



DEAR DR.

HARTMAN

Drill Happy

Hello patients, Since I last spoke to you I have received a flood of mail in response to my remarks about the shocking psychosexual damage that can occur during the stressful process of buying your first home.

It appears many of you have also come across loan-happy bank managers who don't know how to use the percentage button on their calculators, but do know how to sign you up for the personal equivalent of Victoria's debt.

And when it comes to real-estate agents, quite frankly your remarks aren't printable in a family magazine like *Australian Left Review*. Let's just say that many of you appear alarmed and outraged by the chameleon-like nature of real estate professionals.

As one of my hysterical home-seeker patients put it recently. "I hate the way agents can be creepy-crawly slime-balls one minute, offering to lie down in puddles so you won't get your feet wet, and then they spot a customer in a later model car and they knock over your toddler in their rush to shake the hand with the manicured nails!"

It would appear that some of you

feel Dr Jekyll has a stable and consistent personality when compared to your average smiling agent as he or she supervises one of those ugly bargain-basement jumble sales which are euphemistically referred to as "inner-city, low price house inspections". According to the letters I've been receiving, "Ideal opportunity for the first home buyer" usually indicates a 15-year sentence to hard labour with no remissions. "Home renovations" are the owning classes equivalent of "weekend detention".

Actually, the whole process of home purchase, expensive and stressful as it is, pales into insignificance when compared to the horrors of renovations. (The Catholics who are reading this have just crossed themselves. The rest of you have held up garlic and wooden crosses to ward off the evil spirits.)

I think we are all familiar with the latest definition of a male sexual fantasy—being able to lie in bed on a Sunday morning and think about all the home renovations you're not going to do. But I was offered a fascinating insight into the woman's point of view in a letter received the other day from a distressed reader.

This patient-to-be had started to go to bizarre lengths in her attempts to lure her partner into fulfilling his conjugal obligations. For months her man had been "up and at it" by 6 am every Sunday morning "finishing the renovations to the kitchen" which he had originally promised would take only three weekends. She had reached the stage of desperation where the idea of a professionally-installed Knebel Kitchen seemed like a very positive and aesthetically pleasing alternative. So what could she do to attract her man's attention away from the power drill and over to her love canal?

Of course she had tried the usual range of skimpy nighties and provocative sex toys, but he just brushed her and the toys aside as he reached excitedly for the latest junk mail from Black and Decker. Then she tried dressing scantily and hiding in the drum of his cement mixer so that when he turned it on he might notice her spinning around in the sand and cement and think about turning her on as well. But he just asked her to pass him another Besser Block.

Finally, she admitted defeat and asked her mother to look after the kids so she could get herself a weekend job at the local hardware store. At least that way she got to see him when he came in to buy the endless stream of "expensive little extras" which are constantly required by the inexperienced home renovator.

This sad story reflects just one strand in the complex ball of wool called "the modern woman's experience". Needless to say, in the 90s I get just as many letters from women who've chosen a very different path. These are the "home renovator" equivalents of the feminist managers who have "targeted the top" in their professional lives. Quite simply, their slogan is "If you can't beat them, join them". And so, on weekends, they take off their power padded shoulders and pick up their power tools, purchased from the Black and Decker ladies' catalogue.

They spend their weekends standing up drilling side by side with their men. It doesn't do much for their conjugal rights, but at least it keeps down the birthrate in a time of economic recession.

See you in my clinic.

Send your problems to Dr Hartman's secretary, Julie McCrossin, c/- ALR.