

Baby boom

## From cribs to carriers, high-end baby products are in vogue

Demographic and technological changes are making infancy more expensive



Photograph: Artipoppe

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Among the whizzy gadgets unveiled in January at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas was the Elvie Rise, an automated baby bouncer that transforms seamlessly into a bassinet. The device, which costs \$800, sold out even before it was formally released. Parents who missed out can instead opt for a SNOO, a rival bassinet that rocks its occupant back to sleep through the night while dispensing white noise—and which costs around \$1,700.

Clever cribs are just one example of the growing number of high-end baby goods on which parents are splurging. Fashionistas are strapping offspring to their chests with carriers from Artipoppe, a Dutch brand, that cost \$420. Its owner, Bugaboo, makes snazzy prams that can be collapsed with one hand. Undesirable infant smells can now be masked by Dior's alcohol-free baby perfume, which it launched in 2023.

What explains this expanding array? One factor is demography. In the rich world people are having children later in life, when they have more money to spend. First-time mothers in America are now 27.4 years old on average, up from nearly 25 in 2000. People are also having fewer sprogs, so have more money to spend on each. These days the average American woman is predicted to have 1.7 children over the course of her lifetime, down from a fertility rate of 2.1 in 2000.

In the growing share of households where mum and dad both work, time is tight and products that make parenting even a little bit easier can be a godsend. That helps explain the boom in baby tech in particular. The startup behind the Elvie Rise also offers a range of wearable breast pumps that are controlled by a smartphone. Then there is the Nucu pad, a baby monitor developed with backing from the makers of the Oura ring, a wearable device for adults. It allows parents to record their heartbeat and play it to their baby in the crib, mimicking the feeling of being held.

New parents are looking not just for goods, but services, too. On Babylist, a gift registry for soon-to-be parents, the “help and favours” category, which includes babysitting and deliveries of home-cooked meals, has been one of the fastest-growing. Lisa Meakin, a London-based night nurse and sleep trainer, who charges between £280 and £350 (\$347-434) per night, depending on the task, is rarely short of work. Ms Meakin puts that down to the fact that new parents today are less likely to live near family, who might otherwise lend a hand. “People don't have that support network anymore,” she says.

Another factor pushing up demand is the internet. Parenting has always been anxiety-inducing, but the rise of social media has mums and dads more worried than ever—both about keeping up with their peers and doing

well by their infant. According to a survey by Mumsnet, an online forum, half of parents with children under the age of three follow parenting bloggers or social-media influencers. Annabel Karmel, an author of books on nutrition for babies and children, argues that the plethora of information available online isn't always helpful. "You have got all these influencers and they all give you different advice," she says. And thanks to targeted digital advertising, women are being pitched pricey baby gear almost as soon as they discover they are pregnant.

Of course, not every parent can afford to splurge, and some resist the urge to do so. Babylist lets new parents indicate that they are "open to secondhand" items; used baby clothes are, after all, softer. On Mumsnet, one mum-to-be recently shared the list of gadgets and garments she had bought ahead of the birth and bemoaned the cost. "New parents are a marketing department's dream," one mother responded. Another piped up, consolingly: "You won't use half of it." ■