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SF Gallery Celebrates Sensuality

By [Sara Johnson](#)

Daily Cal Staff Writer

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[Tim Maloney](#)/Senior Staff

Three performers tantalize guests during Sensualite at 111 Minna Gallery in San Francisco. Therapists Celeste Hirschman and Danielle Harel hosted the event to promote their new book.

For some Bay Area couples, Saturday night's date meant sushi, cocktails and "cockfidence."

Sex and relationship therapists Celeste Hirschman and Danielle Harel held their book-launch-slash-sex-party, "Sensualite," at 111 Minna Gallery in San Francisco Saturday. Their new book, "Cockfidence: The Extraordinary Lover's Guide to Being the Man You Want to Be and Driving Women Wild," was the theme of the evening, which included live performances, an intimacy workshop and dancing.

After some drinks and small-talk, guests were led in a few ice-breakers - namely back-scratches, belly-kisses and arm-caresses - all to the encouraging words of the therapist duo.

"Notice how you feel now, now that you've been touched," Hirschman cooed.

Clad in a gold sequined bra and matching skirt, the first of the evening's two belly dancers swayed and shook to Eartha Kitt's "Proceed with Caution" and M.I.A.'s "Paper Planes" in a more modern, flirtatious version of the traditional dance form.

The evening also included performances of poi spinning, a type of juggling using rope with lighted balls at the end. The burlesque troupe, The Twilight Vixen Revue, also made an appearance in beige towels, pumps and little else, teasing guests to the 1950s song "Mr. Sandman."

The featured performance of Saturday's event was a dakini tea ceremony, although tea was an afterthought. Three women in white fishnet bodysuits and matching lace panties and pasties kneeled in a circle and tossed glitter and rose petals in rise-and-fall motions. The women concluded their performance with a kind of receiving line, seductively gracing party guests with kisses and glitter.

111 Minna was an ideal location. Tucked away in an alley in SoMa, the unmarked gallery gave the impression of taboo-like invisibility. Inside, the double-barred venue catered to the disc-jockeying, dancing crowd in one room and the electronic-music, intimate-convo group in the other.

Party guests were not members of some clandestine underground sex scene. Middle-aged couples and young singles seemed equally pleased with the party.

The evening's noshes were intentionally aphrodisiac - sushi, figs, cornbread with honey and cookies. They seemed to have an effect.

"People tend to be very prudish and conservative," said Alex Sousa, a lawyer from Sunnyvale. "You are going to die - you might as well have fun."

As the book's title suggests, "Cockfidence" is geared towards men and their relationships with women. Hirschman, who has a master's degree in human sexuality studies, said the book covers topics such as controlling ejaculation and men's relationship to porn.

Hirschman and Harel are careful, however, to stress that their work is not limited strictly to sex. The therapists work to help their clients live an "ecstatic" and "passionate" life.

Hirschman used the example of using "the pussy as (an) oracle."

"If something tastes really good, you may feel tingling in your pussy," she said. The therapists stress the importance of recognizing this aspect of sexuality.

"People do not know how to really harness this energy," said Harel, who holds a doctoral degree in human sexuality. "We bring people back to their source - to their bodies."

For college students, Hirschman has three pieces of wisdom - explore your sexuality, communicate what you want and need from your partner and don't do anything that you don't want to do. This goes for men and women alike.

"We women could use a little cockfidence too ... so let's whip it out," she said at the party.

Tags: sex, 111 minna gallery, Sex Issue 2011, SoMa

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