

From ICON magazine (from Springer-Verlag), December 2021 - the red parts are coloured by me!

Betony Vernon, almost two metres tall, naturally red-haired, has established sex as a sublime art, as sublime eroticism. Dagmar von Taube met the pleasure consultant in Rome.



"I call it moonbathing"

Her pink business card is barely the size of a thumbnail. On it, printed in purple, is just an email address. "Eden" was the name of a Parisian by-appointment-only salon run by the American-born woman who teaches the art of love to women and men worldwide. That afternoon, Betony Vernon, dressed in flesh-coloured calfskin, took her seat in the salon of an aristocratic friend's villa in Rome. "Let me make one thing clear first," says the 53-year-old, "I am neither a 5-star escort lady nor a de-luxe dominatrix who whips her clients for money. My body can only be touched

outside of my working hours, and only with my express permission." What she calls the profession she practices? "Pleasure consultant and designer of high-end erotic toys."

Ms Vernon, you have written a 330-page book on lust, entitled "The Boudoir Bible". It's dedicated to your parents. What do you owe them? Not much more than that they apparently had sex with each other and abandoned me on this planet. My father was a helicopter pilot. He didn't feel like raising me and my mother wasn't allowed to. With the dedication in the book, I thank them both for their absence. The fact that they did not perform their duties as parents gave me the freedom to become the person I was meant to be.

Her parents divorced in the seventies. The circumstances are said to have been dramatic.

My British-born mother wanted to devote her life to art and pleasure. There were always several men in her life at the same time, including men of colour, and in an ultra-conservative state like Virginia. When my

father kicked her out of the house, she was living in a home for homeless women who had been rejected or beaten up by their husbands. She had been barred from seeing her four children by a racist and misogynistic judge. I was four when my father got sole custody. My mother was only allowed to see us once a year. I only had regular contact with her when I was 16.

At 15, you moved out of your father's house, took a Greyhound bus to New York and lived there as a punk girl and occasional model.

After I packed my things, I left my father a letter thanking him for helping me to become independent. He then cut off all contact. We never spoke a word to each other again. After a few years, I heard that his life was in ruins. He had to file for personal bankruptcy and lived as an impoverished hermit on a small sailboat until his death.

Did you go to his funeral?

No, for me he was actually dead long before that.

Did you ever consider having children?

No, even of my three sisters only one became a mother. I had my fallopian tubes removed to free myself from the cross of an unwanted pregnancy.

When did your sexual biography begin?

At the end of 15. Because I had not been educated, I had no shame when it came to my body and sex. I wore a corset and suspenders and took part in orgies at an early age. With my punky red hair and big breasts, I was an eye-catcher. I wore make-up every day and dressed like a sex doll outfitted by Vivienne Westwood. It took two hours to get me ready. It was then that I understood the importance of sexualised objects. As soon as I wore a corset, I moved differently and was looked at with different eyes. That thrill has stayed with me to this day.

When did you come into contact with sexual techniques like bandaging and spanking?

When I was 16, **I met a man for the first time who didn't want to penetrate me.** My lust was his lust. That struck a nerve with me. I felt for the first time how much pleasure it gives to give up control and be dominated by someone who knows something about a woman's body.

After studying art history in Virginia, you moved to Italy at 20 and studied industrial design in Milan. What gave you the idea to design erotic jewellery and sex toys made of silver and gold?

Why should a woman import cheap and unaesthetic looking plastic objects into her body? Basically, I developed toys for myself. I was the test

subject for every new prototype. Success came so quickly that I had my own company at 21 and later designed jewellery for fashion companies like Valentine, Missoni, Gianfranco Ferré, Alexander Wang and Fornasetti.

In 2000, you introduced your "Boudoir Box"-a black leather case with 21 handmade erotic toys that can be customised to the buyer's preferences. The price was initially 75,000 office, today 150,000 euros. The waiting period is one year.

Boutiques and department stores like Barneys in New York were too prudish to sell the box. So I became a travelling salesman, flying to private clients in London, New York, Los Angeles, Tokyo and Moscow. Many buyers of my box let me personally instruct them in its use. Whether man or woman, gay or lesbian, bondage or spanking: the contents of the box can be personalised. Some parts can also be bought individually.

How do the security staff at airports react when your luggage is screened?
I could write a book about that. The box sets off an alarm every time, whereupon I am asked to open it. I then ask to be allowed to show the contents in a room I can't see, but that only makes them more suspicious. In the end, half a dozen uniforms stand curiously around the box every time.

In 2004 you opened a by-appointment-only salon called "Eden" first in London, then in Paris. What happened there?

I taught groups whole afternoons on the theory and practice of sex including the history of the repression of female pleasure. The church considered the female orgasm something dirty and reprehensible. It was only with the sexual revolution in the sixties that women began to live out their pleasure. Suddenly it was understood that the clitoris is a woman's most important sexual organ and serves only one purpose: to give us one orgasm after another.

Sex therapists are a dime a dozen. What distinguishes you from them?

Instead of talking in cloudy abstractions, I show people in exercises how they can create pleasure. If a woman tells me she has no orgasms, I ask if she has a vibrator or diletto. You would be surprised how many women still find it dirty or embarrassing to orgasm with a vibrator or diletto. Breaking down taboos of this kind in minds can take several sessions.

To understand: what is a diletto?

It's what I call a dildo, derived from the Italian verb "dilettare": to enjoy, to delight in something. When I pull out a diletto during sex with a man, many say: "I have a penis. Then what good is this thing?" I reply, "I need a diletto because I want to come all night. If I rely on your penis for that,

the night will only last 20 minutes, and in those 20 minutes we won't open any doors to new experiences."

What is the most taboo topic among your clientele?

Anal sex. Many women still find it disgusting or disgusting. I ask them how they got this idea in their heads and explain that there is only one way to stimulate a man's prostate directly: through the anus. Many women don't know that a man can have an orgasm through this that has nothing to do with the one he experiences through stimulation of his penis.

How do you deal with new clients?

I send them a questionnaire to gauge expectations. I ask about unexpressed desires and fantasies and get a picture of their sexual disposition. Often I deal with couples who say, "We've been together for 25 years and still love each other, but the sexual fire between us went out a long time ago." With these couples I do practical exercises or I bring my boudoir box. However, it is clear at every second that I am not participating in the exercises myself. My opening line is, "I'm untouchable."

Are there clients who violate this rule in the sex rush?

No, as a precaution, alcohol and drugs are prohibited during my sessions. Some of my clients are victims of traumatic experiences. Those who are abused leave their bodies to protect their souls. Often the body sensation remains permanently disturbed. As soon as sex occurs again, the brain instinctively looks for an "emergency exit" sign. I teach these women in exercises to accept and learn to love their bodies again. It helps that I am a trained hypnotherapist.

How old are your youngest clients?

Fourteen. It is not unusual for me to treat young women. I've also worked with young men who can't get an erection in real life because for years they've only masturbated to porn films like addicts. When they want to have sex with a real person, they can't manage to separate the real world from their porn fantasies - and fail. A client recently told me that her 14-year-old daughter wanted to have her labia majora removed because her boyfriend looked at her in horror. The explanation was that the boy had so far only seen a vulva in porn films, where mostly women are shown with their labia removed to create the impression of youth. This is another reason why children should not watch porn. These are the worst teachers you can imagine.

Do you have more female or male customers? And how does it compare with the LGBTQ community?

80 per cent of my clientele are women over 40 who have decided to take responsibility for their desire into their own hands. Many want me to help

them find their G-spot.

What do you like about spanking?

Apart from stimulating nerves, it's about psychology. When I say to a man, "Bend over the couch, I want to spank you," there is a power shift. One person demands obedience as part of the game, and the other has to give up control. This can give both of them a hell of a kick. Do you know E. L. James?

The author of "Shades of Grey"?

Yes, before she wrote novels, she was a student of mine and saw my Boudoir Box. Until then, I don't think she had any idea **that many women are more aroused by dominance scenarios than by penetration.**

What do men do wrong during sex?

They don't realise that they have to learn sex like riding a motorbike or playing football. That there are born lovers is a myth made up by vain men. **A cardinal mistake many men make is their phallogentric view of sex.** More important for us women are play, seduction and openness to experimentation. Without expertise, little goes in sex. No woman wants to be tied up by a man who thinks he's in a cowboy movie and then swings his lasso. I tell you from experience: Bondage with amateurs is life-threatening. Many men still practice quick sex, which lasts between three and 15 minutes. I advocate three, four hours of ritual sex. It is a myth that only spontaneous sex is good sex. Ceremonies help because it takes time for the body's pharmacy to open up and release its natural love drugs like endorphins. Why not suck your partner's toes in between? Tongue and fingers can go on forever.

They say you can teach men to be multi-orgasmic like women.

Yes, it requires a lot of homework though. Men have to learn to separate their orgasmic reflex from their ejaculatory reflex. It can't be done without training. It's about breaking the conditioning of competitive masturbation in youth. This conditioning lasts a lifetime for many men.

What is the main problem women have with sex?

Falling in love immediately - instead of loving themselves. The image we have of our body in our head determines the degree of our pleasure. Women stand in front of the mirror and criticise themselves. Do you know men who do that?

How do you learn to look at yourself graciously, what's the trick?

I call it moonbathing: spending time naked and letting the body breathe, feel. **The skin is our largest organ,** but we cover it most of the time. Everyone should have a big mirror at home. If you don't like something about

what you see, start changing it if it is possible. Otherwise, learn to accept it and love it. And don't be self-critical. Negative thinking only creates frustration and negative action. Instead of complaining that you feel too fat, you could also motivate yourself by saying positively: "I'm happy that I'm healthy and, to feel even better, maybe I could lose a few kilos."

Who are your favourite clients?

Parents whose children have reached school readiness and who admit to themselves that their sex life has fallen asleep over concerns for their children's welfare. These couples look at each other with the knowledge that there is no more perfect partner for them than the person sitting next to them. At the same time, they know that desire is the glue for relationships. So they want to do something for themselves.

What other concerns do people turn to you with?

Themes are: Fear of closeness and intimacy or failure. Many don't dare to talk about their erotic fantasies or don't even know about the sexual potential of their bodies. You wouldn't believe how unenlightened many are. Others suffer from "skin hunger", for example because they were so lonely in the lockdown that they hardly feel themselves any more. I recommend hot baths. Also to hug and caress oneself, simply to be affectionate with oneself. Callousness is on the rise because in our digital world we perceive more and more in the abstract, without emotional, actual connection.

How much do your services cost?

1000 euros upwards for a face-to-face session. Online 400 euros.

Are you in a relationship?

Yes, I am taken. My partner is Roman, we live in Umbria. Long before him, I was even married once, to Barnaba Fornasetti, the son of the famous Italian artist and interior designer. We had twelve very happy years of marriage. When we were both young and in love, it was wild and exciting. But as time went on, the age difference between us seemed to grow more and more. He was eighteen years older than me. I wanted to go out into the world, he just wanted to sit at home with me.

Why does a one-night stand rarely turn into a relationship?

Love is not a hotel room that you just move in and out of.

Isn't good sex already love?

Absolutely. A one-night stand can feel like love for a moment. Sex connects us, but a relationship demands much more.

Do love and sex. even belong together?

Not necessarily. But the key to a happy relationship is not just to be found

in a formula, as partner institutes claim. **I believe in the cathartic power of just one person.** Sex gets better when you love and trust. By the way, I think German men are very charming, they are open, flirty and amazingly cuddly.

How can two people succeed in a sexual reboot?

You have to try sensually. Kissing, for example, is used far too rarely. In my jewellery collection there is a ring with two hazelnut-sized balls of solid silver or gold. When you run the warming metal all over your partner's body, energy flows are released like you've never experienced before.

Have you ever faked an orgasm?

No. I don't think you can either. An experienced lover notices the difference. Making love is not a visit to the gym. Hyperventilating is neither convincing nor purposeful.

What music do you recommend for this?

Classical, soul, soft pop, just no songs whose lyrics you know by heart. That's too distracting. I, at least, am then inclined to sing along.

Sigmund Freud's thesis was that there are at least three more people in the mind in the bedroom.

A 40-year-old once revealed to me that he was still a virgin. I said to him that unfortunately I could not work with him as long as he still lived with his mother. The bedroom could sometimes tell more than many a psycho couch. There are all kinds of tensions, even pain and abuse. I have seen it often enough, we are a society of broken people. Maybe that also explains why our world is falling apart more and more. When I was growing up in the eighties, we were free to love, express and explore. In the meantime, we have almost arrived at an asexual time. It's all about political correctness. Our bodies are increasingly becoming spare parts stores, at the same time we are outsourcing. The horror version is a society in which in the future you can order a fertilisation to your house and the other half sits at home like in a Woody Allen film and lets the orgasm ball circle.

Is it possible to have too much sex?

Yes. I see it in my male friends who used to do porn films, which meant having sex two or three times a day. And all that on Viagra. They look twice as old as they are. After fifty, a man should approach it like the other good things in life. Enjoy it in moderation, like a special menu: once a week.

Are you jealous?

No. Fidelity is a construct of the church. By the way, do you know that the

Vatican has the largest erotic museum in the world!

What is your advice for lovelorn people?

Face it, erase it, replace it. Check off what's over and look for something new.

COMMENTARY: At first glance, what the "pleasure counsellor" Betony Vernon tells us may look rather negative-sexist (to say the least). But on closer inspection it is obvious that she certainly advertises a sexuality without penetration and that she also sees a cathartic power (cathartic power = cleansing effect through the acting out of feelings) in the intensive intimate relationship with only one person - that she therefore definitely has the high value of a successful genuine monogamy in mind. I would therefore use this interview in my lessons today - of course also with the hint that the woman's clients are mainly adults with whom things have already gone wrong and who need "suggestions" that young inexperienced people do not need.

Unfortunately, my teaching at that time was often more like groping, and it was only after my time as an active teacher that I really realised that the reticence with tips on how the girls in particular could get it right was very often simply wrong and not very happy. But "you" have to come up with the right tips first! After all, "one" has one's own problems here and is therefore inhibited to venture ahead.

Above all, the attempt to motivate girls to a more "uninhibited or even open-hearted" approach to sexuality may be understood at first glance as an invitation to enter into libertinage, and that one is therefore afraid of appearing in a bad light in front of young people. But I would like to ask you to consider that I have made the experience, also due to my long pedagogical activity, that the usual "defence-against-all-sexual-tips" for "inexperienced girls" on how to deal with the male sex simply do not work. The problem is that with the "beginning with the practice of sexuality", which is widely used today, the girls often don't look very closely at who the other person is, because the character of "the other person" is not really important to them at first - because it is only about having the "beginning" "behind them". (This is then the chance of the typical "Don Juans" who know something about the psychology of girls!) On the other hand, with the "beginning á la moonbathing", which I would recommend in the meantime, the girls are likely to find out much more precisely who the other person is and above all whether it will remain with the "moonbathing". A girl will use her knowledge and her full intelligence to find someone "suitable" and then also to find out whether she can rely on "him", i.e. what kind of character he has. Therefore, it should always remain "moonbathing" and, moreover, relationships

should very often come about that are really good and that even last "forever".

And I would also ask you to consider that such a "moonbathing relationship" doesn't just happen out of the blue, but is, so to speak, the fruit of a concept that has matured organically for a long time. When I think of the girls I talked to who obviously had a real interest in traditional marriage morals (i.e. penetrative sex only in marriage), I trust them to be doing everything right here.

And now for a few details: First, about anal eroticism. I think here the pleasure counsellor is not consistent, if against penetration, then why not against it? Moreover, it seems obvious that "in the process" one is only using the other - because "in the process" one cannot even look at each other.

Is faithfulness a construct of the church? I think not, because if you start a relationship that is supposed to be a real one sensibly, then fidelity is also part of our humanity.

And about the erotic museum in the Vatican: so what? The director of the Louvre (Paris) once said that half of the museum's collection was so sexist that he couldn't show it. So other museums also have the same problem, that all kinds of things just accumulate over time. M.P.

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