



COVER GIRL
Spanx founder Sara Blakely in her office. Lining the wall behind her are 120 *Life* magazine covers.

TRACKED

SARA BLAKELY

The self-made billionaire behind Spanx, which launches a line of jeans this fall, is an inventor at heart.

BY CHRISTOPHER ROSS PHOTOGRAPHY BY AUDRA MELTON

SPANX FOUNDER Sara Blakely, 43, stands atop a three-story construction site in Atlanta's uptown Buckhead district, surveying the city's skyline and blinking in the hot afternoon sun. By February, this will be the view from the company's rooftop garden, and the cavernous floors below—comprising 86,000 square feet—will be the site of Spanx's new offices, selected to accommodate Blakely's staff of 160. Men in hard hats and yellow vests scale the scaffolding, consult blueprints, maneuver cranes. She turns and smiles. "All this because I didn't like how my butt looked in white pants," she says.

Blakely's success story began in 1998, when, as a door-to-door fax-machine salesman fed up with bunching pantyhose, she created a proprietary slimming version designed to lie smoothly under pants.

Oprah hailed it as one of her favorite products of the year in 2000, causing demand to explode among middle-aged housewives and red-carpet starlets alike, and leading to the creation of a full line that now encompasses more than 200 garments, from body shapers and bras to menswear and, beginning this fall, jeans.

Though she leads a company valued at more than a billion dollars, Blakely still primarily identifies as an inventor. Since she does her best thinking in the car (the idea to call her product Spanx came to her while she was stopped at a red light), she often extends her normal six-minute morning commute to an hour, driving aimlessly to allow her mind to wander. Wherever she goes, she carries a large spiral-bound Mead notebook, compulsively filling it

with scribbles, notes and inspirations.

The mother of three has a salesman's facility with first names and an almost clinical ease about assessing other women's bodies, fixing an unabashed stare on the behind of a model as she walks by. "I look at butts all day," she says. "That's normal. I don't get in trouble with HR." The company channeled its founder's easygoing relatability, leading customers to develop an emotional attachment to the product and eliminating the need for advertising. Blakely estimates that roughly three times a day a woman on the street will recognize her and flash her Spanx, a gesture that has become a kind of secret handshake among the brand's adherents. It's a testament to the fact that in America, a little winking vanity can go a long way. >



10:27 a.m.
Gets ready
to enter her 5-year-old son Lazer's
classroom at the Galloway School
as a disguised "mystery reader."



11:03 a.m.
Hops into
her Toyota minivan to drive to the
office. The vehicle is the object of some
derision at work, but her son is a fan.



12:12 p.m.
Queries a model
about the fit of the jeans the
company is launching
this fall. At left, doodling in
her notebook.



2:45 p.m.
Takes a tour
of the construction site
for Spanx's new Atlanta
offices with project
manager Robert Mills.



1:05 p.m.
Inspects
the new office mascot,
the affectionately nick-
named "Panty Lion"
(held here by a colleague).

11

questions

asked by her son's prekindergarten class-
mates before they correctly guessed
her identity (she was wearing a disguise).

\$250

to trademark the word *Spanx* in 2000.
She changed the *ks* to an *x* at the last minute.

200

people

waiting in line at 10 a.m. for the
opening of the stand-alone Spanx store
(of which there are eight nationally)
in Tampa, FL, this summer.

4

days

Time Blakely's husband, the rapper and
entrepreneur Jesse Itzler, spent in a
wheelchair after running more than 100
consecutive miles for charity.

93

Age of Blakely's grandmother, who
still wears Spanx and is especially a fan
of the "Bra-llelujah."

60

countries

where Spanx are sold worldwide, including
China, Italy and United Arab Emirates.

8

minutes

The typical length of Blakely's stand-up
routine when she was an aspiring comedian
before she started Spanx.

\$24 million

Amount the Sara Blakely Foundation
has donated to support education and
female entrepreneurship.

2

ideas

for her next inventions: lipstick that stays
on and comfortable high-heeled shoes. ●

5:24 p.m.
Drinks at Yebo
with a few of her best girlfriends; Blakely
has a margarita. Chevy Arnold, on the
far left, was Spanx's first customer.

