

## Resident Genius

An Exclusive Express Interview with  
Writer and Cosmopolite David Leddick

Though he shucks comparison, David Leddick is Miami Beach's own answer to Quentin Crisp, Andy Warhol, the Hepburn women and the Marquis de Sade all rolled into one.

The 70-year-old writer/entertainer/personality is a local cult figure within the gay community who is famous simply for being himself.

Not that his vast body of work is anything that can be overshadowed by mere presence. A former ballet dancer and longtime creative director for Revlon and L'Oreal, Leddick has published three novels, countless photography books and has stolen the show with guest starring roles in the South Beach Gay Men's Chorus extravaganzas of the past few seasons.

His grandiose social stature and effortless candor is seemingly innate, but it has been a long road for a man who was born to a poor family in the depths of the Depression. Born in 1930, Leddick grew up in Montague, Michigan the son of a mechanical engineer and a teacher.

"I was brought up in very reduced circumstances," says Leddick. "Genteel poverty was the rule of the day."

Nonetheless, Leddick never had a problem being himself even from the beginning. He was openly homosexual "since birth" and had his first boyfriend at four years old.

"We were brought up to never wonder what anyone thought about us. We were only concerned with what we thought of other people," he says.

"I was never subjected to homophobia because boys were always interested in me. When your sex life is practically as long as your entire life, you skip a lot of problems. I always felt confident about my sexuality."

After graduating from the University of Michigan with a degree in English Literature, Leddick joined the navy for three years as a cryptographic specialist and met the first love of his life, a strapping blonde sailor. This love affair is documented in a still unpublished book by Leddick titled *The Handsomest Man in the World*.

Following his time in the service, 24-year-old Leddick went to New York "because at that time it was the only place anyone went if you were going to have a glamorous life. Nowadays you can pursue anything anywhere, but it was different then."

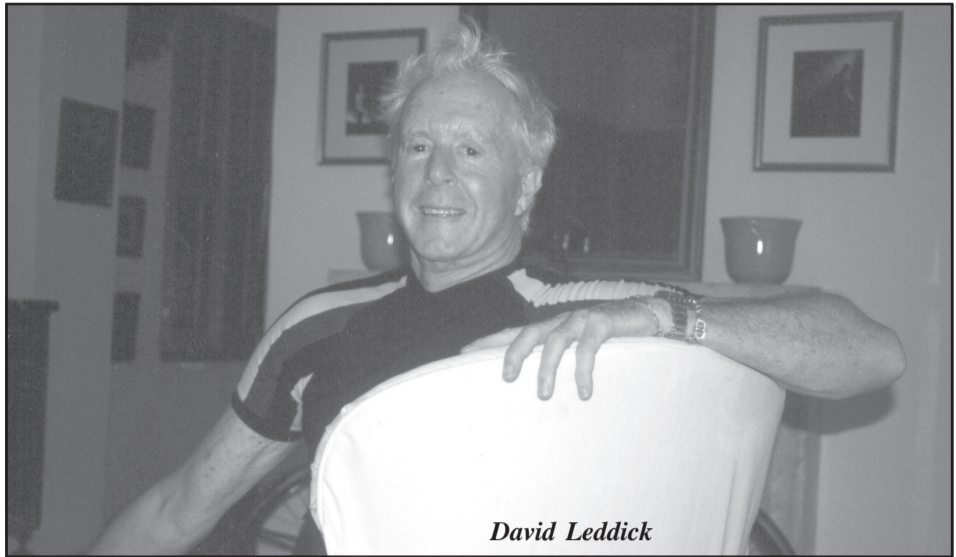
Leddick scored a job through relatives and within a year had become a young advertising executive, but he felt that there was something missing.

Looking back, he reflects, "I said to myself, 'This is a great life, but for somebody else. I have a great job and apartment; I know a lot of interesting people. But this is not for me.'"

"My lover had gone back to college and married his female French teacher. I was at this abyss and I couldn't move forward. I was devastated and thought I must do something," he says.

What Leddick did was become a ballet dancer with the Metropolitan Opera. Though he claims he couldn't dance very well but had "nice legs," Leddick negotiated a career for himself as a dancer until he turned 27, "when I was over the hill."

Leddick returned to advertising. He worked his way up through four agencies in four years until Grey Advertising hired him as the Worldwide Creative Director for Revlon, a post he held until well into his sixties. Following another stint for L'Oreal in the 1980s, Leddick retired from his advertising



David Leddick

life for good, a decade later.

For many years, Leddick was one of the highest paid ad men in the world. At the beginning of his career, though, the new income initially caused him to reorganize his spending habits.

"When I first started working in advertising, I was the only one in my circle who had a real job," he says. "Every payday there was somebody who had to have an abortion, somebody stranded in Amsterdam. I had no conscience not to give it to them. So I started buying real estate. I knew my scruples were enough that if I bought real estate, I would have to pay a mortgage before I loan and give money. I scraped together every penny I could and bought my first house in Greenwich Village."

Leddick's passion for real estate grew. At one point, he owned 14 homes around the world.

Today, he travels between the remaining seven, with one more on the way. He currently divides his time between his home in France's Loire Valley, an apartment in Paris, a house in New York City, a chateau and another apartment in Miami Beach, a farm in Michigan and a house in Philadelphia.

Leddick recently heard South America calling and is purchasing a domicile in

Montevideo, Uruguay.

Love has also remained a focus for Leddick. Though his longtime lover, Ward, died 13 years ago, the relationship was somewhat open and Leddick has always had other romances, most notably with actor/singer/dancer Frank Andrea in the 1960s.

Over the last several years, Leddick has been involved with three different people but he says he really doesn't have plans to commit again.

"If it were 10 years ago, I would have nailed one of them down and gone after them, but I am tired of chasing men and making them do what they should do," he says. "You don't get anyone unless you chase them. It shouldn't look like you're chasing them, but you have to. If you are going to be in a relationship, you have to really get them and hog-tie them. I have been an expert at that. But I just don't feel like it anymore."

The year 1996 is what he refers to as the "death of the old David Leddick." It was in that year that Leddick the writer emerged with the publishing of his first gay novel, *My Worst Date*, and his first compiled picture book, *Naked Men*, which featured his most enduring favorite subject—the male nude.

Leddick went forth with many books celebrating the male figure, including *Naked Men Too*, *Men in the Sun*, *The Male Nude*, and a book on the photography of George Platt Lynes. More recently, there has been *Male Nude Now*, and another project, *Men in the Dark*.

Leddick says he continues to do one novel and one picture book a year. "I am channeling information that needs to get out," he says.

Leddick's other novels include *Never Eat In* and *The Sex Squad*, and he has just finished *The Marriage Closet* (Alyson Press), a book of interviews with gay men who married women.

In the works is *Nakeder Than Thou*, a fictional account of an adulterous murder triangle that takes place in 1830s France, and *Melissa Galloway*, a novel about a woman who falls in love with a façade.

Leddick has become a virtual ambassador to the creative community. He is known for mentoring many creative people and connecting them with one another and people who can get their careers off the ground.

He knows just about everyone in the cultural circle, and makes sure that they all know each other. He formed the Miami Beach Group last year, which brought together five local painters to "more easily gain exposure as a collective rather than on their own."

He sees his efforts to make things happen for artists and creative people as his philanthropic calling. "I'm just neatening up the world. I don't do it to make money and I don't give a damn about appreciation," he says.

"I just see lot of talent wasted because it doesn't get into the right place at the right time. I know the people so I put them together to get the work out there. Artists have to get what they are doing out so they can do more."

## The Wit and Wisdom of David Leddick

### On Life and Death

"I do what I want to do because when I die it will all disappear from me. None of it will exist except how it existed for me. In this life, you are responsible for others and you do things for others to the degree that you can. If you can do it, you should do it. It is just a responsibility that all people have for each other. It is not, however, a reason for living. What you feel good about is having used yourself up. I have used myself up. You have to explore yourself and learn who you are. You are really here to learn. What you contribute to others is not the reason for existence."

### On Goals

"All I ever wanted to do is have a glamorous life, and I have always lived for romance. I have pretty much accomplished that."

### On Art

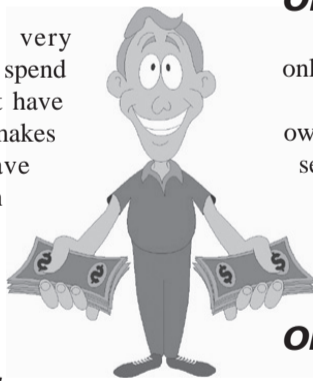
"I was never interested in modern art. For me, modern art is not about anything but art itself. It is not about people, not about emotion, not about passion. It is about how to put paint on canvas. I am likewise not interested in choreography about how body moves, or music about how to put sounds together in interesting ways. The public has been lost completely. If it is not emotional and I am not moved, I just don't care."

### On Money

"I am not very wealthy because I spend everything. I don't have a lot invested. It makes me nervous to have money through interest. Housing and art are real things. I believe in real things."

### On Age Differences

"When you get older, you must be very careful that you don't do unflattering things like running around and having crushes on people 30 years younger than yourself. Amusing yourself that they might be interested in you is out of the question. There are many older men who are very successful in business, very knowledgeable and then they amuse themselves that someone that they are paying for loves them. I've known much younger men and I want them to be happy in love. I will do what I can to talk to them and guide them in directions they should consider, but it doesn't have to be with me. There is a limit to how much you can give to someone not interested in giving back."



### On Sex

"There are no frigid woman—there are only clumsy men."

"I never slept with anyone ever for my own advantage. Only out of love. I only had sex a few times out of love but they didn't matter. It was like going to the gym. When I had sex outside of love, it wasn't even fun or interesting."

### On Relationships

"It is not essential in the male character to settle down, and if you're gay, it's even less essential. In order to have a relationship though, the other person's welfare must come before your own. If you don't put their welfare before your own, you're not in love with them. It's very important that someone is a witness to your passage. That is a relationship. Most people do not have successful love lives because they are looking after someone to care for them."

"In every romantic situation there is the lover and the loved one. There is always one person who loves more than the other. I myself prefer to be the lover. If you are the loved one, you always feel a little bit guilty."

"If you don't feel like sleeping with your lover, then you are in trouble."

### On Appearances

"Sophistication is the period between disillusion and defeat."

