

Cutting Loose

More and more top hairstylists are giving up big salon life for the freedom of working fr

One day this past winter, when the usual well-kept women teetered into New York's Warren-Tricomi salon, they encountered a gaggle of production assistants and a flock of microphones. If any of them had hopes of relaxing in the Moroccan-style chairs while receiving the undivided attention of their stylists, they were about to be disappointed. A crew from Bravo was filming a reality-TV special—and that day, at least, cameras outranked clients on the priority list.

The scene at Warren-Tricomi, while perhaps extreme, is hardly an anomaly. With many stylists to the stars now set on becoming stars themselves—whether by developing television shows, hawking products or escorting their clients down the red carpet—the big salon is not what it used to be. Once places where clients were treated like VIPs, many today are afflicted with staff who don't quite catch your name the third time and stylists who hop from chair to chair, letting assistants pick up their half-finished work. "I know this doesn't sound nice," sighs Kevin Lee, the creative director at Kenneth, the old-school salon in the Waldorf-Astoria, "but I think stylists forget what side of the chair they're on."

Enter the work-at-home hair guru. In search of one-on-one attention, many in-the-know types are willing to climb four flights of stairs and have their hair washed in the kitchen sink. Here, the underground stylists making waves—and turning out great cuts—on both coasts.

—JESSICA B. MATLIN



Gerald DeCock

NEW YORK

Birdsong, not blow-dryers, is what DeCock's clients hear during the warmer months, when the stylist cuts hair alfresco in his rooftop garden at the Hotel Chelsea. An alum of salons Pipino-Buccheri and Oribe, among others, DeCock decided to work out of his home, a penthouse apartment at the Chelsea, 15 years ago. The hotel, a rock 'n' roll landmark, is an apt setting for the 47-year-old, whose inspirations include the Buckingham Nicks album cover and Richard Avedon's Seventies portraits. DeCock, who counts designer Jane Mayle and several other prominent members of the fashion crowd as clients, insists on cutting hair dry—"It's the way I've always done it"—and finds little need for fancy goop. Unless he's working on an editorial shoot, he rarely uses more than a quarter-size squirt of leave-in conditioner. "My clients might be low maintenance," he says, "but they're definitely high style." \$150. 312.227.1254



Frankie Payne

LOS ANGELES

Over the course of his 22-year career, Payne has traveled the globe with his mentor, Orlando Pita, and snipped the locks of high-maintenance types at West Hollywood's Privé. In 2001 he traded salon life for kicking back in his own backyard, transforming a storage room into a studio where he doles out beachy styles to the likes of Eva Longoria, Justin Timberlake, Zach Braff and Fergie of the Black Eyed Peas. The atmosphere, with clients lounging on a white midcentury modern sofa and Massive Attack humming in the background, is more after-hours lounge than beauty parlor, and that's just how Payne likes it. "In salons, there is a certain safe, daytime quality," he says with disdain. \$250. 310.415.7730

Andy LeCompte

LOS ANGELES

The man responsible for Madonna's recent disco flip, LeCompte spent three months traveling with the Material Girl on her Confessions tour. When his schedule became chaotic to keep regular hours at Chris McMillan Salon, he decided that "it's just easier if they come to me." Luckily, many of his regulars are high-profile types who appreciate privacy, so they haven't mind making the trek to his Spanish-style house in West Hollywood. "Liz came over, and we tried on wig in my garage," he says. And La La, a sometime partner in crime with Richie has spent quality time in LeCompte's bathroom. "I was in hair in my tub. Some clients have a chuckle about that." Nowhere seems, is off-limits chez LeCompte. "People play Ms. Pac-Man in my bedroom," he says. "And a lot of times, they bring their boyfriend." \$500. Call Patti Kassover at SoCal Artists, 310.558.7656