

Sunday



Learn to strip

WHY DON'T YOU?

With a little help from an ex-stripper, Kathy Buchanan discovers there's a heck of a lot more to dirty dancing than just taking your clothes off

I'm no prude, but the thought of stripping in front of anyone – except possibly my boyfriend – is about as appealing as receiving a lap dance from an overexcited Anna Nicole Smith. So, I approach Dance Central in Sydney's Surry Hills with much trepidation, not to mention a terrible sense of *deja vu*. After all, the last time I danced anywhere – apart from drunkenly in a club – was as an ungraceful, flat-footed, eight-year-old who sullenly accepted the "best listener" award in ballet class.

I really do love my curves, but that doesn't mean I want to flaunt them in front of strangers. So I'm relieved when my "stripping mistress", Annetta Luce, a petite ex-New York City stripper, tells me and the other six women here that stripping isn't *always* about taking off your clothes. It's about getting in touch with our sensuous sides. Whew!

After all, most of us here just want tips on how to feel sexier (for ourselves) and how to be sexier (for our partners), not to secure lucrative sideline jobs. Luce tells us the first rule we need to learn is that understatement can be truly sexually potent. She pumps up the music and we slowly strut around, hips swivelling, and breathily repeating in unison, "Rat-atat-TAT, rat-atat-TAT, rat-atat-TAT." All the others click into their "sexy zone" instantly but I shake with nerves, my mouth goes dry and I feel silly strutting around like a Pussycat Doll.

Every now and then, I get a burst of confidence and flick my ponytail dramatically, so I at least *look* as though I'm making an effort to get in touch with my inner hot chick. I even have a little fun with it by pretending I'm one of the overconfident, if not particularly talented, hoochie-mama backup dancers from a 1990s Peter Andre music video.

Annetta soon thinks we're ready to explore the most important aspect of stripping: allowing ourselves to be seen. As a group, we do an impromptu, slow-motion, sultry dance to pounding music. Then something utterly horrendous happens. Luce announces it's time for each of us to perform individual routines in front of everybody.

Suddenly, I feel the need to vomit. Some of the women – who are all shapes, professions, ages and sizes – are hot-to-trot sexy in their performances. Meanwhile, wearing my green silk bathrobe from Chinatown over jeans and a daggy jumper, I hide in the corner and hope that Luce will forget about me, but she doesn't.

I desperately cover my nerves by throwing an ultra-serious and sexy *Zoolander*-style look to my "audience". I take out my elastic band and toss my long hair back for dramatic effect. My stripping mistress has taught us that the real mystery and allure is in the tease, but it's clear I'm not fooling anyone. The class apparently takes pity on me and my slightly repressed sexuality; a 20-something girl stands up to save me, turning my dubious solo performance into a teasing showgirl duet. I'm not sure what to do, so I dip, then swivel my hips for effect before throwing myself on the floor and rolling around for awhile. I throw a silk scarf in the air and then strike a sexy pose for the big finale.

While I may *never* give another public performance like this, when the class is over, I definitely have some va-va-voom in my step. Maybe some day, my lucky guy will get a very special, private performance. Until then, I think I'll save my striptease for Peter Andre's next big hit.

NEED TO KNOW

High point: not taking my clothes off. **What they don't tell you:** you'll striptease for your classmates. **Don't forget to bring:** attitude, comfy clothes and a silky robe or sarong that feels good on your skin. **To know more:** in NSW, contact Dance Central, who run drop-in Showgirl Dance lessons on Tuesday and Friday evenings for \$16 per one-hour class; call (02) 9319 2268 or visit www.dancecentral.com.au. In Victoria, Pole Divas runs striptease courses, \$110 for a four-week workshop or \$45 for a two-hour class; phone (03) 9529 3399 or visit www.poledivas.com.au.