

Homing in on Passion

Adult novelty companies provide erotic twist to the Tupperware party concept

By Rebecca Kiester
The Sun Chronicle
October 19, 2003

It's Saturday night and Sandy and her friend Katie, two professional women in their mid-20s, are busy decorating Sandy's apartment for the party that's beginning shortly. Amid the chitchat, laughter and running back and forth from the kitchen, their friend Amy arrives.

"Guys," begins Amy, a recently engaged, 28-year-old executive assistant, "you might think I'm perverted, but those balloons sort of look like breasts."

"Amy, they are," answers Sandy, glancing to the food table decorated in anatomically correct confetti. "What do you expect? This is that sort of party."

And the illusion that this is just a run-of-the-mill get-together disappears as Sandy turns to introduce Katie and herself.

"Katie is the hostess this evening, but I am 'the goddess'," she says.

As the goddess, Sandy Blatchford is a distributor for Athena's Home Novelties, a Woonsocket, R.I. based company that sells products dedicated to the enhancement of sexual pleasure. It's named after Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom.

Tonight, Katie, who like Amy did not want her last name used, has booked Blatchford to educate, demonstrate and hopefully sell sensual and erotic enhancements and toys to her friends.

Growing trend

A cross between a modern-day Tupperware party and a slightly X-rated slumber party, adult novelty get-togethers are popping up everywhere. You may not realize it, but everyone from your co-workers to your mothers-in-law are apparently joining the fun.

The idea of gathering female friends to take part in frank discussions about intimate relationships is not unusual, but doing so with the presence of a professionally trained retailer is a relatively new, but no doubt growing phenomenon. Athena's reports that it has blossomed from 10 to 200 distributors since its inception, and now has distributors in 22 states.

Sex shop alternative

The parties, Blatchford explains, are designed to offer women an alternative to visiting male run and dominated adult sex shops.

"We really do educate," she says. "It's classy. It's not raunchy or dirty. It's a private, girlfriend get-together in a comfortable atmosphere."

"It's definitely grown and it's professional," adds Amy, who has been to two of Blatchford's previous parties. "It serves a lot of different people and it opens up everyone's minds," she says.

Including Katie's. Blatchford enlisted her to be an assistant at one of her parties, and Katie was hooked on the idea of having her own.

"It sounded like a lot of fun, to get my friends together," she said. The party is thrown in the hostess's home for anywhere from 4 to 60 people and for any reason – birthday, bachelorette party, bridal shower, etc... As incentive, hostesses receive 10 percent of the evening's sales in product merchandise.

"And," said Katie, "I already know what I want.

That, said Blatchford, is one of her goals for every party: to help women realize what they want, or what she can give them, thereby helping them achieve a level of satisfaction in their intimate relationships.

"Women come here, think it's a joke, but they see I'm just a normal girl, and they'll come to me with their personal problems. That is the biggest reason I do this, to help someone," she said.

And not just in their romantic relationships. She also uses the job to encourage discussion among friends.

"This is an opportunity or excuse to open up a whole new world, a whole new relationship with their friends. It's about bringing out the goddess in every woman," she said.

To become a goddess, Blatchford underwent extensive training, including observing other goddesses at work. She then purchased a starter kit, which included items for demonstration and for carrying stock.

It was a job she says she was made for.

"I love being the center of attention. It was the right time. I was single, had a good day job, and I decided to invest in myself," Blatchford says.

The investment, she adds, was worth it. "It's fabulous, so much fun."

Range of guests

At Blatchford's apartment, the guests include married, single and some same-sex-oriented women.

The party begins with an information sessions and distribution of catalogs, letting guests know exactly what they can expect. Blatchford's enthusiasm puts most everyone at ease immediately, and laughter surrounds the room before the first "hat box" is opened.

The boxes contain three "levels" of products: the first, lotions and bath accessories; the second, some erotic enhancements; and the third, toys. Broken up by icebreaker games, strictly PG-rated, the items are described, explained and demonstrated when possible.

"This is the expectation," Blatchford says. "You can look at (the product), touch it, taste it, so you know what you're getting."

During the course of the demonstration, any nervousness disappears and soon the guests are offering their own advice and tidbits to each other.

"I have to say, I am having a lot of fun," said one woman who wished to remain anonymous, though she was no longer nervous about being at the party.

Guests are advised to write down items they might purchase on their catalog wish list, which they can use when the show and tell section is over and the ordering begins.

If guests choose to purchase any items, they go one at a time (or two, if they are comfortable doing so) into the ordering room and make their selections behind closed doors. In Sandy's ordering room, an elaborate display of in-stock items is laid out on her bed and bureau. If a guest wishes to order these, they can take them home that night in plain brown bags. Items can also be ordered and shipped directly to the customer in non-distinctive boxes.

"It's strictly confidential. No one will know what you bought unless you share," Blatchford says.

And who are her biggest customers?

"Most everyone usually buys at least one thing, but older women (35-50) are the best customers and the target audience," she says, explaining that that age group is more comfortable with themselves and willing to try new things.

Amy has yet to reach that demographic, but she has nevertheless attained that comfort level. She had a wish list and was planning on a purchase while offering words of encouragement, to women who have not yet been to one of these parties.

"Just come and try it. It changes your thought process, it's fun. It's the year 2003 – we're ready," she said.