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RANT #101

Why Must Women's Restrooms Be So Gross?

Do I just have a sensitive gag reflex, or does every woman cringe when walking into a public bathroom? It starts with the smell. I don't mean urine; I'm talking about that heavy deodorizer that smells like Berries 'n' Cream. Who was the sanitation expert who came up with that one? Nothing smells as clean as clean itself and until someone invents a deodorizer that smells like clean, the only way to get that clean smell is to — shock — CLEAN.

Once I've adjusted to the smell, I face the challenge of picking a stall. I've taken to slowly pushing the door open while standing a good two feet outside. This affords me the opportunity to survey the site without entering and make a quick retreat if necessary. Reasons for retreat include but are not limited to: anything in the toilet other than water; anything on the seat, any liquid — yellow or colorless — on the rim in that gap at the front of the seat, any feminine hygiene products laying on the back of the toilet. I really don't think my standards are too high, yet often after surveying the row of stalls I am forced to lower them and go

with the least objectionable situation.

While I'm squatting there (who sits?), I have a look around. Wouldn't you agree that the concept of a clean bathroom extends beyond the rim? People who clean restrooms should check their work by sitting on each toilet and taking in the view. If I'm lucky, the worst I see is dirt, hair and scum accumulated in the tile grout and at the bottom of the stall legs. Often on the floor there is water from a leaky toilet. Or a tampon applicator (I wonder if the woman who left it there was afraid to touch the disposal bin).

Sometimes the worst bathrooms are in restaurants. To be fair, these bathrooms probably aren't any filthier than most, but one can't help making a correlation between the state of the restroom and the cleanliness of the kitchen. There is nothing more disconcerting than finishing a good meal only to find the bathroom is one step above an outhouse. Many restaurateurs fail to realize that the ladies' room rates right up there with entrée presentation as a chance to surprise and delight patrons. Women alert each other to its state. We'll make a special trip to see

a really great bathroom. If it's bad, we may cut the evening short so we can use the bathroom at home or resort to moving the dessert course to a cleaner establishment. I'm telling all restaurant owners: Your bathroom matters. In fact, I think restaurant guides should rate the bathrooms as well as the food.

Once I've worked out my quads in the stall, it's time to hit the sinks. First I have to find a clean, dry place to set my purse and coat. Finding none on the counter, I clamp both between my knees and wash my hands, overlooking the slimy soap clumped on the dispenser. After I rinse my hands, I do the surgeon move: turning off the faucet with my elbow. Then, coat and purse still between my knees, I shuffle over to the paper towels and try to extract a towel without touching the dispenser. Recently, I was thrilled to be in a

bathroom that had an automatic paper towel dispenser; the woman in front of me just waved her hand in front of a sensor and out came a towel. It's ingenious. Except that even these machines run out of paper and I was left wiping my hands on my pants. Oh well, at least I know my jeans are relatively clean.

There have been times, I must admit, that a bathroom sink area has been so gross that I saw no point in washing my hands; I'd rather deal with my own germs than pick up new ones. Before you get too offended, let me tell you that I keep a little bottle of hand sanitizer in my purse. But even if I didn't, there's no need to worry: I never touch the bathroom door on the way out. **✉**

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