

# Entertainment Outlook

## Is the world ready for designer coffins?

Much as we might hate to admit it, there are few things in this world more impressive than a truly inspired marketing campaign. The whole philosophy of marketing is quite brilliant in its simplicity: come up with an item that is of no practical value to anybody, and then convince millions of people that it's precisely what they want.

Be clever enough about it, and you can sell almost anything. Computerized jogging shoes. The Greatest Hits of Boxcar Willie. Even George Bush.

That's why I've been so struck by the brilliant strategems that have been hatched recently by the clever folks in the coffin business.

On the face of it, it would seem pretty darned difficult to orchestrate an appealing marketing campaign for coffins — considering that coffins hardly fall into the category of impractical items which you nonetheless want.

A coffin is undeniably something you'll need, sooner or later. It's also something you want even less than root-canal surgery.

But this didn't deter a company down in Virginia from unveiling, a few months back, a new and exciting line of designer coffins.

The company is offering fashion-conscious consumers the choice of the black-and-gold Rutledge model, the wood-and-metal Hancock, the white fibreglass Abigail, or the Jefferson in two-tone blue. And inside the caskets, a company spokesman was quoted as saying, "we are using designer fabrics from soft cottons to satin and the traditional velvet."

At first, quite frankly, I remained a bit skeptical about the whole notion. "The two-tone Jefferson: A coffin you'd be proud to be caught dead in! (Ask about our exclusive, long-term layaway plan.)"

But gradually, the genius of the thing began to dawn on me. These folks are actually tapping into a lucrative market which no one else has ever tried to exploit: the dead Yuppie.

Someone who wants his last gesture to be a fitting summation of his lifestyle. Someone whose income has suddenly become even more disposable than ever, and who is not (alas) in the market for any more racquetball equipment.

I haven't heard any actual sales figures for these designer coffins, but we can only assume that business is booming. And now, it is reported that an enterprising businessman over in London,

England has taken aim at the other end of the coffin market.

Shopkeeper Steve Nicholson is marketing... (wait for it)... a do-it-yourself coffin kit.

The kit costs about \$100 U.S., says Mr. Nicholson, so that "customers will save a fortune as the price of coffins continues to go up." And best of all, the coffin can be used as a handy table or



**Weir's View**

By Ian Weir  
Thomson News Service

cocktail cabinet until it's needed for its true purpose.

Again, I was just a bit skeptical when I first read about this amazing entrepreneurial scheme.

These things may indeed make handy tables, but it's kind of hard to picture the family gathering happily round the coffin for Sunday dinner.

And using one as a cocktail cabinet might involve a certain unpleasant symbolism. "By all means, Fred — go right ahead and pour yourself a 12th drink of scotch. The bottle's right there,

in the coffin."

There's also a psychological barrier that might hinder the sale of coffin-kits. A coffin isn't really something you'd like to buy for yourself, and it also falls short of being the ideal gift for someone else.

Put it this way: the wife might misinterpret the gesture if you gave her one for your anniversary.

All the same, that \$100 price-tag is appealing. And assembling a do-it-yourself kit can often be an enjoyable project for the whole family.

("I've finished mowing the stupid lawn, Dad. I'll clean up the stupid ga-

rage later. Can I help you assemble your coffin, now?")

Goah. What it boils down to is a dilemma for the consumer — two completely different but equally appealing lines of coffins to choose from.

Part of me wants to save a fortune by ordering that \$100 kit, and acquiring a lovely planter in the process. But another part of me wants to rush straight out and buy the white fibreglass Abigail I've been dreaming of.

On the other hand, I may just sit back and wait for the dentist to persuade me that what I really want is root-canal surgery...

## The real McQueen

By Dick Kleiner

Dear Dick: I have wondered for 30 years about Steve McQueen. I almost married a young man who was in the Army at the time, who looked identical to Steve McQueen. His name was Johnny Scroggins. We both lived in Arizona in the '50s. Are they by some chance the same? What was Steve McQueen's real name and where was he brought up? — M.L.W., Okmulgee, Okla.

in Beech Grove, Ind., and raised in Indianapolis and Slater, Mo. No Scroggins, he.

• Dear Dick: Can you tell me if the woman who played the part of Angel in the mini-series, "Windmill of the Gods," was the same actress who was in the short-lived but funny series, "Open All Night," a few years ago? — L.K.H., Alpena, Mich.

Dear L.K.H.: Yes, same actress. Her name is Susan Tyrrell, and she's always good for a fine performance.

Dear M.L.W.: Sorry to have to burst that pretty bubble, but the late actor was born Terrence Steven McQueen

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