

# PAPER

**I**t's September, back-to-school time for the students at Miss Vera's Finishing School for Boys Who Want to Be Girls. Enrollment peaks in the fall at the Chelsea academy, where Dean of Students Veronica Vera welcomes men "who are looking for the woman inside of themselves."

## Venus Envy

Sitting in her pink-walled studio, surrounded by mirrors, wigs, dresses, high heels and silicone "breasts," I'm enjoying the captivating company of the sexy, witty and charming Miss Vera. "What these men want is to understand the female part of themselves in terms of their sexual energy," says Vera. Naturally, a lot of students

wanted to go out as women, so field trips became an important part of the curriculum.

"Just about all of the people who come here have been dressing up since their childhood," Vera says. "Many of them have never seen themselves totally transformed, so it's a very exciting moment for us when they confront their greatest fear and desire, look in the mirror and see that *she* is beautiful." She adds, "I've had very straight guys look in the mirror and say, 'I'd fuck me.'"

As to the constituency of her "college of female knowledge," Vera surmises, "Right now, the student body is 95 percent heterosexual, and about 60 percent of them are married."

Now in its fifth year, Vera figures that the academy has educated about 400 students from around the world. She helped to transform soap actor Frank Beatty, who was in drag for several months on *The Guiding Light*, and Johnny Depp got information from the academy for his portrayal of Ed Wood. Vera adds, "Dennis Rodman has an open invitation to come here anytime he likes."

After graduating from college

with a degree in English, the New Jersey native moved to New York and got a job on Wall Street as an over-the-counter trader. "Mostly I seduced horny order clerks in the big board houses over the telephone," she recalls. But she always wanted to write, and finally submitted a story about a man's first experience with oral sex, based on the men she knew on Wall Street, to a friend who edited *Penthouse Variations*. "That opened up the whole field of sex-as-research for me," she says. Vera recently signed a contract with Doubleday to publish a book that has already been optioned by Katie Face, Tony Danza's production company.

"The whole concept of the academy is that women have a lot to teach men," says Vera. "Our founding philosophy is 'Venus Envy,' and the school motto is 'Cherchez la Femme.'" Unable to resist a parting shot, she quips, "Remember, for every woman who burned her bra, there's a man ready to wear one."

For more information, call 242-6449. For over-the-phone instruction, dial 1-900-884-VERA (\$2.99 per minute; over 18 only). ★

BY TOM MURRIN



Veronica Vera grants men's wishes

Back to school with Veronica Vera.

photo: eric kroll