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What's Sexier than Luxe Lingerie? Micro-Finance



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The sexiest thing in high fashion lingerie is... wait for it... micro-finance.

Last night at Cipriani on 42nd street, a society crowd in Dolce & Gabbana gowns and crisp tuxes took in LingerieNY, a benefit that included dinner, cocktails and barely-dressed models. The crowd, which included "A Modern Family's" Sofia Vergara, Russell Simmons and those perennial party fixtures, the NYC-edition Housewives, came for the lace and champagne but also for a dash of do-gooder spirit.

Deepak Chopra addressed the crowd via a taped video message, urging them in his trademark optimism, that if they want to change the world, they can. "Empower women on a G-string rather than a shoe string," he quipped, getting the biggest laugh of the night. It would sound glib, but organizers gambled that a sexy attention-grabbing lingerie show was just the way to entice a moneyed audience into learning about the micro-finance world.

The Seven Bar Foundation, a nonprofit foundation headed by Renata Mutis Black and Kim Hoedeman, provides funding to micro-finance organizations all over the world. The funds come in part

from partnerships with companies, like jeweler Royal Asscher and cosmetics brand Fusion Beauty, which donate proceeds from certain sales. Charitable donations are then channeled to organizations like Accion USA, the U.S.'s largest micro-lender, which has lent over \$120 million since 1991.

The event included two runway shows, showcasing everything from sheer black lace slips to corsets and sweeping goddess dressing gowns, a dance performance and a live auction.

"It's a cause that's close to my heart," actress Sofia Vergara said. "I understand what women need sometimes is just a little push."

"You think that lingerie and micro-finance don't really go together but it was this whole idea of bringing what we would call ethical luxury," British property developer Robert Whitton said. "The idea of using high end fashion, which always has an attraction for both females and males, and linking that to the empowerment of women — I think it's a subtle but also a very logical connection."

Whitton's company is currently developing Freedom Bay, an ultra-exclusive eco-luxury resort in St. Lucia, where he aims to partner with Seven Bar Foundation to bring micro-financing to the local population.

If Seven Bar is successful in its evangelism, "micro-finance" and "ethical" may soon join "artisanal" as signifiers of luxe. "Especially in this environment, people that have money and still want to purchase, they want to do so with a clear conscience," Whitton said.