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MAGAZINE

Viagra: Is it ruining your sex life?

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When genius runs
in the family

Behind the scenes
with Trinny and
Susannah



They're tough-talking and posh, and they're on a mission to revolutionise the way women dress. Fiona Neill meets TV's Trinny and Susannah.

Some time halfway through the Trinny and Susannah experience I am invited upstairs into Trinny's bedroom to chat while they get dressed. I am mildly fazed. This wasn't part of the plan and seems a bit intimate, even though she extends the invitation standing by the kitchen table wearing nothing more than a thong.

This is the moment when they will try to touch my breasts and tell me that I am wearing the wrong bra size, I fret. Everyone has warned me about this and, having watched most episodes of their latest TV series (*Trinny & Susannah Undress*, shown in Australia on The LifeStyle Channel), I know there is a strong likelihood of a mauling. But they are such entertaining company that it seems worth taking the risk.

Besides, sartorially speaking, the normal rules of engagement were suspended when I arrived at Trinny's home in upmarket Kensington, west London, to find her dressed in pale-pink floral pyjamas, several sizes too small, with her three-year-old daughter Lyla sitting on her knee in a matching pair. Surely an infringement of every one of their famous style rules. "I know, I know," said Trinny, laughing. "But my daughter insists."

So I follow them upstairs and sit on the edge of the bed because it is the only surface in the room that doesn't have something on it. And in the event I'm reprieved. Trinny, who is one of the most energetic and driven people I have ever met, is fully concentrated on putting outfits together in preparation for a photoshoot to showcase their new coat and trouser range. She holds a beige shirt that she has plucked from her wardrobe against Susannah.

"Shit colour," she says emphatically, before rushing off again. "I'm going to do a pee that might turn into a poo," she tells

us in her perfectly rounded vowels, heading into the bathroom. Trinny's husband, businessman Jonny Elichao, is apparently asleep on the top floor of the house, dispatched during the night for snoring too loudly.

It's 9am, and by all accounts an average day in the Trinny and Susannah roadshow – which, as well as this interview, includes a lunchtime Botox session for Trinny, a school sports day for Susannah (she has three children, aged eight, six and three), followed by filming for their series on body shape and a charity do in the evening. Lesser mortals would weep at such a schedule. Susannah says she often does, but Trinny persuades her it will be fine.

"Sometimes I feel totally overwhelmed," says Susannah, who suffers from a combination of working-mother guilt and what she describes as a natural tendency towards laziness. "When the schedule arrives I have panic attacks and Trinny will sit me down and explain the reality. Once I'm in it, I'm fine. With Trinny it's the reverse."

"I'm calm on the outside and a flood inside," interjects Trinny. "In situations, Susannah is an amazing rock."

That, I think, sums up the only slight discrepancy between the people you see on television and their off-screen personas: Trinny, 43, is even more energetic (she says she is "very manic"), a classic workaholic, and Susannah, 45, is more laid-back and tolerant. Other than that, they are uncannily the same.

Beside me, Susannah stands in a pink bra, pulling on an elegant black tuxedo coat from their range, which she describes as "prescriptive clothing". There are trousers and coats designed to shrink big bums, reduce thighs or flatten tummies. Some do all three. "For us, it's all about shape, and

how that is going to cure a bodily defect," explains Susannah, who is fond of medical analogies. She is trying to see past a glass cabinet filled with vintage handbags into the mirror. Trinny is definitely a hoarder. Her shoe cupboard is open and I lose count when I reach 78. "We're like clothing doctors," Susannah says. "It's like going to a doctor and saying: 'I've got f-king huge hips, what can I do?' And the doctor prescribes a coat that covers up the hips and makes your waist look tiny." The coat she is wearing is particularly good for "big tits", she says. It looks great.

A clothing range is the next logical phase in their mission to revolutionise women's dress sense by convincing us to dress to suit our shape. It follows the huge success of their Magic Knickers, four best-selling books, and all those television programs where ugly ducklings are turned into swans by reinventing their wardrobe.

SINCE THEY BEGAN A NEWSPAPER column in Britain 13 years ago, advocating affordable mainstream fashion for women and using their own bodies to illustrate what might suit different shapes, Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine have slowly moved down the food chain to become unlikely clothing advisers to the masses and champions of the female form with all its imperfections. They don't advocate dieting. Their target audience is "the kind of women who never put themselves first", says Susannah. They fervently believe that we can all look good if we can learn to wear what suits us. In a curious way they have democratised fashion.

They have an almost messianic mission to change the way women think about how they dress, especially those who have neither the time nor the money to think about themselves. Although Susannah jokes

The STYLE COUNCIL

FOREST MENU

of the clay..... £1.20

st Beef, Boiled Potatoes, cabbage.....

st Lamb Boiled Potatoes, cabbage.....

st Pork, Boiled Potatoes, cabbage.....

ARRIED BEEF & RICE..... £4.40

ver Bacon, chips..... £4.40

iver Mash, Onions..... £4.50

Chicken, chips, Peas..... £4.50

Spagetti Bolognaise..... £3.60

Sausage Mash peas..... £3.60

Sausage Mash onions..... £3.50

Egg, Bacon, chips..... £4.40

Hammon, Steak, chips, Peas..... £4.50

Fish and chips..... £4.50

Hamburgers, chips, Peas, Onion..... £4.50

OMELETTES

Mushroom om, chips..... £3.80

Ham, om, chips..... £3.80

Cheese, om, chips..... £3.80

Tomato, om, chips..... £3.80

Spam, om, chips..... £3.80

Spanish, om, chips..... £4.30

MANY MORE MEAL

INS



"We're like clothing doctors," says Susannah (right, with Trinny). "It's like going to a doctor and saying: 'I've got f--king huge hips, what can I do?'"

about wanting to make "shitloads of money", and Trinny is fearsomely ambitious and talks about things like "longevity of career", there is no doubting their passion for what they do. Says Trinny: "If you ask anyone why they are driven, it's not just money, it's not just a need to prove themselves, it's a combination of things; and for us, if we can get women to look at themselves in terms of shape, not size, if Suze and I achieve that as our little gravestone thing, then that would be a f--king big achievement."

Their exhaustive investigations into the relationship between clothes and body shape are reminiscent of the 19th-century writer Isabella Beeton's scientific approach to cooking and cleaning. In an experiment for their next TV series, they discovered that in a group of 1000 women, 976 were wearing the wrong-sized bra. Their book-signings take hours because they spend hours giving advice. Susannah has even been known to lend her bra (she is a big fan of Elle Macpherson's range) for other women to try on.

THEY ARE, HOWEVER, UNLIKELY advocates, because despite their protestations about big tits (Susannah), and lack of tits (Trinny), by the standards of most 40-something mothers they have amazing bodies. Trinny is on the wrong side of skinny, but not anorexic, one of those people who burn calories because they never sit down. She says her idea of relaxing is tidying her wardrobe. "Trinny is a natural worrier," says Susannah. "Once the thing she's worried about has been resolved, she'll start to worry about something else."

Susannah, in contrast, is on the right side of voluptuous and more laid-back. She loses things like credit cards and keys. When I ask her if she has anyone to organise her, she answers wryly: "Trinny." She works out with a trainer three times a week, and despite complaining about rolls of fat around her stomach, it looks pretty flat to me. But they illustrate the fact that few women are satisfied with their bodies – and the books that followed their huge success with the BBC-TV series *What Not to Wear* prove they are not afraid to have their own flaws photographed if it helps to get a point across.

But mostly they are improbable because their democratic fashion credentials are so at odds with their privileged backgrounds (think country houses, ski chalets and very famous friends). They first met at a dinner party given by Susannah's then boyfriend, Viscount Linley, the Queen's nephew (other previous boyfriends include cricketer Imran Khan). Susannah was a kind of It Girl of the early '80s and a favourite of Princess Margaret, Viscount Linley's mother.

Both have wealthy parents – Trinny's father was a banker and her grandfather, Sir John Duncason, ran British Steel during the war; Susannah is the daughter of Joseph Constantine, a shipping magnate who'd been through two of the great institutions of the British upper class,

Eton and the Coldstream Guards. Susannah went to St Mary's Wantage, the classic posh girls' boarding school, which she says she hated because she was homesick, missed her parents and animals, and was too shy and insecure to make friends. She tells a funny story about the school writing to her to ask whether she would come back and speak to current pupils about her success. "I wrote, 'No f-king way' on the top of the letter, and my PA accidentally sent it back," she says. "They wrote a horrified letter back saying they will never let me anywhere near the school again."

After school, Susannah did a year of Montessori training and drifted into PR, then worked for various clothes designers and became a style consultant for Harrods before heading to *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper in London, where she wrote pieces for the sports pages. When she met Trinny – who had worked briefly for a commodities firm in the City, and who had the idea for the column – she had the contacts and experience to make it happen.

IT'S NOT SURPRISING, GIVEN their backgrounds, that their natural stomping ground should be west London's fashionable, well-heeled Kensington and Chelsea. And indeed, there is no attempt to shy away from the class issue. There are no faux East End accents. Trinny and Susannah are typical of those strident, uninhibited, eccentric women who characterise the British ruling class.

Sounding like a bossy, horsey woman clearly isn't an impediment to a successful television career. Millions of people watch their programs. And there are precedents: the *Two Fat Ladies* spring to mind. But it could have presented a barrier to dealing with ordinary folks, who might have resented the plummy accents and acerbic comments. Because for those of you who haven't seen *What Not to Wear* or *Trinny and Susannah Undress*, they can be breathtakingly direct.

They have no compunction about telling someone their outfit is "shit" or asking a couple how often they have sex. It is difficult to understand why people would put themselves through that kind of public mortification at the hands of two bossy, posh birds. But they seem to bond with their subjects, and although caustic, they are never gratuitously nasty and always compliment them on their good points.

Their subjects genuinely seem pleased with the results. "When it comes to aesthetics and how a woman looks, they will take anything. But none of it is gratuitous. It's totally from the heart," says Trinny.

Their new TV series has come in for particular criticism. While *What Not to Wear* cleverly exposed the complex

emotional relationship between what women wear and how they feel, the next incarnation pushes the boundaries much further with its aim of helping couples resolve relationship difficulties by transforming the way they dress. Many of the female participants in particular have pitifully low self-esteem. Doubts have been raised about whether Trinny and Susannah are properly qualified to deal with the depth of problems exposed.

But it makes gripping, and often excruciating, viewing. The format involves them deconstructing a couple's emotional relationship from the way they dress and interact with each other. There are plenty of direct questions about their sex life. "Are you gay?" Trinny asks one shocked-looking husband when she discovers he and his wife sleep in separate bedrooms.



Says Trinny (left, with husband Jonny Elichaooff) of their acerbic comments: "None of it is gratuitous. It's totally from the heart." Right: Susannah with husband Sten Bertelsen.

The emotional climax of the show is "The Naked Truth", when couples stand naked behind a screen and use a hand-held camera to highlight bits of each other's bodies they particularly like. In one case, a woman who'd had a mastectomy shows her husband the scar for the first time in six years. In another, a wife admits to having an affair. Then, just when it all feels way too voyeuristic, there is catharsis, as husband and wife undergo a total transformation under Trinny and Susannah's watchful eye. Although in every case participants look infinitely better afterwards, it is difficult to believe some of the deep-rooted unhappiness exposed by the program can truly be remedied by a makeover.

Trinny and Susannah clearly think they're helping, though. "Susannah and I have always felt that the psychology of clothing does make people change a mindset, so if we use that and we help someone feel more confident about themselves and build them up, that's

great," says Trinny. "That's the qualification we have."

What is perhaps most revealing about the new series is the empathy that they have for the people involved, particularly the women. They both say the filming is emotionally draining. Susannah says she often goes home "in pieces", but Trinny cries more.

There are still trenchant comments, but they are tempered by an unexpected compassion. "You have got to stop seeing yourself as a victim, take control and take responsibility," Trinny tells one woman. One senses it's the kind of thing she has learnt from experience.

I ask whether they can relate to these problems because of difficulties they have overcome in their own lives. Perhaps surprising, given her apparent on-screen confidence, Susannah says



she has suffered from bouts of shyness and insecurity since she was a child. Endearingly, she says that even now she feels ill at ease at parties unless she is with Trinny, or with her husband, Danish entrepreneur Sten Bertelsen. "In social situations I still feel scared," she says. "My best friend and husband give me the freedom to be myself."

Susannah describes how she became very close to a 24-year-old mother in the series who suffered from anxiety. "I identified with her a lot. I couldn't step out of it. There was something inside her that I felt in my solar plexus. I knew there was a part of her that came from the same place I did. I don't know if it was the vulnerability, the insecurity. I don't know if it was something to do with her past, but I felt it. I was close to tears with her a lot of the time."

She looks close to tears as she talks about it now. I ask whether her empathy might have stemmed from the fact that she suffered from

postnatal depression. "I did have therapy sessions. It's not something I want to talk about," she says.

TRINNY HAS HAD HER FAIR share of difficulties, too. At six she was sent away to what she describes as a "cruel" and "sadistic" boarding school with her elder sister (she's the youngest of six children, the eldest three from her father's first marriage), until her family went to live in Germany three years later. She had terrible acne from her early teens until her early 20s, when she took a course of Roaccutane and had laser treatment to remove the scars. Most significantly, she was an alcoholic and addict of one kind or another – she is reluctant to talk about the specifics – from her late teens until she was 26. She still regularly attends Alcoholics Anonymous. She has had periods in rehab and therapy. She also underwent nine rounds of IVF until she conceived Lyla, and suffered two miscarriages.

It's not territory she is comfortable talking about. "I much prefer in my friendships that people come and tell me their problems than I tell them mine," she says. "I've always felt uncomfortable in that role, in the role of revealing too much of myself."

When I ask how she can reconcile her apparently happy childhood with the descent into addiction, she says staring at me steely-eyed that "it is an impossible question to answer". Susannah interjects with a question about the outfits for the photoshoot. They are very protective. If they sense the other is uncomfortable with a line of questioning, they change the subject.

They are stronger together than apart. If anything, their off-screen rapport is deeper than their TV partnership, perhaps because it is rooted in genuine friendship. "We were not manufactured for TV," says Trinny. They even go on holiday together with their families so that they can have quality time away from work.

Ultimately their friendship is one of the things that makes them most attractive. Women can relate to it. And it is the kind of friendship that is inclusive of other people. Interestingly, most of the people who work with them regularly have been with them for years.

By the end of the interview, I pluck up the courage to ask Susannah whether she thinks my bra fits. She stares at my chest: "You're wearing a 34C and you should be in a 32DD." I get home and check. She's right. ☉

The Body Shape Bible will be published in December (Weidenfeld & Nicolson/Hachette Livre Australia, \$39.95). Trinny & Susannah Original Magic Knickers are available nationwide: www.theoriginalmagicknickers.com.au, or freephone 1800 140 295.