



Lin says that because she's a perfectionist she's "over-careful" with the smallest details.

A sewing machine is the only thing making a sound in the quiet alley and its regular rhythm contrasts with the hubbub of crowds at the nearby Jenn Lann Temple. For Lin Hong-luan, this rhythm is proof of a peaceful, stable life, as it not only represents her contribution to her family's livelihood, but also the confidence that countless women have gained in their own bodies from her products.



Highlighting the 'beauty inside' with every stitch:

Lin Hong-luan's commitment to making perfect lingerie

Words by Ye Jia-hui Photography by You Jia-huan Translated by Angel Pu

"People say all my money is from women because--from hair and make-up to lingerie--I can do them all!" says Lin Hong-luan, an elderly woman with a tidy hairstyle and light makeup who knows a few words of English and remains a senior seamstress even in her 70s.

Although Lin seems to have aged very well and is always smiling, she actually has confronted a number of tough challenges throughout her life.

Doing her best to make women beautiful, from head to toe

Although Lin's family was not poor and she had high grades in school, her parents didn't allow her to continue her education in what, back then, was a very traditional Taiwanese patriarchal society. Instead, they let her choose a career as soon as she finished grade school. At that time, women didn't have many vocations to choose from, so she decided to study hairdressing first, followed by cosmetics. She ended up becoming a "bridal secretary"--today a fairly popular position that is responsible for a bride's makeup, hair and dresses.

Fortunately, she had a knack for the beauty business, not to mention high expectations of herself, so her salon business did pretty well. One of her patrons, the wife of an American military officer, thought Lin had a great attitude towards her job and asked her if she'd like to learn how to make girdles and shapewear, because



1. Measuring is a very important step. The slightest difference can lead to a huge mistake, and it's also the key whether finished underwear is comfortable or not.
2. In order to be very precise, Lin always concentrates very hard when making patterns.
3. For a wearer's comfort, there should be as little stitching as possible.
4. Lin never stops improving herself and is still always trying to develop more comfortable underwear.

the officer's wife was moving to America with her husband and wanted to pass along these techniques to someone else.

Although finances were tight for Lin and she needed 75 grams of gold as tuition to study these techniques, she still decided to spend the money because she believed it would be good for her future. After she spent about three or four days learning with two other students, the officer's wife told her that although she wasn't sure about the other two, she was certain that Lin had everything required to learn about girdle-making. After just one month, Lin had mastered a brand-new skill that would change her life forever.

A side job becomes full-time work

In 1962 Taiwan got its first TV station, TTV. At that time, anyone able to work with the station was not

only considered the best in that field, but also of higher social status and income. Therefore, when Lin beat out other makeup artists from all over Taiwan to become one of three new TTV makeup artists, she was more than thrilled. However, due to the fact that she had just given birth to Siamese twins, she had to give up the high-paying job to take care of her children.

To help earn a livelihood for her family, Lin went back to doing what she did best—being a beautician. However, when her customers discovered that she also made girdles and shapewear, out of curiosity and personal trust they asked her to customize shapewear for them. After a while, as Lin's techniques became increasingly skillful, she even developed improved methods for sewing and selecting fabrics, completely winning over her customers. In the end, her shapewear side-job became another important source of income.

From that time on, regardless of whether she was

busy with house chores or child-raising, Lin was also with her sewing machine, scissors and fabric. Even today, at an age of over 70, she still happily serves her customers.

Even an inch is a big difference

"Everyone has a different body shape, even if they share the same height and weight," notes Lin as she uses a tape to skillfully measure her customer's hips, waist, cleavage and crotch. She also points out that while it's easy to learn such techniques, the most important thing is the experience of a seamstress, which is necessary to determine the pattern, curve and elasticity, based on the customer's size and shape. These all affect how the wearer likes the finished shapewear, and is not a skill one can simply pass down.

Due to the fact that she has seen so many different body shapes in her life, there's a small "human body shape database" in her head. Teenage girls have flatter and narrower bodies, while women in their forties care about their tummies the most. As for elderly ladies, their shapewear not only needs enhancement for bellies and backs, but also requires small pockets on the sides to secretly store their cash and gold rings. "Old ladies take a sense of security seriously, so these small pockets are a must-have for them," says Lin with a smile while making these observations about women of different ages.

After settling on the size and pattern, what follows next is cutting the fabric, sewing, trimming the details and touch-up. According to Lin, the most important things about shapewear, unlike other outfits, are comfort and an ability to adjust to body shapes. While some customers have requested different colors and lace decorations, in the end most ladies have found that the most practical color and material is beige and cotton, which has never changed. Lin's girdles are not as colorful and fancy as those of major underwear brands, but their quality is so consistent and good that most of her customers have worn her shapewear for 30-40 years. Some have brought their daughters, or even granddaughters, for Lin to customize underwear for, making her feel very proud.

A neverending quest to learn new things

Although Lin's son already has his own business and she doesn't need to earn money for the family

anymore, she still hasn't considered retirement. Besides, old customers have "threatened" Lin against closing her shop, lest they find themselves "out-of-shape". Her business is also the best gathering place for her and her classmates to study calligraphy and dance at. "I didn't have the chance to learn before so of course I'm learning as long as I can, so I have a lot of classmates!" she says. You can see beautiful passages from her favorite books written on a whiteboard and hand-written Buddhism scriptures hanging on the walls of her studio. After spending most of her life focusing on other women's needs, Lin can now finally spend some quality time on herself. 🌸



1. Lin notes that all her shapewear is customized and unique.
2. Creating patterns for bra cups is the most challenging part of underwear-making.