

# It's Party Time

*These entrepreneurs prove girls just want to have fun.*



PHOTOGRAPHS: ADAM BARNES

ABOVE, LEFT: Michie Wenzler (left) and Jan Simmons help women plan perfect getaways through Girls Weekend, a business designed around their art and their own experiences with friends. ABOVE, RIGHT: The hosts believe a Girls Weekend requires a degree of silliness not possible in everyday life and liken the all-women gatherings to slumber parties.

Aliens with taut green faces and unblinking eyes glide through a Nashville home. The menacing mugs crack only when a wave of mirth strikes the women slathered in rejuvenating facial masks.

Later, the friends at this giggly get-together break out passion pink and fiery red nail polish, style each other's hair, gorge on decadent cake, dip into a bubbly hot tub, and curl up in pajamas and pink feather boas for a late-night gabfest.

Nashville entrepreneurs and artists Jan Simmons and Michie Wenzler

masterminded these fab female festivities. A few years ago, the two friends started Girls Weekend, a business that supplies notions, knowledge, and

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Jan Simmons

encouragement to women craving time away with friends.

“Our company encourages wild women to unite and take time to get together with friends, even if it is just

once a year,” Jan explains. The gift line includes frilly doodads such as a faux leopard-skin fashionista party case.

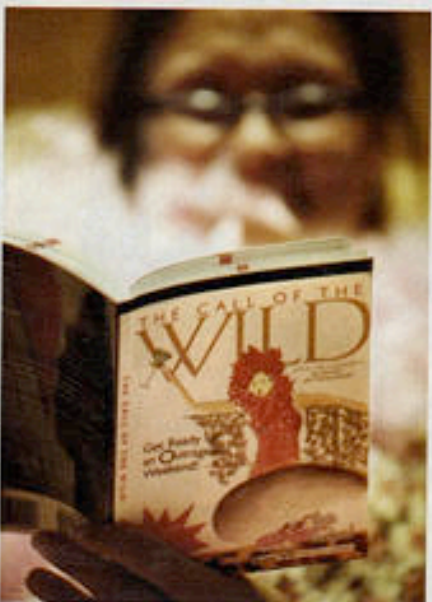
The partners' book, *The Call of the Wild*, gives tongue-in-cheek tips and tales on blowout weekends with female friends. The primer includes pointers on whom to take, where to go, and what to eat, as well as the 411 on divine Girls Weekend products.

#### Smart Art

Jan, a fifty-something mother of three, is married to the brother of Michie, a single woman in her thirties. The



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Food figures prominently into any Girls Weekend worth its salt (and sugar). Women use the time to relax and recharge. *The Call of the Wild*, by Jan and Michie, delivers hilarious pointers for a successful gathering. The gracious hosts confab about Girls Weekend products.



partners first came up with the Girls Weekend business when Jan, a former publicist and copywriter, and Michie, an ex-retail fashion marketer, brainstormed ways to promote their art.

Michie creates watercolors of fashionably attired, vogue-posing females. Jan uses oil paints and outrageous color choices to depict wry, funny women. Their subjects spout phrases such as "Someday I hope to travel extensively" and "I'm a single-swim-team-baseball-lacrosse-basketball-ballet-piano-full-time-self-employed-working-out-of-the-house soccer mom. But I used to be cool. I promise."

#### How To Go Wild

The company taps into a growing trend of females eager to take recreational trips together. Michie and Jan

believe today's woman realizes her family and/or career will survive just fine without her for a few days. "Men are always headed out on a golfing or hunting trip," says Michie with a shrug. Jan nods, adding, "Women are getting to the point that they are letting themselves go on fun trips too. I'm glad to be modeling to my kids that women can have something else besides children going on in their lives."

What's the first step in a Girls Weekend jaunt? "You have to make it

as simple as possible, or you won't do it," advises Jan. In selecting a site, she says, "You can make it expensive or cheap." Depending on your group's preference, Jan says, "You can go camping, or you can go to the spa." Since their college days, she and Michie have traveled with friends to places as diverse as Chicago, Illinois, and Iuka, Mississippi. Even your own house will suffice, Jan says, if you obey one cardinal rule: No boys allowed.

"It is essential that the husband and kids leave," says one Girls Weekend veteran. "We always talk about things that are going on in our lives—our children and our marriages. You don't want to do that when they're around."

It's not about male bashing, insist the women. It's about female bonding. Topics during late-night chat sessions range from the silly to the serious.

#### Together With Friends

"It's like a slumber party," Michie adds. "We like to pull out crazy hats and old bridesmaids' dresses. We have this one we call 'Purple Rain.'" She laughs and adds, "It's like a long purple cape, and we dance around in it."

When the rendezvous ends, however, women do take home a few mementos beyond tacky tiaras, toe rings, and fake tattoos. If the weekend is a success, Jan promises, "you are more confident, more adventurous, and more willing to experience new things."

Michie nods and then smiles indulgently at a particularly raucous outburst of girlish glee from the adjacent room. One thing is certain—facials alone can't explain those radiant faces.

NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON

### Plan a Wild Women Weekend

For tips and to order the book and products, visit [www.girlsweekend.com](http://www.girlsweekend.com). Items are also sold at select stores throughout the Southeast. You can find the retailer nearest you on the Web site. For possible inclusion in a second book planned by Jan and Michie, submit your own Girls Weekend story online.