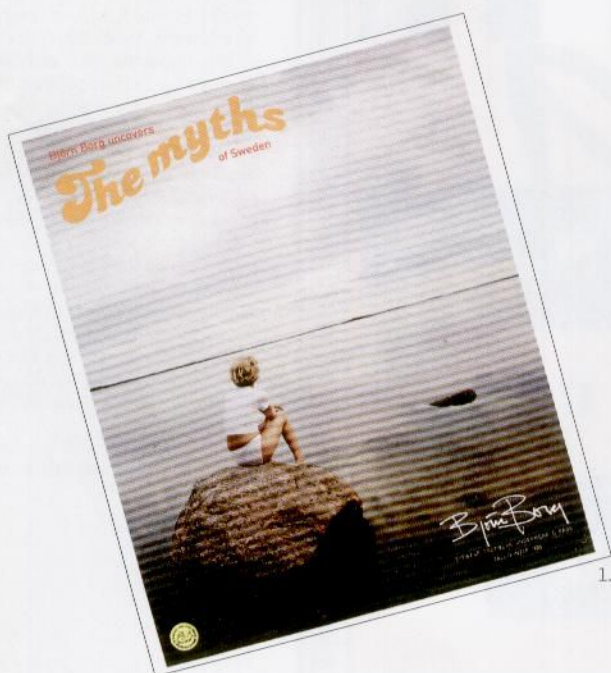


Björn Borg's Underwear

An ad campaign from Sweden pokes fun at stereotypes of Swedish sexual permissiveness.

By Nicole O'Neill



One of my earliest and most memorable experiences of Swedish culture goes back to 1978, two months after my family and I had moved from Los Angeles to Stockholm. I was seven years old and my mother and her new Swedish husband decided to send me to summer camp. I was put on a bus with a bunch of screaming kids, with no idea where I was going. After five hours on the bus, having passed seemingly endless lakes and a million pine trees, I saw ten butt-naked men and women diving into one of the lakes and bursting out in shrieks of euphoria. *They were the summer camp's staff.*

After three weeks, I knew my mind and body would never be the same. I had tried my first "light" beer and joined my first political demonstration. But I especially remember a blond woman by the name of Agneta giving me the lesson of my life. I was constantly teasing the teenage kids at the camp by imitating their kissing. One day, Agneta finally had enough of the frigolite-rubbing sounds that were coming from my innocent lips and demonstrated what a real kiss should look like.

That was my '70s in a nutshell. Now that we've reached the '90s, Sweden has changed considerably. From being a nation with socialist sympathies, it has become the most Americanized country in Europe. The younger generation has grown up with problems endemic to Western capitalist countries such as racism, violence, and increasing unemployment. And sexual liberation has lost much of its appeal under the threat of AIDS. Many young Swedes are showing a new interest in moral values, etiquette, and traditionalism—everything their parents wanted to demolish.

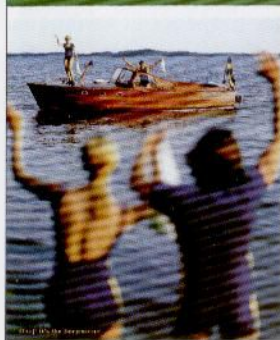
But memories of Swedish libertine attitudes remain. The adver-

tising agency Paradiset-DDB has incorporated them in its ludicrous ads for Björn Borg underwear and accessories. With deliberately tacky images, showing blond boys and girls jumping all over each other on cars and conference tables, Paradiset has followed the truly unusual route of marketing sports-related fashion to media-savvy consumers by poking fun at Swedish stereotypes.

In the Swedish ad business, Paradiset plays in a league of its own. Since its founding in 1990, the Stockholm-based agency has won several international awards for campaigns for the fashion brand Diesel and for OLW snacks. The Grand Prix in the respected pan-European advertising awards Eurobest topped off their list of honors last year. But, for two years in a row, the agency has declined participation in two of Sweden's major awards shows. The reason? Swedish advertising is terrible, say staff at the agency. Or, in the words of creative director Joakim Jonasson: "Swedish ad agencies don't keep up with what's going on in society. Today, people will not accept false messages in ads, no matter how appealing the image the ad presents. Paradiset will never make an ad that tells people they'll lose weight by eating 'light' margarine." Those ads apply to the standard strategy—you take a minor truth, blow it up, and turn it into the entire truth. And as long as you do it in a clever way, the business will pay homage to you." Does that mean Paradiset is an ad agency with morals? "Why not?" Jonasson replies. "There are many other ways you can dramatize an ad."

For the last two years, the Björn Borg campaigns have appeared in various popular publications in Scandinavia, the U.K., Germany, Holland, and Australia. What's

Björn Borg uncovers
The myths
of Sweden
'48 Happy hours'



A paragraph of text in the top left corner of the ad, partially obscured by the headline.

1.

Erotica
"Mixed Emotions"

More legends who visit Sweden say "Sweden must truly be the country of legends." In fact, Sweden is home to quite a few more or less different cultures and legends, so wonder the French cinema has been so appreciative to the last century of legend.



LEARN THE KEY WORDS:
Hello - Hej
Homeboy - Pappa/ding
Place - Snopp
Tender - Nykter
Date - Fika
Cognac? - Korvrik?

2.

3.

All credits for the catalog and ads shown include Joakim Jonasson, creative director; Paul Malmström, art director; and Linus Karlsson, copywriter. The agency is Paradiset-DDB, Stockholm.

1. Cover of Björn Borg catalog. Photographer: Henrik Halvarsson.
2. "48 Happy Hours" ad depicts a carefree Swedish weekend in the country. Photographer: Henrik Halvarsson.
3. "Mixed Emotions" ad sends up "Swedish Erotica" with a tale of close encounters on the Swedish roads. Photographer: Mattias Edway.

remarkable is that Paradiset has abandoned the conventional methods of marketing sports underwear and has taken a more conceptual approach. You won't find any athletes jumping around in these ads. Neither will you see Björn Borg posing in his boxer shorts. Instead, the agency has chosen to create more open associations, reinforcing the quality aspect of the product by associating it with "Swedishness," albeit a humorous and kitschy version.

Many people perceive the Swedes as a practical, quality-concerned people, and Björn Borg himself seems to personify the typical Swede: quiet, a little bit shy, but with typical Swedish "efficiency." Borg was an exotic sex symbol in his glory days and—perhaps—the greatest tennis player of all time. Thanks to his name and its associations with Sweden in the '70s, Paradiset was provided with an inexhaustible source of ideas for its campaign. Björn Borg himself has nothing to do with the marketing process. He has minimized his role in the fashion company and simply allows it to license his name.

The "Myths of Sweden" concept, created by Jonasson, art director Paul Malmström, and copywriter Linus Karlsson, consists of various narratives assuring consumers that "all you hear about Swedes is true"—a slogan that appears in every ad, next to two rabbits in action. Some stories feature the sort of sensationalist intrigues you can find in tabloid newspapers or teenage magazines. Take the love triangle with two men getting into close combat over a blond. She stands in a bar, casually sipping a beer in her black lingerie, totally unaware of the surrounding commotion. These elements are brought together in a messy layout—it's as

4,5. Spreads from the Björn Borg catalog. Photographer: Henrik Halversson.

6. After one too many beers, shy Ove unwisely challenges tough guy Tobias for Agneta. "Please," begs the ad, "if you see a Swede at your local bierstube, DO NOT buy him a beer: You'll get a friend for life!" Photographer: Robert Nettparp.

7. Business conferences don't have to be dull—not if you're in Sweden. Björn Borg illustrates some "Body Language and Strategies" in this instructive ad. Photographer: Mattias Edwall.



4.



5.

if a talentless editor attempted to make the tale easy to read by framing all the pictures and using several type styles . . . and failed. In Paradiset's hands, this mess becomes interesting and hip.

The only program Paradiset uses in these ads is Adobe Illustrator, since it "gives a lot more creative freedom than Quark XPress," according to Jonasson. The typefaces employed are Din, Clarendon, and Cooper Black, as well as plump '70s retro hand-lettering. In later campaigns, the colors have been toned down because some consumers confused the ads with the not dissimilar Diesel campaign. From now on, the Borg ads will sport a duller, more "Swedish" color system, with lots of beige, brown, and yellow—excellent colors if you want to create something kitschy and tasteless.

When it comes to models, Paradiset wanted to get away from the typical fashion images of muscular pretty boys. The male models in the Björn Borg ads, styled in sleazy fake mustaches and permed hair, are supposed to create a humorous and disarming effect instead of giving the beholder an inferiority complex. On the other hand, the women still look like typical models, but that's only to maintain the myth of the willing Swedish bombshell.

The campaign's essential message doesn't lie in its hip design or odd-looking models. With the underwear products playing a noticeable part, Paradiset attempts to make fun of people's prejudices and joke about debates on sexual equality. This tactic has raised critical voices accusing the agency of being superficial and immoral. But, according to Joakim Jonasson, critics should blame advertising as a whole—not only in Sweden, but worldwide: "Today we blame

young people for being shallow when we—the advertising industry—are the ones that made them grow up with messages saying that superficiality is the only thing that counts! We are the ones that keep on producing flashy advertisements filled with lies. That's the point we're trying to get across in our ads."

Other reactions have been more positive. It doesn't matter if people are 15, 50, or 70 years old—the campaign's humorous approach works across different age groups. The ads are particularly popular in Sweden, where the latest research showed a total recall factor for the ads of 82 per cent; 51 per cent could actually remember the copy. "People often get bored or upset when they read traditional advertising," he says. "They feel manipulated or they feel they've wasted their time reading rubbish. Our philosophy is to try to give people energy instead of taking it away from them. If somebody's going to spend two minutes reading an ad, they should get something good in return."

Because of the campaign's restricted budget (\$1.5 million for media buying, 5 per cent of Björn Borg's total sales), Paradiset has limited its advertising to double-page spreads in magazines and a few evening papers, with the exception of one TV commercial last year. If they could, they would gladly do more commercials and morning press. After staying true to the same concepts with Diesel for several years and still achieving success, Paradiset has applied a similar working philosophy to other clients, producing long-term concepts that become refined with time. In Björn Borg's case, they've exhausted familiar Swedish myths and now have begun to create their own. It's an approach started with

