

my co-author Steve Sampson. I spoke to street hustlers, high-class cocaine dealers, online suppliers, traffickers and the drug squad. Some of the people we met were amiable and charming, while others were selfish and violent.

But what became apparent was that it is not the landscape painted by tabloid hysteria and urban myth, of cartoon drug peddlers and junkies skulking in dark alleys. Instead there exists a hidden population, from cab drivers and pensioners to solicitors and bankers, who were part of this trade. It is a world heavily embedded within society, a zone into which the middle class and super rich step in and out as it suits them. And women play a massive part.

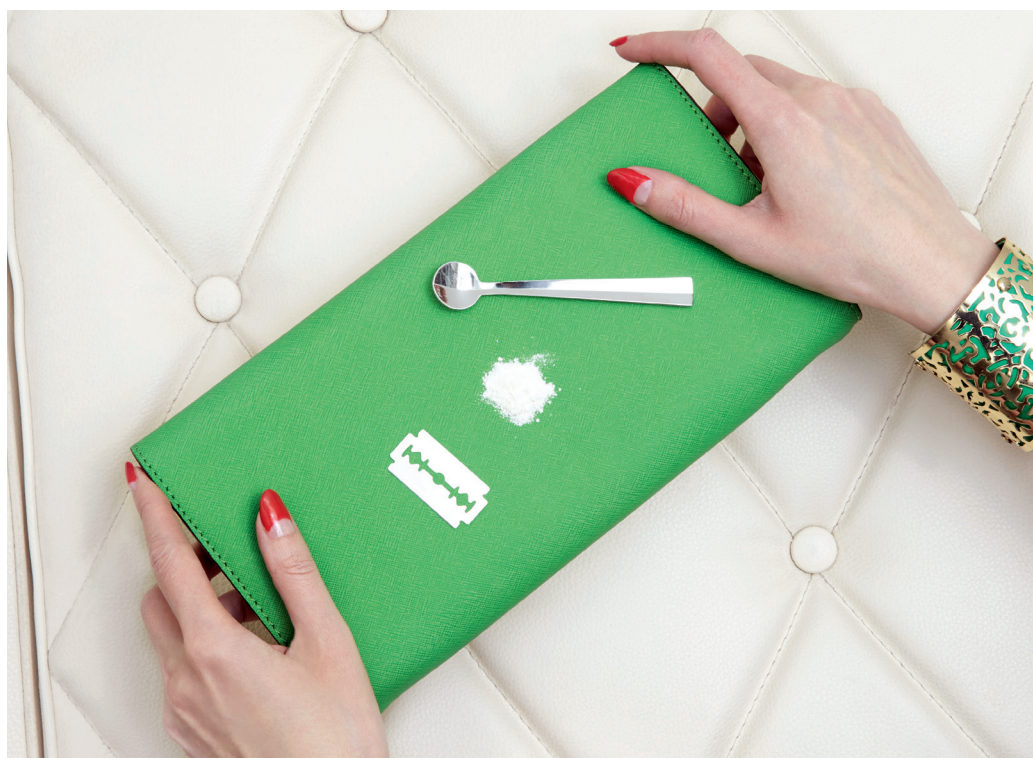
For many female drug users, taking drugs needs to fit alongside their professional lives. They apply the same standards to buying and using drugs as they do to the rest of their lives: discreet, controlled, safe and well organised; just one of a list of things to do scrawled in a diary or added to an iPhone Note.

But once you're too old for club or college life, purchasing drugs can be problematic and risky – unsuitable for women with jobs and children.

'It was fun and daring when we were young, but not now we want to keep control of it. We need it done efficiently,' says Rachel, 37, who is married with three children and works as a freelance photographer from her home in Bristol. She buys cocaine, mephedrone and MDMA from Karen, the mother of her son's best friend, who goes to the same local primary school. And because it's convenient, they swap the cash and drugs, from buggy to buggy, while picking up the kids from school.

'No one would ever suspect,' says Rachel, who's active in the PTA. 'There are a few like-minded parents who buy from her as well. It's a nice primary school and they'd be surprised that some mums buy drugs in the playground.'

So far, perhaps, so unsurprising. But gradually a range of more extreme female-friendly outlets is surfacing. At this point they're probably still



one-offs, but they're symptomatic of the demand from women and could well be a clue to how drug culture will develop.

Take Jody's boutique hair salon, for example, behind a nondescript, unmarked door in one of north London's most fashionable shopping districts. There is no need for an eye-catching name or a marketing budget: it's a successful business that runs on reputation alone. Actors, rock stars, artists and TV faces make up some of her clientele. So do well-connected media types and lawyers. But not

everyone is there for a cut and colour. For those in the know, Jody's salon – all dim lighting, exposed brick, leather chairs and

ornate mirrors – is also a clandestine venue for taking and buying drugs. In between highlights and blow-dries, customers pass around lines of cocaine, mephedrone and MDMA powder. Regular customers pop into the salon to buy a pre-ordered bag of powder, pills or weed to take home. There are no rip-off deals or snorting lines from the top of a toilet cistern. It is, quite simply, a pay-day treat.

'I call it the 24-hour party salon,' says Jody, in her 30s, who charges £100 for a cut with a gram of cocaine. 'Sometimes we really dress it up and serve lines on a silver platter and open champagne. We have fun. People come in at 10am and don't leave till 10pm. They usually

pencil in time off work the next day because they know it will be a write-off.'

Meanwhile, a new breed of members' club has surfaced as a counter to the underground cannabis cafes dealing weed to insiders and the private members' bars serving up cocaine to City workers in London, all heavily male-dominated. The Club, as it's known to its 100 or so members, of whom most are women, is a 'respectable' drug den, a narcotic speakeasy. Located in west London, it opens for business to its select clientele three days a week.

Sophie, 31, a web designer from Brighton, joined The Club shortly after it was set up two years ago. She explains: 'It's a civilised way to buy and take drugs, it's relaxed and it's safe, with a touch of decadence.'

Once inside, she says, members take a seat on one of the leather sofas or retro 50s chairs in a series of inter-connecting rooms where guests laugh, chat and take drugs. Some will be passing around lines of cocaine on mirrors, while others will be rolling and sharing joints.

On the handwritten à la carte menus, handed to members on arrival, is a small selection of wine and lager, snacks such as peanuts and chocolate, and a list of drugs. MDMA pills are £15 each, a gram of MDMA powder is £55. Cocaine is £65 a gram and mephedrone is £45 a gram. There are three types of cannabis available: light hash from {continued}

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