

a e BOOKS

# Chix Can Fix Anything

BY CYNTHIA POTTS

Now, I know my way around a construction site. I can identify most of the contents of a toolbox at a glance. I even write the Building and Remodeling Section of the local newspaper. And I manage all of these things while engaging in the earth-shattering activity of being female.

While this isn't unusual for me, or frankly, for most of my peers and neighbors, it's apparently news to Norma Vally. The Discovery Channel's "ToolBeat" diva has just released a new book entitled *Chix Can Fix*, seemingly for the sole purpose of assuring readers that you can have estrogen and still be competent.

When it comes to delivering the "How To" portion of her book, Vally does an excellent job. From the mysteries of the gurgling toilet bowl to installing a dimmer switch, repairing wallpaper to installing window guards, the reader is presented with common-sense practical solutions, complete with helpful illustrations, lists of tools needed, and even instructions on how to use those tools. Her approach is straightforward, practical, and realistic.

It's when you hit the philosophy portion of the book that Valley's approach becomes infuriating. Take the introduction to the wall and floors chapter:

"When I'm learning something for the first time, I always try to relate it to something I'm already

familiar with - like cooking, shoe shopping, and searching for that magic wrinkle cream. Thinking in terms I already understand makes it easier to master the new task. I know I'm not the only one who thinks this way. When I teach other

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women about home improvement, I find that they're more comfortable if I explain projects in ways that they can relate to."

Couple that with gems like: "Don't run crying "You were right! I can't do it myself!" to your father/boyfriend/husband. (That said, don't tell your father/boyfriend/husband he's the last person in the world you'd ever call on for help - just in case you end up needing a little backup)."

And this, from the concluding "What is *Chix Can Fix* Really All About?" chapter:

"But let's face it, in the world

we live in today, 'All you need is love' doesn't pay the rent, secure a job, or fix the plumbing."

"Although written with love, this book has given you another powerful L word - leverage - not only to change a light switch and repair your plumbing, but to realize that you can take control of your reality and be self-reliant and powerful ... Suddenly you're no longer the victim, the helpless girl - now that's leverage."

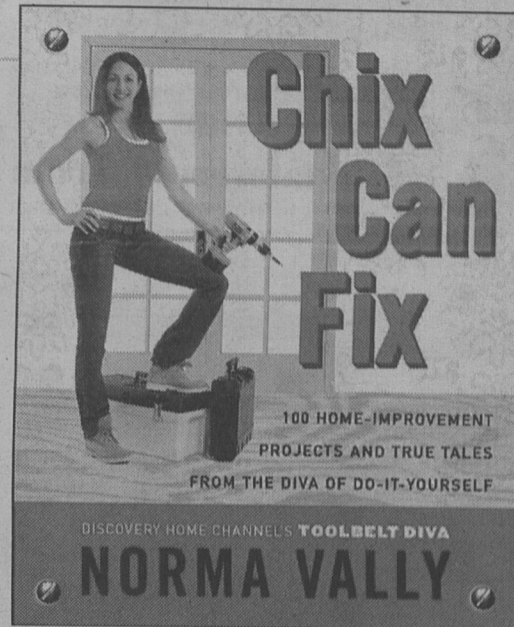
Issues much?

Setting aside the constant, overwhelming, nonsensical heterosexist nature of the book - which includes, and I kid you not, a section on installing a dimmer switch on the dining room chandelier whilst cooking a romantic dinner for The Boyfriend - this patronizing attitude toward women, couched in carefully PC language, seems at odds with her marketing literature.

In the literature, we read that single females account for 18% of all homebuyers in 2004. More than half of the women who live alone own their own homes, and by 2010, there will be 31 million women-headed households.

Yet nowhere in the text are these single women addressed, beyond the fact that some men find women who know how to use power tools sexy. Lesbians might as well be invisible - or perhaps it's just assumed that they already possess all the home repair info they need.

It's a shame, really. A good chunk of this book is insightful,



*Chix Can Fix*, by Norma Vally  
Published by Viking Studio  
(Penguin) \$14.95

useful knowledge that will really help the average homeowner (whatever gender they might be!) fix common problems around the house. Projects are realistically presented, well thought out, and make no assumptions about the skill set of the person attempting the fix. Especially commendable is the chapter on electricity, which puts the sometimes intimidating world of home wiring in easily understandable terms with appropriate cautions clearly spelled out.

If you can overlook the attitude - or buy the book as a gift for someone who won't even notice it - then *Chix Can Fix* is well worth the modest \$14.95 sticker price. On the other hand, you might want to wait for an author who realizes that sometimes Chix have girlfriends, not boyfriends, and that they tackle projects together. ▼

➔ Cynthia Potts lives in Plattsburgh, New York where she writes the Building and Remodeling Section of the *Press Republican*.

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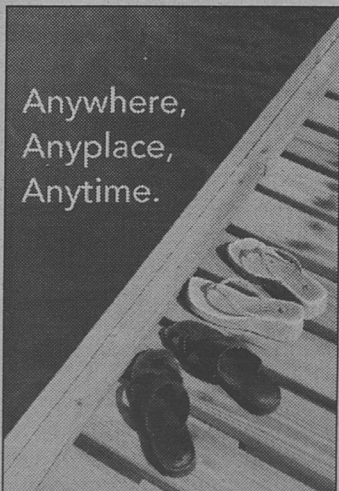
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