

fashionably lewd

NEVER THOUGHT A DILDO COULD COST MORE THAN A DRESS? FIORELLA VALDESOLLO GOES BROKE USHERING IN THE NEW (EXPENSIVE) SEXUAL REVOLUTION. ILLUSTRATION BY YUKO SHIMIZU.

There is a scene in *Parenthood* (1989) in which Steve Martin, who plays disenchanted single mom Dianne Weist's older brother, looks for a flashlight during a blackout and mistakenly emerges in front of the entire family with his sister's vibrator in hand. Everyone—including the viewing audience—chuckles and nudges each other knowingly, while the woman is shamed. That same scenario has been played out on television and film numerous times—man/child/family member finds woman's hidden vibrator/handcuffs/dildo and laughter always ensues. But is everyone laughing out of embarrassment or curiosity? With the slew of high-end sex toys currently edging their way into the marketplace, one could safely guess the latter.

Luxury and sex toys seem like an anomalous pairing. Traditionally, when one thinks of where to buy a butt plug, stores like Barneys don't come to mind. It's spelled "adult," not "luxury." If you live in New York, anywhere near the Port Authority). Though none of us relish trips to these seedy stores, the fact remains that many, many women own some kind of pleasure-inducing

device. Granted there have been a number of female-owned sexual emporiums that have opened up in recent years, and yes, nowadays when I need a new "pocket rocket," these are where I turn. But what about when I'm looking for something a little more, well, upscale? Sam Roddick, the creator of *Coco de Mer*, was faced with the same dilemma. "The female sex shops that were in existence were very clinical, like going to the doctor, and clearly didn't inspire curiosity." But it wasn't always this way. "The first sex shop in London was actually run by a woman in the 19th century," Roddick points out. "She used to sell velvet pouches filled with condoms, and vases full of brambles and nettles for those who indulged in the art of euphoric pain."

Roddick set out to bring back some of that opulence to both her products and her London store, located in a high-end boutique in Covent Garden. And she's not alone. Sex educator Betony Vernon, the mastermind behind *Paradise Found*, insists that much of her inspiration for her high-end sexual jewels and tools also comes from the pages of *Fanny Hill*. "I tend to look at women in times when our sexuality was not something that was considered dirty or wrong or shameful," says Vernon. Not only do they invent (or in some cases, re-invent) the tools for erotic pleasure, both women are well versed in human sexuality and hold regular workshops to help raise consciousness

and awareness. "Everything I do is a response to what seems to be a fairly open society in relation to our sexuality," Vernon professes. "But in reality, it's all quite superficial and people are confused."

So can sex toys go mainstream *and* upscale? Will we soon be seeing cock rings in glass cases at Bergdorf's amidst the designer baubles? Not anytime soon, I'm afraid. But these companies are taking the first step: giving sexual toys a major image overhaul—replacing the neon plastic animal-shaped vibrators (whoever designed the version with crabs on it should be promptly fired) with luxe, streamlined designs. "People feel a bond with their iBook, but no bond whatsoever with the mechanical device," says Ethan Imboden, one of the people behind *JimmyJane*, purveyors of, among other things, engraveable gold and platinum vibrators. "We set out to create something that is quite literally an object of desire, and which represents, visually, aesthetically, and functionally, all of those aspirations." And when it comes to sexual accoutrements, why should we settle for anything less? "Quite frankly, when you spend £150 [about \$300] on a pair of shoes and £10 on your vagina, I don't really think that matches in terms of sense of importance in your life," says Roddick. In other words, these products shouldn't simply be considered costly sex toys, but rather an investment in a tool you are utilizing for the most intimate purposes... and can you really put a price tag on that?



1. THE MINX BY SHERI ZINN VIBRATOR, \$300, BOOTYPARLOR.COM. 2. JIMMYJANE PRECIOUS METAL LITTLE GOLD VIBRATOR, \$250, AT SELECT LUXURY RETAILERS AND JIMMYJANE.COM. 3. BETONY VERNON PARADISE FOUND PEACOCK FEATHER TICKLER WITH SADO BRACELET, PRICE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST, PARADISEFOUND.IT. 4. COCO DE MER LEATHER HANDCUFFS, \$85, COCODEMERUSA.COM

