spanking have always been ubiquitous in English pornography and speak to an abiding national fascination with it. Corporal punishment was an integral part of English culture for hundreds of years, more or less institutionalized in schools, the military and the penal system. Boarding school boys who were caned in class grew up to become upper-class male audience interested in having a spank.

Eve Lom of Shadow Lane, an American producer of spanking erotica, has seen spanking suffer in the age of political correctness, but still predicts a rosy future. "Spanking images have permeated virtually every form of media throughout most of the 20th Century with luscious examples too numerous to list."

Although mainstream films like *Secretary*, which featured a lot of James Spader spanking Maggie Gyllenhaal, put the practice back into the spotlight, many purists felt conflicted about the attention.

"It squicked some of us to find our dearest fetish associated with self mutilation and disturbingly emotional head games," says Lom. She has

no such reservations, however, about the Gucci campaign which features a gorgeous male model slapping a girl in a ribbon mini-dress.

"The Gucci ad represents a return to the pure idealization of spanking romance. This is an image that can speak to every type of enthusiast. The positioning is excellent, the attitude correct, the principals adorable and the aura glamorous. This is the type of image that a girl into spanking will paste in her scrap book and write stories about. It is an inspiration and a delight. We view such visual bounty as manna from heaven, to be savoured and shared. Fetish is sexy and sex sells products. Not to exploit fetish would be foolish."

Cass King, retail manager of Womyn's Ware in Vancouver, is curious about the Gucci Spanker, but would like to reserve judgement until she sees the real item. "I imagine getting spanked with crocodile must be a like a cheese grater," she says. The entry of designers such as Ford into the sexual realm she greets with a somewhat jaundiced eye. "Sex is used to sell everything from toothpaste to cars, but we're the opposite: we're selling celebratory sex, not exploitation."


The dearth of good design is also a problem when it comes to sexual accessories. "The Gucci Spanker might be great for someone to wear on their belt at a party, but we're more concerned with a customer who wants to buy it and use it for a good hard session, and not have it fall apart," King says. "Anything we bring into the store, we vet its suitability first. We're the Ralph Nader of sex toys."

Many spanking and bondage fans recount their first kinky experience happening quite by accident, with the victorious "cowgirl" tying the struggling "Indian" boy to the porch with her skipping rope. The Gucci Spanker is a long way from the plastic skipping rope, but the thrill remains the same. While these new designer sex toys are clearly for grownups, with a degree of sophistication and a price tag to match, they're also for those interested in a little playtime.

Dorothy Woodend last wrote for Mix on talk-radio host Tom Leykis.

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