

Trying New Magazines on for Size

Of all the fashion "issues" we deal with here at Fashion Police headquarters, none is so perplexing, so fraught with anxiety and frustration as size—as in, "I'm large and I can't find my ..." or, "I'm tall and no one has my ..." or, "I'm short, but even the petite clothes don't come in my ..."

Although the last decade has seen more designers and manufacturers offering high-quality, fashionable clothes for women who aren't 5 feet, 10 inches and size 6, many consumers don't know where to find them or aren't even aware this revolution exists.

So we're happy to report that for you gals, some of your size needs are being addressed. Plus sizes now have Grace magazine, debuting its summer issue Tuesday, which has the tag line: "Living Life to Its Fullest." San Diego-based Petite magazine also makes its debut next week as a monthly, with a mandate to be "the hip, trendy, glamorous, sophisticated, stylish magazine for petite women everywhere," says its editor in chief.

You'd think in this everyone-is-beautiful-in-her-own-way culture in the year 2002, we might not need separate magazines for women over size 12 and women under 5 feet, 4 inches. But since the major fashion magazines continue to pay scant attention to these demographics, others have sprung up to fill in the gaps.

"There's nothing worse than picking up a magazine and not

seeing yourself in it," said Ceslie J. Armstrong, founder and editor in chief of New York-based Grace magazine, which starts this summer as a quarterly, moving to bimonthly in January 2003. "I'm a size 16 and even being a fashionista insider, to flip through the pages of a magazine and not see anything I can buy is completely depressing." Armstrong was editor of Mode magazine, the glossy publication for large sizes that abruptly shut down last October. When it did, she said, such a hue and cry ensued (including readers and advertisers calling her at home) that another periodical addressing plus sizes had to be born.

Both Grace and Petite strive to be lifestyle magazines in addition to offering fashion. Petite's first issue, with actress Susan Lucci on the cover, has stories on successful petite professionals, fitness advice from Tamilee Webb, petite sports figures, and bridal gown designs. Grace's debut issue includes features on Pilates, actor Vin Diesel, travel, food, plus first-person columns on issues surrounding size (there's one from skinny-turned-curve model Carré Otis). One of Armstrong's mandates is to use "real people" models as much as possible (the current Grace cover girl is an open-heart surgery nurse, Krissy Woodard) and give readers copious information on fashion resources.

"We're not advocating being re-

ally big and unhealthy," Armstrong said. "We want women to be happy and healthy and fit in the skin they're in. If you're not happy being a large size, maybe you need to get into a fitness regime. There's a way to strike a balance in life."

Though petite women haven't hit the same walls of discrimination that large women have, Petite magazine's Editor in Chief Deborah Tumlinson says that at 5 foot 2, she's encountered some unpleasant stereotyping, including such brilliant comments as, "God, you're short!" and the ever-popular "Dynamite comes in small packages!"

She hopes that by addressing health, fitness, nutrition and beauty issues as well as helping women find clothes that fit and flatter them, the magazine will empower readers who are diminutive, be they skinny, a plus-size petite, teenagers or on the mature side. "It's not so much about size as it is about attitude," she said.

Tumlinson, a former petite model, motivational speaker and military police officer in the Navy, hopes to open dialogues between readers and designers to let the latter know what their customers want: "In our designer showcase we'll let the designers tell the readers everything they want them to know, from who's on their staff to where their clothes are available. But to be in the magazine they have to agree to lis-

ten to what our readers have to say, what their problems are. Basically what we're doing is a marriage."

We asked both editors if they thought there would ever come a day when magazines such as Grace and Petite won't have to exist, a day when major mainstream fashion publications feature women of all shapes and sizes, all ethnicities, all ages. Both said an emphatic "yes."

"I absolutely think that will happen," said Armstrong, adding, "though not in the near future. But there are more social changes happening. I'm from Texas, and we have a saying down here: 'It's a long row to hoe.' There's a lot of great women who are evangelists and advocates for this. There are changes in television and film and more ad campaigns featuring real women. And with the retail numbers being where they are, I think it's a winning formula."

We won't hold our breath waiting for the first inclusive fashion magazine, for fear of passing out. But we do applaud these two efforts, especially as they're being launched during precarious economic times. We wish them both success.

For more information on these publications, visit www.gracestyle.com, and www.petitemagazine.com.

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