

## Staying power

How a surf vacation led to a revolution in women's swimwear

An investment banker who worked long hours at a London-based firm, Anna Jerstrom found herself with a glut of unused vacation days when 2009 came to a close. Jerstrom, who grew up in Sweden, decided to give surfing camp in Costa Rica a go.

That trip changed everything. She loved the sport so much, she quit her job, moved to Costa Rica and became a surfer.

"It was like *Blue Crush*, without the handsome leading man," she says. "I was super-scared, but I fell in love with surfing."

What Jerstrom did not love was surfing attire for women—namely, ill-fitting bikinis. "You'd be out in the waves, walk out of the water and literally you've lost your bottoms," she says. Though Jerstrom made many of her own clothes, she had no professional experience as a designer. But she did have sketchbooks full of ideas.

In 2010, she put those sketches to work and founded Newport Beach, Calif.-based Calavera, a line of bikinis designed to stay on, no matter how rough the surf. Jerstrom's designs incorporate eyelets and other closures typically used on men's boardshorts, as well as hidden spots to secure car keys and other essentials. The bikini bottoms have Velcro and less elasticity in the band, so they don't slip when a surfer gets pounded by a wave. The tops have tie systems



started making the suits and sponsored five surfers to test the designs. They recorded 50 videos that demonstrate the suits' performance in the surf—helpful, since the bikinis look deceptively simple (and skimpy).

Jerstrom, who still surfs frequently, streams many of the videos on the company website. The interactive site, the only place surfers could find the product through 2011, allows shoppers to custom-design a suit, choosing from a variety of styles, colors and sizes. The bikinis cost between \$90 and \$100.

Projected revenue for 2012, when Calavera suits hit specialty retail outlets, including Katin Surf Shop in Huntington Beach, Calif., is \$200,000. "We are known for our men's boardshorts," says Jesse Watson, Katin's general manager. "Many women's lines are just

cute, but not made for active stand-up paddlers and surfers."

Watson ordered the line after seeing Calavera's online videos and a comic-book-style promotional mailing. The trick to success, he says, will be to train his employees to understand how the suits work and to articulate that to customers who initially see only a sexy bikini.

"Our customer does not just want our product," Jerstrom contends. "They want to be that girl on the surfboard."

—Margaret Littman

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—Anna Jerstrom, Calavera

that prevent pressure on the neck.

Jerstrom raised \$150,000 in seed money from 10 investors, largely through contacts from her days in the finance industry. With the initial funding, she

Holding steady: Calavera's Anna Jerstrom.