


# BATHROOMS ON THE GO

# **Privacy be damned!**

**Something's happening in bathrooms at clubs and eateries around the world—and the news for those who guard their quiet moments isn't good.**



**It's happening right before your eyes. In Paris the Café Costes has taken a French**

**tradition — people-watching — and turned it into a spectator sport. Glass restroom stalls, a mirrored *pissoir*, and mirrored walls make certain that not a single tug on a roll of *papier hygiénique* goes unnoticed. At a private club in the Southern U.S., large magnifying lenses have been installed over every other urinal in the men's room so that anyone peeking next door, so to speak, will see *much* more than he would ever have expected.**

**A few places have taken the bathroom to an even higher (or maybe lower) art form. Not content to merely invade customer privacy, they've decided to entertain him or her while they're at it. At New York City's P.J. Clarke's, for instance, management has thoughtfully placed large cakes of ice in the urinals so that customers can do a little freelance "sculpting" while they're taking care of business. Fortunately, no one has yet attempted to abscond with a work of art.**

**Other establishments have gone even further. Just take a peek:**



## BOTH SIDES NOW

**W**hen a business executive recently excused himself from the table at Felty's restaurant in Minneapolis, nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

Two minutes later, though, while he was standing at the urinal, he saw something that nearly made him lose control. He found himself face to face with the rest of his party: three of his employees, including his lovely blond secretary, were standing on the other side of the chest-high window above the urinal at that very moment—laughing, pointing wildly, and calling out to him.

That sort of thing goes on all the time at Felty's, of course, but for the uninitiated the fun can sometimes be a little disconcerting. The window above the urinal, it turns out, isn't a window at all;

it's a two-way mirror. And it's there to entertain both insiders and outsiders.

For men standing at the urinal, looking into the eyes of someone on the other side of the glass is a common occurrence. The window looks out on an atrium in a shopping and office complex, so passersby frequently stop to groom themselves in front of what they think is a simple mirror. Often a man will find himself standing face to face with a woman combing her hair or just admiring herself. Other passersby—aware that the mirror is actually two-way glass—make it a point to pretend to be able to see in, just on the off chance that it will embarrass whoever is standing there.

Of course, the women have their own two-way mirror that also looks out on the atrium. But because of anatomical differences, they always turn their backs to the action.

# GHOUL FRIDAY

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hoever first said it was right: a woman's name is Vanity—at least at Dante's Down the Hatch in Atlanta, where a little commonplace preen-

ing can lead to serious consequences.

The women's restroom at Dante's looks normal enough: tile floor, acoustic ceiling, and metal stalls. Compared with the restaurant's 11,000-gallon moat, replete with snapping crocodiles and turtles, in fact, the bathroom is downright boring. Except for one thing: the full-length mirror just to the left of the sink. Few women can resist its tug, and when they finally do weaken—perhaps to comb their hair or to apply a little makeup—something unexpected happens. Suddenly their own reflection disappears. In its place a horrible image appears—an ugly woman, a witch in a black cape, actually, with a crooked nose and warts.

"What are you looking in here for?" the witch may say. "I've seen better locks on a mop."

Or maybe the witch will be in a more sarcastic mood. "Dante wants me to sing with the trio," she may say, "but I can't break away from watching you primp yourself in the mirror."

The witch, of course, is the brainchild of Dante's eccentric owner, Dante Stephensen, who fashioned the waxen witch behind the mirror after seeing a similar figure in Merlin's, a bar in California. There, Dante says, he had an eventful encounter with Merlin the Magician—and decided his place could use its own ghoul.

Not everyone, of course, is amused by the talking mirror. Dante's manager, Jerry Margolis, remembers a woman who stormed out of the bathroom, complaining loudly. "She was insulted," Margolis says. "She said she couldn't believe we'd put that in there. I guess she must have been primping pretty badly at the time."



Dante's magic mirror: Not everyone is amused by the talking witch.

CHARLIE ARCHAMBAULT

he fun begins long before you step inside the bathroom at the Safe House in Milwaukee. At the front door you're met by a woman who looks

as if she might know James Bond. Her name is Miss Money Penny, and unless you know the password, you'll be instructed to do one of a variety of peculiar tasks she has up her counterspy sleeve. Maybe she'll ask you to look under a table. Then, when you get down on your knees, she'll press a secret button that raises the table to the ceiling. Or maybe you'll be lucky and she'll simply open a secret passageway. But whatever happens, you can bet that the rest of the customers inside the spy-house restaurant will be watching you on closed-circuit monitors.

With all the gimmicks in the Safe House—the moving walls, escape-hatch telephone booths, talking gargoyles—no one enters the restrooms without keeping his guard up. One of the two men's restrooms, in fact, isn't even a room; it's a door that opens up on a solid brick wall.

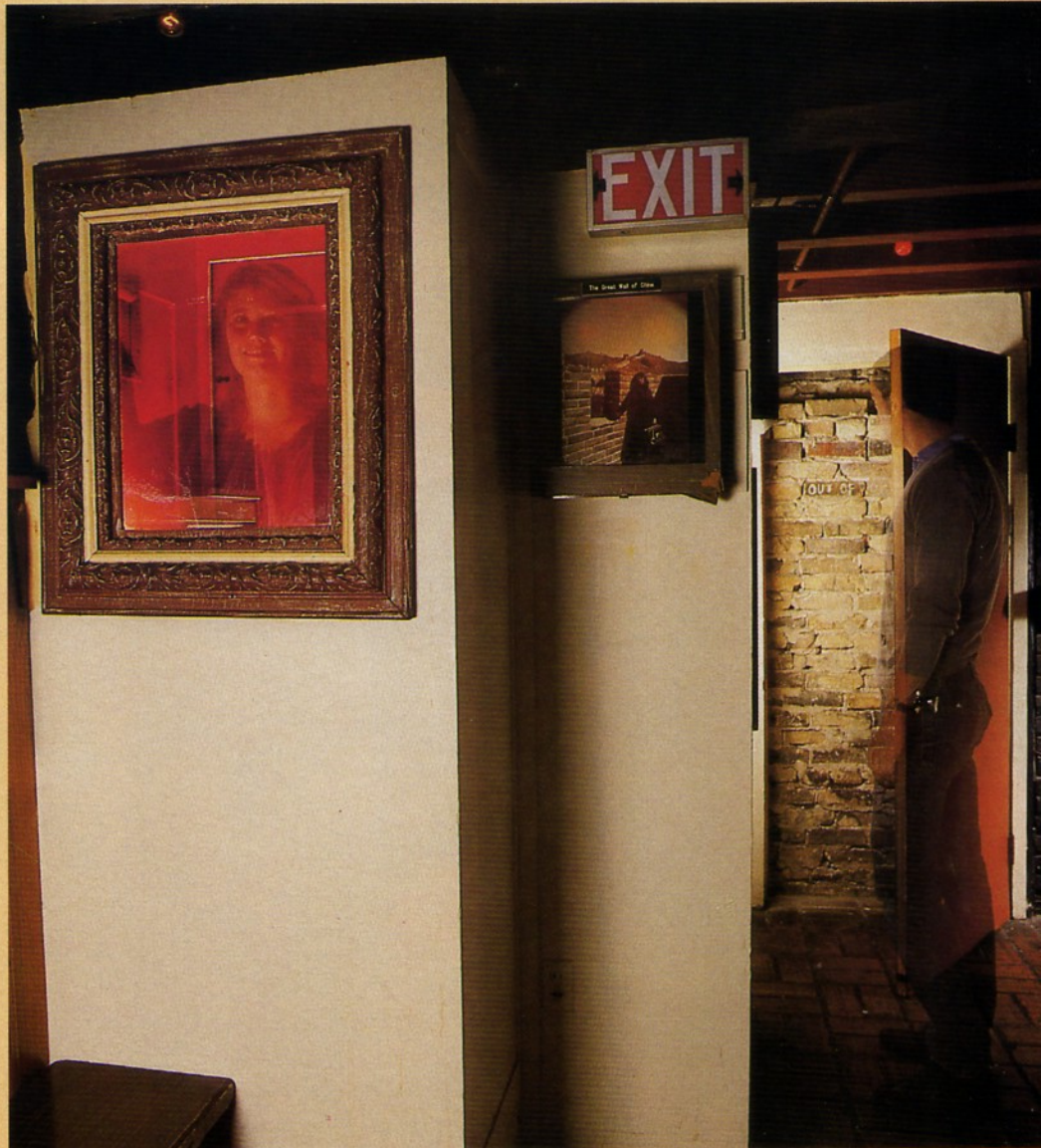
The women's rooms aren't much better. One is kept dark—and for good reason: should a woman turn on the light before realizing that the mirrors are two-way glass, customers seated near the bar will be able to see in. Experienced visitors simply keep the lights off so that they're able to look out on the unsuspecting customers nearby. Others are more imaginative—and daring. They strip in darkness and then flash the lights (and customers) for a brief second.

The other women's room is set up strictly with the customer in mind. Hanging on one wall is an enlarged *Cosmopolitan* foldout of Burt Reynolds in the buff. Well, almost anyway. Part of Burt is covered by a red metal heart, and next to that is a sign in eight different languages instructing the more curious to keep their hands off. DON'T PRESS HERE, it reads. HIER NIET DRÜCKEN. NE PAS APPUYER ICI. NO OPRIMIR AQUI. No matter in what language the warning is written, though, some curious woman will inevitably look beneath the heart. When she does, it triggers a siren and red light in the nearby cocktail lounge, alerting customers to look for the woman when she comes out of the restroom. Then, if all goes according to plan, she'll wonder why everyone is smiling at her.

## HEART ATTACK



Milwaukee's Safe House, right: A Burt Reynolds prank. Below: A bathroom door leading nowhere.



# WATER CLOSET

**T**he men's restroom at the Madonna Inn in San Luis Obispo, California, just may be one of Southern California's busiest tourist traps. Every day at least one tour bus stops there and unloads dozens of passengers in front of the West Coast landmark so that they can visit the restroom. They don't even want to *use* it; they simply want to *see* it.

Like much of the rest of the hotel complex, the men's room is built around large stones taken from the same

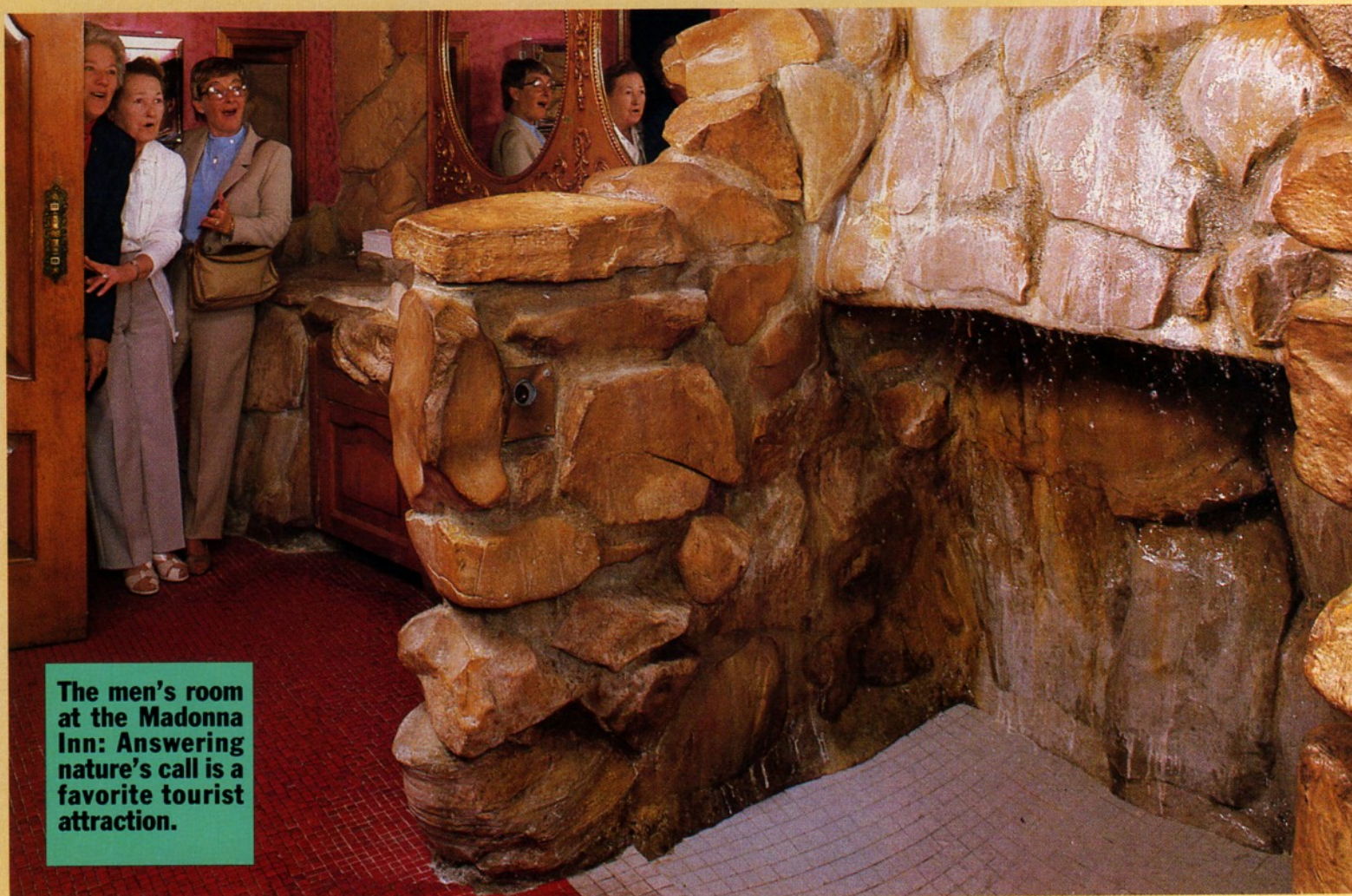
quarry the Madonna family used to help pave some of the first highways linking the San Francisco Bay area with Southern California. It's the urinal, though—which is really more like a grotto—that draws the biggest crowds. It features a waterfall that's activated when a man steps up to it. Soon he feels as if he's *really* answering nature's call. When he steps out of the beam of light, the water flows for a few flushing minutes and then shuts off.

For some reason, though, the urinal is more popular with women visitors than with men. "Sometimes 40 or 50 women are in there at one time," says Alfredo Escareno, a longtime janitor at

the Madonna Inn. "Men who have to use it may have to wait a little while until they come out."

Several months ago, Escareno recalls, a group of Catholic nuns visited the men's room and left visibly impressed. More recently, an 18-year-old girl visited the room with her parents. Afterward she told them, "That was like no other men's room I've ever been in." "And just how many men's rooms," her father asked, "have you been in?" ■

DON RAY's last article for Tables was "What Happened to the Spanish Kitchen?" in the January issue.



The men's room at the Madonna Inn: Answering nature's call is a favorite tourist attraction.