



PETER DAVIS

Who he is: As the editor at large for *Paper* magazine, Davis splits his time between New York, where he grew up, and Los Angeles. He's also written for *Vanity Fair*, *The New York Times*, and *Elle Decor*. **In this issue:** Davis does double duty by profiling emerging fashion designer Jay Ahr in "Power Players: French Connection" and our anything-but-ugly cover star America Ferrera in "Miss America." **His must-have item for spring:** "The one thing I can't imagine life without is my new Rolex Milgauss. It goes with everything, and the second hand is safety orange, which is my favorite color."

EMILY LIEBERT



Who she is: Liebert is an award-winning, internationally published freelance writer and editor whose work has been featured in *Elite Traveler*, the *Robb Report*, and *Cottages & Gardens*. She also served as editor for Kerry Kennedy's *New York Times* best seller *Being Catholic Now: Prominent Americans Talk About Change in the Church and the Quest for Meaning* (Crown). **In this issue:** Liebert shares the personal experiences that shaped her first novel, *One White Picket Fence, Please*, in "Starter Marriages." **Her must-have item for spring:** "My white Seven [for All Mankind] jeans. They fit like they were made to measure, and I can dress them up or down with the right accessories."



SØREN MØRK

Who he is: Once the captain of the Danish National Fencing Team, Mørk discovered fashion while in Paris to compete in a World Cup tournament. A friend invited him to the Christian Lacroix haute couture runway show, and he was hooked. He's photographed for clients like Ralph Lauren, Lord & Taylor, *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *Marie Claire*. **In this issue:** He captures the iconic essence of DKNY's 20th anniversary in "Bella Donna." **His must-have item for spring:** "I will most likely freak if I don't have my Nokia N95-8GB cell phone. It's amazing when you're on a remote location and need to send samples of the shoot to a client. The 3G network rocks!"

DIANE VON FURSTENBERG



Who she is: A woman who needs little introduction, von Furstenberg has set fashion trends ablaze since the 1970s with her progressive designs and flattering construction. President of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, she also lends her efforts to other nonprofits like Friends of the High Line. **In this issue:** She offers her own vital voice to her cause of choice, Vital Voices, in "Sweet Charity: Lift Every Voice." **Her must-have item for spring:** "Clothes this spring have to make sense, and be used more than once, which is why you can't live without a wrap—it is such a recyclable dress!"



MADELINE WEINRIB

Who she is: A textile and carpet artist, Weinrib is renowned for her minimalist, graphic designs. She's most recently put her stamp on trends by reintroducing the traditional patterns of suzani and ikat textiles to new audiences through her fashion-forward colors and designs. Her wares can be found at the Madeline Weinrib Atelier, located on the sixth floor of ABC Carpet & Home. **In this issue:** Weinrib advises on home adornments in "Estate of Mind: Buy Design." **Her must-have item for spring:** "I have a new pair of earrings given to me by Munu from Gem Palace. I love them and can wear them with jeans or to a formal event—it makes for easy packing."



Wedded Miss

The age-old institution of marriage has a truncated sibling—the starter marriage. And as it becomes an accepted, almost fashionable practice, one first-time offender investigates the trend.

by Emily Liebert

Illustration by Barbara McGregor

“EMILY HAD A STARTER MARRIAGE,” my best friend announced over drinks—with a colleague I barely knew—to “celebrate” my impending divorce. Later that evening, still mildly irritated that she’d revealed such a personal detail, I confronted her. “Did you have to divulge the story of my life to a virtual stranger?” I asked. “It’s no big deal,” she declared coolly. “Everyone’s had one.”

Well, perhaps not everyone, I thought. But I knew I wasn’t alone. Elizabeth Taylor and Ava Gardner did it 60 years ago and countless celebrities have done it since (think Julia Roberts and Lyle Lovett, or Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston, or Jessica Seinfeld and Eric Nederlander). Once you’ve joined the club, friends and acquaintances will regale you with their own “starter marriage” stories—an initiation of sorts. As in: Welcome. We’ve all been there. It’s nothing.

Really? It certainly didn’t feel like nothing at the time. Still doesn’t, in fact.

Surprisingly, in a country with one of the highest divorce rates in the world, there’s little statistical information on how many of these broken

“People try out the merchandise and if it doesn’t fit, they return it. Five years is like a long date!”

—celebrity divorce lawyer Raoul Felder

unions are “starter marriages.” The term—defined as a first marriage lasting less than five years and ending without children, typically between twentysomethings with little joint property and, ideally, no acrimony—made its debut in *The New York Times* almost 15 years ago. Why? Because our society is responsibility-averse. We give kids Ritalin when they’re hyper. When we’re fired from a job, it’s not our fault. And now, quickie divorces have become the new blameless trend. *We were young and stupid. We felt pressured by our parents. We got caught up in the wedding, but didn’t realize we were getting married... for life.*

Not to mention that teenagers these days are having sex—“hooking up”—like it’s going out of style. (Intercourse first, relationship later.) If parents aren’t teaching their children the importance of love, intimacy, and commitment, how can future generations be expected to comprehend the true significance of marital vows?

“Starter marriages are about 15 to 20 percent of my practice, which is significantly higher than a decade or so ago,” says New York divorce lawyer Robert Cohen. “The climate that we live in makes it easy. All of the tabloid programs are constantly covering celebrity splits. Divorce has almost become fashionable. Years ago people got married for life. They hunkered down, had kids young, and made it work. These days, it’s easy for people to just bail.”

Celebrity divorce lawyer Raoul Felder couldn’t agree more. “People try out the merchandise and if it doesn’t fit, they return it. Five years is like a long date!”

So divorce isn’t such a big deal anymore. Is there any accountability?

Jill Brooke, editor of *Firstwivesworld.com*, a divorce website that helps women to heal through smarts, self-love, and humor, says, “When I split from my first husband after two years, I never thought of myself

PROS & CONS OF “Starter Marriages”

PRO You’re single again!

CON You’re single again—and now a divorcé(e).

PRO You’ve learned more about who you are.

CON Your wedding cost more than five years of grad school.

PRO You can spend your hard-earned money on shoes...

CON ...because you won’t have to buy Valentine’s Day or anniversary gifts.

PRO You can hang out with your friends more often.

CON Your friends are all in relationships.

PRO You’re just like all the celebrities...

CON ...minus the money, fame, trainer, chef, and private jet.

as a divorced woman. I just thought of myself as a free woman. Free to do anything I wanted. Free to have a life full of possibility instead of predictability.... Free to reinvent myself and find someone who was truly compatible with me instead of someone who fit a résumé I was programmed from childhood to care about. The liberation was intoxicating.”

Brooke, now a certified stepfamily coach and author—and happily remarried—adds, “Unlike my mother’s generation, where it may have been a stigma... there was no scarlet letter burned on my chest.”

Beth Blake, cofounder of Thread, a purveyor of chic cocktail and bridesmaid dresses, shares a similarly positive outlook on her “starter marriage” experience. “I didn’t feel pressure to keep the marriage intact for family and friends’ sake. I knew that we were young and could start over.” Blake admits she initially wasn’t happy about the divorce.

“But the truth is, most people couldn’t even remember that I’d been married. The idea of a starter marriage isn’t necessarily a bad thing. It’s a way of figuring out who you are.”

As for the man’s perspective, if men are from Mars and women from Venus, there surely must be some discrepancy. Abell Oujaddou, a well-known Manhattan hairstylist who’s preparing to walk down the aisle for a second time, says, “These days, if a marriage doesn’t work out between

people after a few years, then it just doesn’t. Divorce used to be seen as a failure, and now people are more focused on their own happiness.”

Sounds good, but would his ex-wife agree? It just so happens she does—in fact, the two worked together for years post-split. “We were young and didn’t know what we wanted,” says Sharon Dorram-Krause, a celebrity hair colorist whose salon, Sharon Dorram Color at Sally Hershberger, recently opened its doors. “But we both moved on with our lives without any resentment.”

Still irked by the chorus of nonchalance, I asked a “starter marriage”

couple—divorced within the last year—to weigh in. There had to be some lingering bitterness or guilt, anything but insouciance. “My first marriage was nothing more than a long-term relationship. I made a mistake. I got divorced. It’s done with,” the wife insists. According to the husband, “I guess I didn’t

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give the concept of marriage too much thought. We’d been dating for four years and there was pressure to propose. When it wasn’t working out, about a year in, I had no qualms about ending things. I didn’t feel ashamed. Today, early divorces are like leaving a job you’ve had for a long time. You’re sad it didn’t work, but you’re ready for the next stage in your life.”

Leaving a marriage is like leaving a job. Hmm.

You May Be in a “STARTER MARRIAGE” if Your Spouse Says:

“You have such a nice last name—you sure you want to change it right away?”



“My cousin had a postnup, and it so came in handy.”



“Do you think [name of your best friend here] finds me attractive?”



“I don’t think an emotional affair should be considered cheating.”



“Maybe we should rent instead of buy—those co-op boards can be brutal.”



“How would you feel about a threesome with [name of spouse’s 23-year-old assistant]?”



“Which bank do I keep my money in? Um, let me get back to you on that...”



“Oh, you’d like kids. You mean, ones who look like us?”

“Starter marriage” is an expression that signifies an “Ooops!” instead of an “Oh, shit!” even though there’s nothing fundamentally different.

No matter how amicable the situation, every divorce incurs at least a certain amount of pain and suffering. I can tell you firsthand—if you have a few hours. The “starter marriage” as a concept may not be revolutionary, and neither is the fact that our society has cast a positive light on this traditionally embarrassing subject by tagging a trendy nickname to it. We’re pretending divorce isn’t bad. Why? Because we live in an age in which failure is not an option. So we give the old dog a new name and spread it around until it’s become so commonplace that we feel better about it. “Starter marriage” is an expression that signifies an “Ooops!” instead of an “Oh, shit!” even though there’s nothing fundamentally different.

In fact, I’ll go so far as to speculate that this blasé attitude actually breeds the phenomenon. As my friend said, “Everyone’s had one.” And if everyone’s done it, then the stigma is automatically diluted and it’s easier to do again and again.

Gary Silverstein, cofounder and executive director of the Therapy Center in Brewster, New York, confirms my hypothesis. “There’s absolutely nothing new about this phenomenon,” he explains. “What’s new is how it’s viewed in our politically correct culture. Everything needs a label. A label provides a cover for the failure.... It’s a way of surrendering responsibility for your actions. It’s not your fault; it’s society’s fault—you’re sharing the blame.” And there are plenty of articles and books to prove his point.

As President Obama and others before him put it: “You can put lipstick on a pig, but it’s still a pig.” **G**

CELEBRITY “Starter Marriages”

Chris Kattan and Sunshine Tutt: Separated after two months; divorced

Drew Barrymore and bar owner Jeremy Thomas: Less than two months

Shannen Doherty and Ashley Hamilton: Seven months

Courtney Thorne-Smith and genetic scientist Andrew Conrad: Seven months

Kelly Rutherford and Carlos Tarajano: Seven months

Elizabeth Taylor and Conrad Hilton: Seven months

Mike Tyson and Robin Givens: One year

Ava Gardner and Mickey Rooney: One year

Julia Roberts and Lyle Lovett: Just under two years

Jennifer Garner and Scott Foley: Two and a half years

Angelina Jolie and Jonny Lee Miller: Separated after one year, divorced after three

Jessica Simpson and Nick Lachey: Three years

Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston: Just over four years

