

How To Choose a Hair Salon

By Curt Hagedorn

Hard on the heels of picking a doctor, lawyer or accountant, choosing a hairdresser (or barber, or stylist, or whatever) is one of the most critical decisions you can make these days, whether you're male or female. Ignoring for the moment that the individuals who cut our hair, like bartenders, often also stand in as informal life coaches, today your hairdresser's vision of who you are (and how well they and their team execute that vision) can catapult you to the head of the pack in the power/money/fashion matrix that dominates our culture, whether it's in the boardroom or the singles bar. If you believe in the term "perception is reality" then hairdressers are kung fu masters in the ever more complex world of appearances.

If you're unfortunate enough to have lost your stylist, or have never really found one who rocks your world, appearance wise, if only for the sake of your future happiness and success you need to make some time to concentrate on the search for the perfect hairdresser. A friend of mine and I recently joined forces to plan a makeover for an extremely attractive but "hairstyle challenged" friend of ours who is embarking on an exciting new career, and I can tell you from personal experience that in many ways it's really more about you, the client, than it is about the barber. So first things first, do your homework. Talk to all your friends and friends of friends, pore over your newspaper's society pages and find out where those people get their fabulous hair cut. Whenever the local (or even national) talk shows are doing makeovers, write down who's doing the hair. From this, you'll be able to develop a hit list of potential choices. Next, set up an appointment: not for a cut (not yet) but for a 'consultation for cut and color.'

Before you go, have at least some idea of what you absolutely do not want (like a buzzcut with green highlights.) Not only will this rule out the salons which seem to be turning out rainbow hair-dos on a regular basis, but you'll at least be able to communicate the outer limits of your imagination to your stylist even if you don't know what you do want. You can research what you're looking for in fashion magazines, you can find your "celebrity twin" whose facial features and coloring most closely match your own and mimic their obviously expensively purchased "look," but ultimately you need to create that bond of trust with a hairdresser that stands the test of time and fashion, so communication is key. In your consultation appointment, be honest with the stylist (who may also bring in a colorist or other colleague) about everything. For example, if you prefer your hair long to the point of bursting into tears at the thought of having an inch of it removed, make that clear. Though they may eventually (and probably should) talk you into a short haircut, at least you'll have had the conversation and know what's coming. Never, ever, be

intimidated by a hair professional or feel that your opinion isn't important. If they're the kind of hairdresser you're looking for, they will be more than capable of using the information you give them to convince you to do the right thing, hair-wise. So let it all hang out, insecurities, childhood hair traumas, anything that might help them bring out your best self as opposed to the combination of self delusion, desperate clinging to youthful fads and other bad choices that has resulted in far too many Farrah-do's and mullets walking the streets. Then, pick the stylist you feel most comfortable with, who's taken the time to listen and who seems to understand that finding the right cut is a professional process, not a \$100 bucks for 20 minutes transaction.

And my "hair challenged" friend? We eventually found her a salon whose owner had been featured on "Oprah," right around the corner from where she lives. Her consultation with the stylist luckily resulted in an instant bond between them. She was confident enough to go ahead with what turned out to be a spectacular cut and, after a period of adjustment, has another appointment to consult about color. Inexpensive? No, but the confidence the transformation has already wrought is priceless.

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