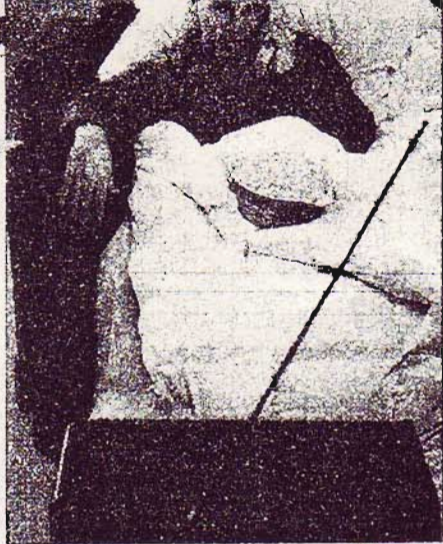


COUCH POTATOES

Isn't it nicer to just stay home and curl up and watch TV?



Couch-potato chic

PETER FREED



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The aptly named Robin Leach

Thinking about your friends and people you know, do you think the following are...

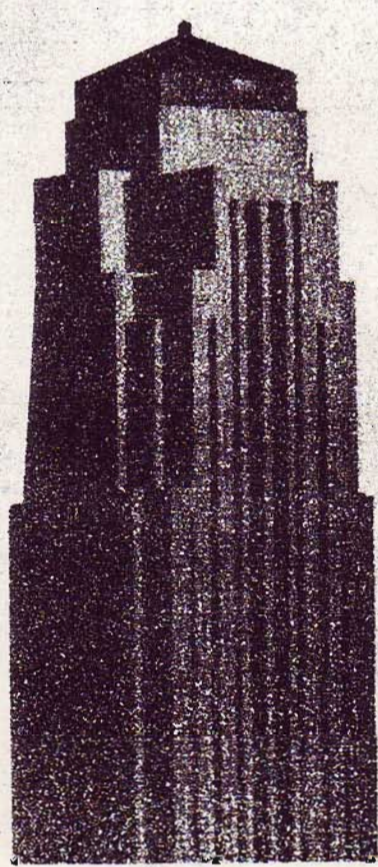
	Gaining favor	Losing favor	Same
...spas	16%	57%	4%
...karaoke	18%	59%	5%
...entertainment spending more with children	65%	27%	4%
...staying home instead of going out	70%	17%	9%
...gardens	26%	60%	3%
...watching only the best TV things	52%	31%	8%
...you've learned about the fortunate	67%	20%	8%
...watching one's career rise	51%	29%	9%

What do you see as the most interesting satisfying lifestyle for you...

...men, full-time job	37%
...men, part-time job	25%
...men, no job	19%
...women, full-time job	8%
...women, part-time job	6%

STEVE BRADY

Postmodernity



now do fitness walking, with nearly half adding it to their regimens in the last six months. There are some 4 million fewer people doing aerobics this year than in 1985, the peak year of the craze. Paulina Porizkova is a model (get it?) of the new, post-'80s feminine ideal—curves are in. Designers like Donna Karan made a big splash with business clothes that are sexy but serious. Professional trendspotter Faith Popcorn sees Americans getting "a little fatter. One of the big trends is toward gaining weight. It shows health and it shows security." There's a sea change from the pump-it-up days of the '80s—fat is good!

Some builders are moving toward reasonableness, too, toning down huge post-modern skyscrapers and moving toward simplification and preservation. Developer Mortimer Zuckerman recently announced plans to cut half a million square feet of floor space from his gargantuan Columbus Circle project in New York City. His financial partner and principal tenant, the troubled investment banker Salomon Brothers, had just withdrawn from the project.

Perhaps the biggest generational change as the '80s end is that virtually no one thinks cocaine is glamorous anymore. Before "Less Than Zero" made it to the screen the producers performed "laser surgery" on the story, in the words of Scott Rudin, president of production at Twentieth Century Fox. Drug use was toned down and the female lead kicked her cocaine habit. Preview audiences liked the new, anticoke version better. High Times recently switched its focus from coke to marijuana, and circulation rose 14 percent. Coke may have gone better with the solipsistic spirit of the '80s, editor Hager says, but those times are over. "Marijuana takes people outside their own egos to look at the world as a larger package."

So does MDMA, a.k.a. Ecstasy, which first made a splash in 1984 and is popular on some college campuses. Neurologist Stephen Peroutka recently surveyed Stanford students and found that 39 percent had tried Ecstasy, a mild psychedelic whose chief effect is to make the user feel all warm and snugly and safe—just the opposite of cocaine. Peroutka says that Ecstasy has taken hold in the West and Texas, but interest is wider than that: when Harvard psychiatry professor Lester Grinspoon lectured on the drug at the University of North Carolina, people were standing in the aisles of the 650-seat auditorium.

Grinspoon is quick to point

THE LIFESTYLE

out that "there is no drug that doesn't have risk." Animal research indicates the possibility of brain-cell damage. But the impulse behind Ecstasy consumption can't be explained away so easily. One bad thing about cocaine was that it made you want to go out all the time; as the '80s dwindle, more of us seem to be realizing that it's so much nicer to just stay home and watch TV. Who would have imagined five years ago that a club called The Couch Potatoes—a group dedicated solely to the practice of sitting on a sofa and watching television—would boast 10,000 members? The great inroads made by video-cassette recorders surely have something to do with the Couch Potatoes' rise: there are VCR's in 51 percent of American homes today, and the 50 millionth unit was sold in October. Sales of popcorn (the food, not the professional trendspotter) rose 16 percent from 1986 to 1987. Dinner, a show, a babysitter—all that makes for "a real expensive evening," says "Head Spud" Robert Armstrong of Dixon, Calif. "Why not just stay at home?" TV viewing may even be the aerobics of the '90s. "I've always pushed for people watching more TV," Armstrong says. "It's beneficial. It's relaxing. It lowers your heart rate."

In fact, home is where we're going in the post-'80s. Americans responding to a NEWSWEEK Poll were almost three times more likely than they were in June 1986 to say that "staying home with family" is their favorite way of spending an evening. The group most likely to feel this way is people 30 to 49, suggesting that after six years, 11 months and 15 days of struggling to get ahead, aging baby boomers are thinking longingly of settling down and taking a nice nap.

The homes we are returning to as the '80s end are built for comfort, not for speed. Merchandising expert Bernard Ozer sees Americans opting for "the couch-potato home. You can live in your own home like a little village." When clubgoers do go out these days they are going to places like Nell's in New York or Pasha in Dallas—clubs that look like cozy living rooms. "Cocooning grows," says Faith Popcorn (the professional trendspotter, not the food). "We're going to really get into everything that symbolizes security. It's going to be an age of reality, where people will indulge only in a small way." There are indications that more people are thinking of paying as they go: a

poll conducted by the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency shortly after Black Monday found that a third of young consumers say they're more likely to stop using credit cards and that 39 percent will be more careful to track down bargains. Says Ray Brown, head of the popular-culture department at Bowling Green State University, "A return to the old financial morality is evident, because the new morality was too damned expensive."

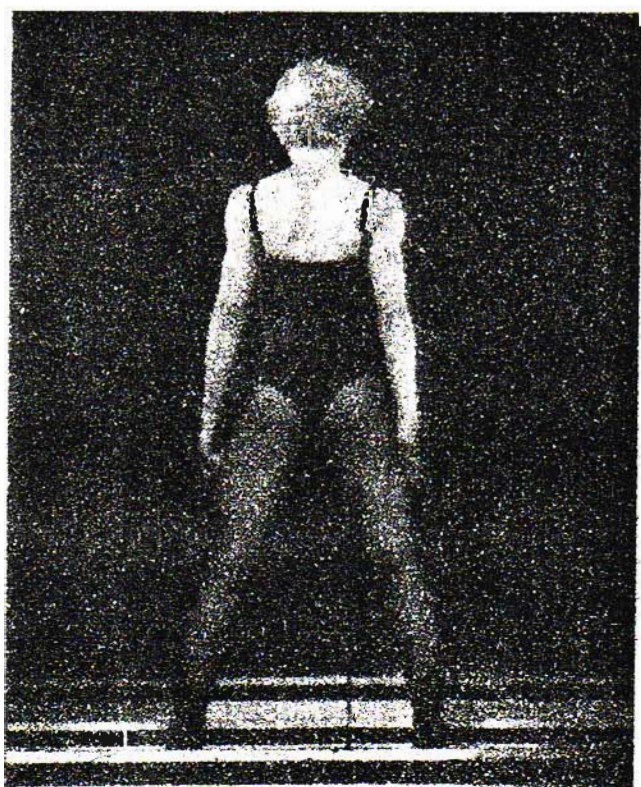
Everywhere, there are signs of stabilization. Magazines and newspapers are filled with articles about young people returning to houses of worship for the first time in years. The terrifying threat of AIDS has made a quiet, monogamous home life seem newly appealing to sin-

In the days to come we will calm down, lighten up, gain weight, stay home more and pay as we go

gle people. The year's most talked-about movie, "Fatal Attraction," which had sold \$117 million worth of tickets by mid-December, unsubtly links extramarital sex with death—a romantic chiller for the age of AIDS. Marriage is being viewed more than ever as a refuge from the scary world of sexual adventurism, which may explain in part the booming marriage-counseling business and the fact that the divorce rate leveled off in 1986 after a steady 15-year climb. "Fatal Attraction" ends with the audience cheering the demise of the psychotic home-wrecking antiheroine. Says filmmaker John Hughes, audiences "want to see a woman dead who dares to attack the institution of family."

There are signs of increased altruism in the '90s as well. Forty-nine percent of respondents to a NEWSWEEK Poll say they are involved in charity or social-service activity, up from 36 percent in 1986. That change may even have seeped into the corporate world this holiday season: the investment bank First Boston forwent its annual Christmas party for 4,000 employees and donated \$50,000 to The New York Times Needeast Cases Fund, instead. Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. posits a 30-year cycle in American life, and sees the beginnings of a generational change taking place. "This is equivalent to about 1928 or 1958. There's a lot of pent-up idealism that will increase, and in the 1990s we'll enter a phase that will be much like the 1930s and the 1960s."

Maybe. Then again, maybe not. Who knows? The 30-year theory at least has a comforting ring to it. It suggests that as a people we may dither about through the complicated constructs we know as decades calling them in retrospect by shorthand names that evoke great national mood swings: the '60s, the '70s, the '80s—that finally we are subject to forces greater than our course and are just body-surfing the tides of history. Kind relief, after all the dizzying obsession of the bygone '80s: *must cultivate our garden*, *taire wrote in 1759, post meditating on the end of a zany time 18th-century dits called the '50s. In the ade to come, history may dictate that we turn for he settle in and simply po awhile. If you want us, we' in the garden.*



ROSE MARIONA FROWNS

... And at last, say so long to Madonna

KAREN SPRINGEN and JENN FOOYE contributed to this