



A (Metro) Sexual
REVOLUTION

The word salon conjures up images of society ladies having their hair styled, their nails French-manicured, and their eyebrows perfectly tweezed, waxed, or in the case of the current flavor of the month, threaded. We, or at least I, being the self-described theater and film buff, automatically think of the glamorous starlets of Hollywood's Golden Age, such as Ava Gardner, Lauren Bacall, and Elizabeth Taylor. But, there is a new place in the Washington, D.C. area where female customers are nowhere to be found. It is called The Grooming Lounge and perhaps serves as confirmation that Western society has entered into a new era; one marked by the rise of the metrosexual, a term that became widely used beginning in 2003 and meant to describe the urban male who has a strong sense of style and spends a great deal of time and money on his appearance. By **Faisal Al-Juburi**

The past few generations have defined the male as being rugged, rough, and tough. To be a man meant to be a symbol of strength and virility, or violence of the highest degree. He was the protector. He was the brute, almost caveman-like in description. The perfect man was of significantly few words and marked by an intense spirit, even though his emotions should and would never be exposed. Today, however, we have come to see that that man perhaps never actually existed, that he was a myth of sorts. He was, in all probability, a social ideal meant to polarize further the two sexes. But, as the once well-defined lines of masculinity and femininity are increasingly blurred not only in the West, but also across the globe, we as men, see ourselves entering into the Age of the Metrosexual and his exclusively male salon.

At The Grooming Lounge, as well as establishments of a similar nature, clients, many of whom come in groups of either friends or colleagues in an effort to mix business and pleasure, begin their treatments in a social area, where they are offered the drinks of their choice as they relax and watch sports games with players such as metrosexual poster boy David Beckham on a large plasma television. Then, they are taken in for their previously scheduled services, some of which begin with a warm facial wrap, and most, if not all, finish their time at the lounge with a sense of serene satisfaction. For after all, they have just spent an hour or more in the lap of ultimate luxury, pampered to whatever limits their chequebooks delineate. And, as they prepare to pay their bills and leave, they find themselves surrounded by a gallery of personal care products from such popular international lines as Fekkai for Men, Molton Brown, and Zirh. Unless completely numb to the powers of temptation, the customers all undoubtedly feel like the proverbial children in a candy store, in need of everything offered in hopes that such products will aid in the effort to make each of them the new face of the metrosexual race.

To those of us who grew up with the male role models who attempted to emulate the ideal of the rugged super man, the above

description of a modern-day male salon may sound like a form of heresy. After all, the notion of being manicured and polished from head-to-toe was, and in some circles still is, inextricably linked to the female population. But, one need not look too far back to recognize that we are, in truth, returning to our roots, realizing that the period of the unkempt and disheveled male was itself only a phase, and a fleeting one at that, that it perhaps simply stemmed as a reaction against the standards of society during the Vietnam War and postwar periods of the 1960s and 1970s.

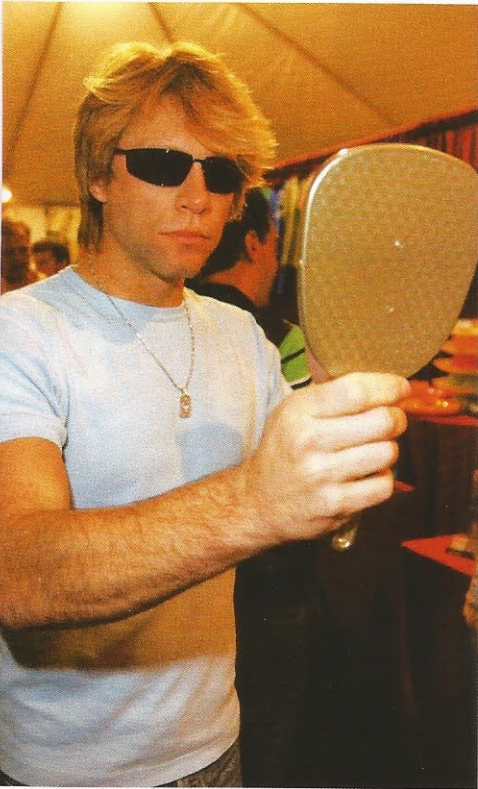
But, as we have veered back toward the norm of the elegantly coiffed male during the past decade or so, the military man as the image of physical perfection to which one should aspire has been undoubtedly replaced by a model of a smoldering appeal. Instead of Uncle Sam, a cartoon figure meant to symbolize the United States in a human form, on posters proclaiming, "I Want You For U.S. Army," we have seen a scantily clad Jon Bon Jovi saying, through a coy smile and stare, that he wants us to buy Versace, that we too will become rock stars if we do. We have seen famed rapper-turned-actor-turned-entrepreneur Sean "P. Diddy" Combs featured in the advertisement campaign for his clothing line entitled Sean John, one which stresses the importance of accessories in a man's wardrobe and caters itself to the tastes of the every man who has a rapper hidden underneath his more polished veneer. And, in every newspaper and tabloid across Europe, we are perhaps always bound to see our favorite aforementioned metrosexual soccer/football player acting as his own personal commercial, raising awareness of his partnership with Adidas footwear and setting trends with his Dolce & Gabbana wardrobe and ever-changing, salon-styled hair.

And, it is in all likelihood, the growing mane of hair which many current celebrities sport that has given the male salon industry the present boom on which it is thriving. Apart from the nails, brows, and clean or purposefully unclean shaves, we as common men outside of the spotlight, immediately notice the different and innovative things that the Orlando Blooms, Brad Pitts, Ashton Kutchers, and Hugh Jackmans of our popular culture society are doing with their sometimes long locks, realizing that the day of the singular

closely cropped military haircut is long gone. We see their hair gelled and waxed and either neatly combed or perfectly messy, and think to ourselves that our hair, in addition to a closet filled with items from Giorgio Armani to Ermenegildo Zegna, Mark Jacobs to Ralph Lauren, may be the ticket to enter into the elite world of trendsetters and style icons.

The salon is, in a way, the celebrity and city's answer to the small town's barber-shop, a setting idealized and popularized in the 1950s and early 1960s by American artist Norman Rockwell and the classic television series, *The Andy Griffith Show*. It is an arena in which men meet, talk about the current events in their lives to all those who surround them, and leave looking their utmost best. Thus, to the historically savvy, the salon also brings to mind the *hammam*, the communal bath that was once integral to Ottoman culture and adopted by the Europeans, who at one time had their men of high society, including powerful political leaders Louis XIV of France and George





Washington, the eventual first president of the United States of America, powder their faces and don high heels and wigs on a daily basis. And, while we are most probably and thankfully far away from the day when or if men off the stage and screen must once again receive lessons in makeup application, we should embrace the fact that the masses have chosen to look to the high society men of years past, rather than Tarzan, as role models in personal presentation. We should, as so many already have, wholeheartedly accept that cleanliness, in the

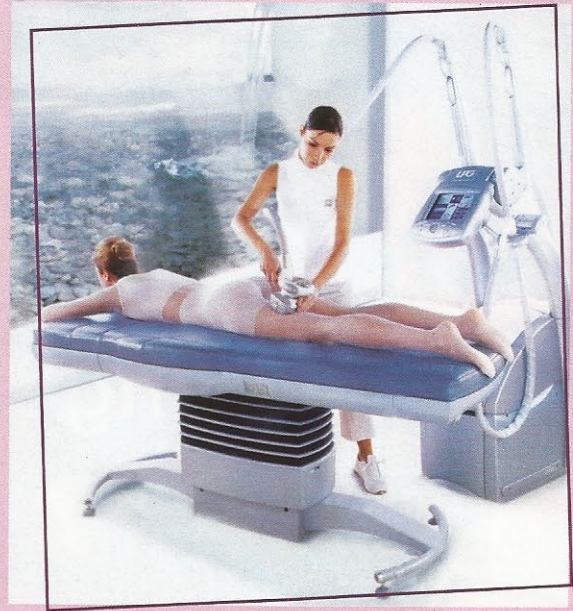
form of a close shave, manicure, pedicure, and/or facial in the setting of The Grooming Lounge or elsewhere, is not synonymous with femininity, that the ideals of the metrosexual should be unapologetically, and even proudly,

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embraced. For, in my mind at least, the images of Ms. Gardner, Ms. Bacall, and Ms. Taylor in a salon have now been joined by those of the dashing and perfectly groomed Cary Grant, Van Johnson, and Peter Lawford.

For the future Grants, Johnsons, and Lawfords of the 21st century, I leave you with my Top Five Grooming Tips:

- ☛ Shave either during or immediately following a hot shower. The pores are at their largest and the beard is at its softest due to the heat, providing the perfect conditions for a close, clean shave
- ☛ Pedicures provide great comfort for the busy businessman who is always on his feet. However, they are a necessity, and not a luxury, for those who choose to wear sandals or thongs/flip-flops
- ☛ Never, under any circumstances, bite your nails. The raw skin that comes as a result makes a very poor impression on others. Nails do not have to be professionally manicured, but should be neatly trimmed and filed once a week
- ☛ Dry hands are a big faux pas, since first meetings are usually marked by a handshake. Olive oil is a wonderful skin moisturizer that should be used at least once to twice a month, in addition to a daily hand or skin lotion
- ☛ When tweezing eyebrows, separate the brows but do not shape them. Arches are still, and should always be, reserved for the likes of Ms. Gardner ■



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