

After spending Memorial Day weekend at what my boyfriend called “that hippie nudist colony” (Harbin Hot Springs in Napa) with my “lesbian lover” (my *girlfriend*), landing at **Kari Feinstein's pre-MTV Movie Awards-style lounge** extravaganza in Beverly Hills the following Thursday made for some serious culture shock.

A weird mix of the famous, the almost famous and the media who love/hate them gathered at a makeshift valet near the lower reaches of Benedict Canyon. A candy-apple Lincoln Navigator, whose back end had been converted into an entertainment center complete with wide-screen TVs and oversize speakers (rendering it able to seat only four, including the driver), shuttled us up the canyon to the party.

“How many miles to the gallon?” I asked the driver, himself a Lincoln rep.

“Not many,” he replied.

A squeaky publicist in a bubble-hemmed mini greeted us with red wristbands and empty tote bags. A **Youth AIDS** in Action information table off to her right sat empty and forlorn as the throng focused on the task at hand: filling bags with obscene amounts of shwag.

Eager for the Thai massage, reflexology and facials touted in the invite, my friend and I marched inside the spacious and uninhabited Spanish estate, which was empty but for the whirlwind of grab-bag madness. In search of bodywork, we meandered through unfurnished rooms, filled with jewelry-smattered tables and hair products. We passed through the “kitchen,” and politely declined sake, vitamin water, sliced abalone and other foodstuffs offered by enthusiastic vendors eager to place their products in the hands of Hollywood royalty of varying pedigrees.

We sidled by Jessica Alba, who was poring through floor-to-ceiling stacks of **Reebok** sneakers in an otherwise barren library. We wandered outside, hoping to happen upon a manicurist or chiropractor or a gaggle of cute boys to play with. Instead, we saw Anne Heche trying on canvas espadrilles and a Kate Hudson look-alike smoking a cigarette. Nary a bodyworker was in sight.

“Let’s suck some oxygen,” shrugged my friend, leading us to the **Oxygen Plus** table, where a bored-looking guy offered us a taste of peppermint-flavored air in a reusable can. Succumbing to the temptations of clean air, we filled our tote bags with trial-size canisters of O2 and climbed the stairs in search of strong hands and nimble fingers with a massage table in tow.

After dodging a pitch for Laser Facial Rejuvenation, I found the *Thai Massage-and-Reflexology* booth. My friend indulged in an exercise-free toning technique called Electrotherapy while I suffered through 10 minutes of half-assed butt poking, another 10 of distracted earlobe mashing and a final five spent flicking imaginary lice out of my hair.

We gave up on bodywork and turned acquisitive. I found a T-shirt made of bamboo, inexplicably

packaged in a plastic envelope. A sweet middle-aged man named Jorge enthusiastically demonstrated the benefits of **iMainGo** (a portable stereo designed to fit any iPod) to my friend.

“Now,” asked Jorge, in a doting-dad kind of way, “do you think you would use this?”

We nodded yes, and he dropped one of the gadgets and four AAA batteries into my friend’s tote bag.

We next wandered into the back side of **KIN’s** makeshift boutique on the third-floor landing. The staff tried their best to ignore us as we sifted through rack after rack of fabulous, red-carpet-worthy (Vivienne Westwood, John Varvatos, etc.) fashion.

My friend slipped a cozy cotton halter top over her head as a cute guy with dark features and an air of authority approached us.

*Do we get our pick of this stuff?* we wondered, still unclear as to appropriate shwag-grab etiquette.

“These are for people with purple bracelets,” he explained, eyeing our red wristbands disdainfully.

“Who gets purple?” I asked.

“A-list celebrities.”

“Which A-list celebrities have you given clothes to today?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” he snapped back. “A-list ones.”

“Like whom?” I persisted, curious whether the gay Asian guy from *Entourage* whom I glimpsed just then pondering a stripy broadcloth qualified.

“Like Brooke Shields.”

“Brooke Shields???”

A long silence stalled in the space between us.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“Uh-huh,” I answered, understanding he meant *please leave*.

“Are you sure?” he replied, meaning, *Why are you still here?*

I didn’t budge.

“Here, let me give you some shoes,” he said, finally ending the impasse. “What size do you wear?”

Two-pairs of open-toed flats later, we were on our way.