


OUR★TOWN



CLOSE ENCOUNTER

BODY TALK

Nonverbal language analyst **PATTI WOOD** knows the secrets of the stars.

PATTI WOOD, A SMALL BLOND WOMAN WEARING glasses and a woolen black-and-white checked blazer, sits primly on a plush couch along a wall in The Ritz-Carlton, Buckhead, Lobby Lounge, surveying the scene. She's holding a glass of ginger ale topped with a maraschino cherry. The lounge is nearly full, and Wood's hushed voice, just a notch above a whisper, is almost lost in the din of conversation and consumption.

"That lady over there," she says, nodding toward a svelte, middle-aged woman sitting across from a gray-suited man, "look at where her hands are."

The woman's hands are clasped in the center of her lap.

"You see what part of her body she's covering? That's a sign that their relationship is in trouble."

Wood, a professional speaker who holds a master's degree in interpersonal and organizational communication, touts herself as "The Body Language Lady." She makes a living telling people what their outer selves reveal about their inner ones. Through her Atlanta-based company, Communication Dynamics, Wood teaches executives how to appear confident during board meetings, shows cops how to get murder suspects to open up during interrogations and coaches wallflowers on how to make good first impressions.

Wood also works as a consultant for several

magazines and tabloids of the sort found in supermarket checkout lines, which hire her to decipher photographs of celebrities. Show her a few pictures of Tom Cruise and Nicola Kidman, for example, and Wood can explain how the dissolution of the couple's relationship was foretold in the steepening slope of Kidman's shoulders or the diminishing width of Cruise's smile.

Local celebs often find themselves under her scrutiny. In a recent *Us Weekly*, Wood analyzed a shot of parttime Atlantans Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown. "He's trying to connect with her because of his hand on her knee," Wood noted. "Whitney has her leg crossed away from him, which puts a barrier between them. There's no connection. She's very unhappy with him."

The Body Language Lady is not always so pessimistic. Wood has this to say about Smyrna Julia Roberts' relationship with cameraman Danny Moder: "They mirror each other; their smiles, their slouches. His casual style matches her real state of being."

Incidentally, the Lobby Lounge is a known hangout for Brown and Houston. Last winter, according to news reports, they came here, sat together by the Steinway in the corner and gave an impromptu late-night concert. No photos were taken, and sources didn't note the position of Houston's hands.

—LUKE DITTRICH

TIP BIT
Handshakes developed in medieval times, as proof you weren't concealing weapons up your sleeve.

PHOTOGRAPH BY EMMETT MARTIN