

Top Stories

She wrote the book on kissing, after plenty of practice

By JILL ZAREND-KUBATKO, Valley Life Editor February 14, 2006
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Faith Hill sang about this kiss, this kiss. Lucinda Williams and Mary Chapin Carpenter asked for passionate kisses. Poets such as "Gibs" pined for it: "darling, kiss me once again." And of course Aaron Tippin sang, "Kiss this."

But Andrea Demirjian has explored it thoroughly - kissing. The Manhattan born and raised Demirjian completed her first book, a compendium to everything kissable. "Kissing: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About One of Life's Sweetest Pleasures," was available just in time for Valentine's Day. The kissing handbook delves into the history, physiology, psychology and anthropologists' theories on the not-so-simple act.

The 208-page "playful guide to puckering up" offers a dozen chapters on everything from the many faces of a kiss, unforgettable kisses, what makes a great kiss to kissing 101, what a guy wants, how to be irresistibly kissable, kissing around the world, types of kisses, kissing folklore and superstitions, girl to guy advice and guy to girl advice and the kissing survey and profile. She also includes other reference books on kissing and a list of Web sites.

Demirjian's own journey into the realm of placing lips on lips, and recording it for all, was by accident.

When she was a child and went to the cinema she thought the actors used cellophane across their lips when they kissed.

"Then I grew up," said the 42-year old single marketing consultant turned author. "I've been really lucky, the kissing has been really wonderful and fun and I am very particular about who I kiss. I haven't had too many bad ones."

Kissing drought

Like a rainy day in Arizona, for a time it was hit or miss in the smooching arena for Demirjian. "I was in a drought when it came to kissing." But not unlike the weather, life changes and suddenly a kiss happened - a big booming thunderstorm of a kiss.

"There was some major 'kiss-arisma'. Before the night was up we had incredible kissing, it was like waking Sleeping Beauty," she said. "I hadn't been kissed with such abandon," Demirjian said.

From then on she went on "kissing escapades." She began writing the initials of everyone she had kissed on a piece of paper. "I am still about 14 years old, mentally," joked Demirjian during a phone call from her apartment in New York last week.

She tossed the kissing inventory in a bag and forgot about it.

Months later Demirjian found the list and began making a spreadsheet including columns on how old the men were, who kissed first, public or private and other topics on 14 men in all.

"I was seeing an interesting pattern, for example, while I thought I was attracted to dark hair and darker eyes. I was kissing fair-haired boys with lighter eyes," she said. Her friends thought it was hilarious and dubbed the list the "Smoochy Report."

"Even my guy friends thought it was hysterical. Soon guys and girls were talking to me as if it's newsworthy of the Wall Street Journal." Demirjian contemplated writing an article for the over-the-top women's magazine, Cosmopolitan.

Life took on a whole new meaning. For example, job-hunting and interviews could be spiced up. Filling out employment forms could include "Hobbies: photography, reading, kissing." "I would love to go to an interview and say 'I am a real good kisser.' It's a very silly, self-indulgent escapade," she joked.

The quest

After hearing so many lips wag about her newfound pursuit, Demirjian decided to go full-throttle and tackle this kissing business. "There are anthropologists' theories, or you see Web sites and women's magazines with kissing tips. I thought it would be fun to collect and bundle all this together. I talked to guys and got their kissing experiences and I certainly had enough of my own perspective. I wanted to make the book very lighthearted, sort of Mae West meets Doris Day meets Betty Boop," she said.

"Kissing is a very sweet, innocent thing, or it can be a very provocative thing. This duality is incredible. There is enough insanity out there, I wanted this book to hearken back to a simpler time."

When research began, Demirjian found kissing to be a delightful topic. No matter where she went or whom she talked to - from young adults to seniors - everyone had a story to tell. "It didn't matter who it was, the more they started thinking about their own special kissing experiences, they would start smiling. I really

about their own special kissing experiences, they would start smiling. I really enjoyed learning about the history of the kiss; from the first kiss to a function of procreation to the sexy interaction we think of today," Demirjian said.

Gathering information

She talked to anthropologists, read books on anatomy and learned history through the ages. "In the land of the cave man, kissing was innate; it was about survival and gathering information; kissing may have started by putting regurgitated food into the baby's mouth," she explained.

Teenage cave boys, she said, may have smelled the breath and tasted the saliva of a future mate to see if it was "fair to neutral" - meaning the prospect had a good immune system and could procreate.

"It was all about grabbing a woman and tasting the saliva. It was the young kiss. It all started with the kiss and to make sure they could kiss to keep them warm during the cold nights in the cave. It was gathering information."

Kissing customs

Credit India in 1500 BC for kissing becoming sexy, she said. Those in India were the first to record about "mouth on lips" and "quivering lips."

"There may have been other cultures, but they recorded it. They are big kissers and when you think of India with the Karma Sutra, it kind of makes sense," she said.

When Alexander the Great conquered different lands, he too caught on to this "kissing thing." It spread to Rome, she said, with toga parties and much debauchery. The Romans also started many customs including kissing at the altar as a means of sharing the soul and kissing when the man returned home from work.

"They came home to taste their loved ones to make sure they had not been drinking all day," said the kissing conqueror herself. The Romans also described different types of kisses: a deep kiss or tongue kissing.

During the 1920s anything that was considered overtly salacious was attributed to the French, thus "French kissing" was born. "They call it soul or deep kissing. There is a lot of fascinating information on kissing. Ninety percent of the world population kisses, she said.

Only in the Himalayas do they think kissing is dirty because of the saliva. They believe kissing invites germs and death.

411

There are cultures in the South Pacific where kissing is about rubbing their nose against the cheek and neck to get a scent.

"It's again about gathering information. Rubbing of the noses or sniff kissing. If you think about it today, you are gathering information about a person, you can tell what they ate for lunch to how they groom, to their personality. Are they down to earth? Reserved? Or do they have a good sense of humor? A lot of 411 that happens. We are still using it to gather information but it's not critical to procreating," she said.

Personal preference

To Demirjian men are not about the cars they drive or the watch they wear. "It's about the mouth. I'd rather kiss a guy with a junky car than a guy who wasn't a great kisser in a hot car," she joked.

Another hot topic: Are his eyes closed? "It's pretty wild to look at each other when you are kissing; sometimes I like to see if the guy has his eyes closed too. I think it is sweet," Demirjian said.

Kissing to one may not be the same to another, she said.

"It's not that he is a good or bad kisser, what may not be good for you may be good for someone else."

Things to look for in a good kisser include: soft lips, use of tongue in a nice way, controlling saliva factor and having neutral breath, using variety, no alcohol or tobacco, mixing it up a bit, and it is important to have that chemistry.

"Some women look at his watch or car. The first things I am looking at are his mouth, his lips, his teeth, to make sure they are lovely looking, tasty looking and have a lovely scent about them. You have to kiss a few frogs before you find your prince. You do have to kiss a few before you come on the right one. It's a process of just numbers. It's important to wait for that special one, be selective. My kissing has been wonderful, but I have been selective," she said.

Spoken like a true connoisseur.

To be a part of Andrea Demirjian's research for future projects or to buy the book, visit her Web site www.kissingbook.com. The \$9.95 book is published by The Berkeley Publishing Group, part of Penguin Group in New York City. Her book is available at major bookstores and at amazon.com.