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MY BROTHER  
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ISSUE 24

FOR THE STYLISH, THINKING WOMAN



# Your partner or mine?

Swinging has ditched its sad, suburban image and become the party scene of choice for the young, liberated and libidinous, reports **Beverly Kemp**



A sexy woman and her handsome catch of a boyfriend are on their way to a party. The location is a penthouse in a sought-after apartment block in London's Chelsea Harbour. The woman is a designer and he's a stockbroker. They're both in their mid 30s and have been together for two years. He wears Diesel, while she's clothed in something gorgeous she bought on holiday in St Tropez.

For the first half hour, they will sip Laurent Perrier champagne and make polite conversation with other stylish couples. An hour later, both will have discarded their designer clothes to join a *mêlée* of other party-goers on several strategically placed king-size beds. For this is a party with a difference. Every guest is there for one reason only — to have sex with other attractive people.

Swinging used to be something that happened behind closed doors in the suburbs. The word conjures up images of 70s soirees where, on arrival, people threw their car keys into a bowl. Who you went home with depended on which bunch of keys you picked up when leaving.

Swinging 2003 style is a world away from this cliché. It has moved several notches upmarket, with increasing numbers of happily committed couples trying it out.

Why? Well, hedonism is back in fashion. 'Our idea of what constitutes a good relationship is no longer laid down by the Church or the expectations of our parents. It is more likely to be driven by the pursuit of pleasure,' explains Dr Andrew Beatty, lecturer in social anthropology at Brunel University.

Says Beatty: 'If you're used to a certain diet, but are suddenly presented with a diverse menu which appears more appetising than the food you eat every day, you might be tempted to try more exotic dishes. The same logic can be applied to sexual behaviour.'

## EASY ACCESS

Swinging is a cyclical pastime influenced by societal changes, points out Dr Petra Boynton, a sex psychologist and lecturer at University College London. 'It was in the public eye in the 60s and 70s, but the advent of HIV and Aids meant it became less publicly talked about. Concerns about safe sex probably caused a dip in the number of swingers, although it continued as an underground movement.

'Now swinging is becoming high profile again, as an increasing number of people become aware of the opportunities to have recreational sex if they wish to, courtesy of the internet. You simply go online, add your photo or look at other people's, state what you want and with whom, then sit back and wait for the replies,' continues Dr Boynton.

A must for A-list swingers are the parties organised by a company called Fever, which was set up in

1998. 'My then girlfriend and I had started swinging two years previously, but half the couples we met were over 50, which is a real turn-off for people in their 20s and 30s,' explains co-founder Mark Roberts.

'In Europe, there are hundreds of tasteful swinging clubs, full of beautiful men and women. Some even have restaurants and dance floors. Here, the venue for swinging parties is often the basement of a pub, with people making out against grubby walls or hard chairs. We decided to offer a more sophisticated experience to young, attractive couples.'

Invitations to Fever parties are like gold dust. Couples must send a recent photo with their name, address, job titles and details of previous swinging experience. Single women are welcome, but lone men are not. Potential guests are then considered by a panel of six — including a lawyer, political lobbyist and fashion PR — who whittle down 200 to 400 applications to create a mix of experienced couples and newbies. The maximum number of couples at each party is 60 and the average age is 25 to 34. Previous

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guests have included bankers, policemen and models — and more than one celebrity pair has applied.

'It's very middle class and metropolitan,' says Roberts. He admits that a panel member's veto is often based on whether they fancy an applicant. The unkempt, overweight or unfit are immediately rejected, as are those who send tatty old snaps.

For those who find the idea of being vetted by a panel daunting, there are dozens of other websites for couples who share an inclination to swing. Mark Turner's site, *Swinging Heaven*, receives more than 7,000 visitors every day.

He and his wife Helen have been together for nine years. 'Neither of us had any swinging experience before we met, but the fantasy of sex with another couple, or two men with Helen, gradually crept into our sex life — until we both agreed we wanted to try it for real,' he reveals. 'One day, we bought a local paper and were amazed to see lots of adverts from couples wanting to meet people like themselves. That was six years ago and we've met about 10 couples and several single men since then.'

Although it appears to be gaining in popularity, swinging undoubtedly remains a minority interest. Most people still demand monogamy in a committed relationship and have no desire to share their partner. Even the thought of doing so can be enough to provoke feelings of jealousy or hurt.

Dr Boynton believes that, while a lot of men find the fantasy of swinging appealing, in reality they ►

would be very distressed if they saw their wife or girlfriend having sex with another man. 'Often the woman may enjoy it more than her partner because she gets more attention,' she says. Certainly for curious women, the swinging scene offers opportunities to meet like-minded females.

'For both men and bisexual women, seeing very beautiful women make love to each other is breathtaking, especially when you know one of them has never done it before and has been longing to do so,' explains Mark Roberts.

## SETTING BOUNDARIES

Hedonism may be the name of the game, but recreational sex between couples is not without ground rules. Sex between women is fine, man-on-man action is generally discouraged — unless both male partners are bisexual. Condoms are de rigueur and sex usually takes place in the same room with both partners present. Opposite-sex friends are not admitted to Fever parties, nor are couples who have only been together for a short time.

'It's not something you should ever try in order to put more pizzazz into the bedroom,' advises Mark Turner. 'It's important to make sure you have a good sex life already, otherwise you risk messing up your relationship. If I see Helen having a good time with another man, it really turns me on. Jealousy would only come into it if I thought she was developing an emotional bond with someone — but that never happens because everyone knows the rules. We're very much in love and she's my everything. Swinging is just sex. We simply "play" together.'

Is swinging harmful? Psychologists say that depends on the motives and the state of your relationship beforehand. It's like having a baby to save a failing relationship: recreational sex rarely revives dying love — it's more likely to kill it for good. Dr Boynton believes the only way swinging can work is if both partners have discussed it in detail and there is no coercion on either side. 'You need to agree limits you're both comfortable with. Who do we fancy and what do we want to do with them? Do we want to see them again or not?'

Although she acknowledges that swinging works for some, she has also seen the pitfalls. 'The truth is, sometimes the woman is going along with it because she thinks her partner will leave her if she doesn't. Or he's had an affair in the past and she sees this as a way of being able to keep an eye on him.'

'It may sound obvious, but if you want to save a relationship, you need to resolve problems together, rather than start having sex with other people.'

'If a couple's hobby was chess, no-one would expect them to only play with each other,' asserts Mark Roberts. 'If their hobby is sex, the same rule applies.' Mark Turner believes, 'Good swinging is about having the right mentality. It appeals to confident, liberated people. It isn't for those who are looking for a quick shag or a life partner.'