

Chapter 1

Setting Up Shop: Career Stylists and Kitchen Beauticians

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When my good friend Ling Moon first came to the United States from China, the number of hair colors and textures that dotted the American landscape overwhelmed her. Although I didn't have the heart to tell her until much later that most of that hair was color treated, I identified with how she felt.

Everyone's hair texture, growth pattern, length, and color are different, making every haircut a unique experience. And because you'll always have an endless supply of the stuff — rain or shine, hair grows about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch per month — haircutting is also one of the few artful activities where saving or making money is a sure thing.

If you cut your family's hair just some of the times, for instance, you can shave dollars off your beauty budget. And if you find yourself falling in love with haircutting, becoming a licensed stylist gives you the chance to make an above-average wage. And from there, the sky is the limit in terms of different career opportunities. (Chapter 22 shares great information about different career paths you can take after you become a licensed stylist.)

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Discovering Your Inner Artist: Do You Have What It Takes?

Haircutting is a three-dimensional art form consisting of different lengths, angles, and elevations. Although haircutting is a simple science, it only produces exceptional results when you also draw on your unique talents. If you think that you don't have any talents worth considering, think again. It certainly helps to be a sculptor, a painter, and an all-around artistic fellow, but talents needed for haircutting also come from areas that may surprise you.

- ✓ Do you love to paint, draw, or doodle?
- ✓ Are you mechanically inclined?
- ✓ Do you have carpentry or handyman skills?
- ✓ Do you know how to sew?
- ✓ Do you have a strong sense of symmetry?
- ✓ Are you methodical by nature?

Knowing how to sew, for instance, means that you're adept at putting pattern pieces together — a skill that you can apply to blending the various sections of your haircuts. If you have drafting or carpentry skills, the precision of your angles can make your haircuts exceptional. The ability to paint a house can also translate into creating interesting finishes in the hair. And if you have the gift of symmetry, or you're extremely methodical, your haircuts will be straight and true — two of the major challenges for real artistic types who intuitively cut hair.

This list makes up just a smattering of the talents you can draw from to create exceptional haircuts. For instance, I personally don't draw, paint, sew, fix houses, or put my child's toys together. But I do apply my own unique sense of balance that brings a signature quality to all my haircuts. Someone else may apply a keen sense of integration so that every haircut moves, lays, and styles perfectly. Other folks may apply their innate ability to cut crisp, clean lines. Or others . . . well, you can see my point.

Getting Your Goods Together



Assuming that you're not preparing to build a complete salon in your home — that's illegal unless you're licensed and home salons are allowed in your area — here are some things you need to set up an informal shop:

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- ✓ **Stool and beanbag:** Get a stool with a generous seat and back as well as a baby beanbag to cut young children's hair. Put the beanbag on the seat and the kid on the beanbag. This setup hoodwinks the child into not moving as much, while keeping his or her ears and other body parts safe.
- ✓ **Large mirror:** Cut hair in an area where you have a large mirror to improve the quality of your work. If you can't face a hanging mirror, purchase a full-length wardrobe mirror that you can wheel out any time you cut hair. This type of mirror gives you a great view of your work and allows you to visually balance your cuts as you go.
- ✓ **Newspaper:** Always use enough newspaper to cover a six-foot-wide area around your chair to save yourself from cleaning up hairy messes. When you're done with your haircut, cleaning up is as easy as wadding up the newspaper and tossing it in the trash.
- ✓ **Good lighting:** Work with good lighting; have lights overhead and on each side of the person whose hair you're cutting. If you only have light on one side, you're cutting half of the head in a shadow. Weather permitting, I also like cutting hair outdoors when the sun is overhead and I can clearly see details.

If you're feeling really ambitious after getting that annual bonus at work, invest in these gems:

- ✓ **Hydraulic styling chair:** If you plan to cut many adults' hair, consider investing in a good hydraulic styling chair. Many beauty suppliers sell these chairs, and they make your haircuts much easier to do. If you decide to purchase a styling chair, you can skip the stool. (Hang on to the beanbag, though, because it still helps keep fidgety young children in one spot!)
- ✓ **Roller caddy:** Purchase a *roller caddy* — a handy little cabinet on wheels with a flat, 12-inch square countertop — from your local beauty supply. You don't have to have this item, but it does make the act of haircutting much easier. Roller caddies have drawers for storing all your cutting paraphernalia — combs, capes, scissors, clips, and so on — while providing a workspace where you can hang your water bottle and place your comb, scissors, and clips.

Cutting Up in Your Kitchen

I find cutting friends' and family members' hair at home appealing for several reasons. The most important reason, of course, is all the money you can save

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by cutting hair, or at least prolonging the time between professional haircuts. (Chapter 7 tells you how to maintain your own haircuts. Chapter 21 reveals how to keep other professional haircuts in shape.)



I also find that haircutting is just plain fun. It allows you to be creative and interact one-on-one for up to an hour with someone you particularly like or love, and it gives you tremendous satisfaction when that person looks in the mirror and says, “I love what you’ve done to my hair.”

Contorting to cut your own hair

Haircutting lets you help other people out, but you can also please yourself! Making minor adjustments to your bangs, shortening the hair around your face, or trimming the top of your hair, for example, does wonders to improve the appearance of an overgrown haircut and dramatically lift your spirits. I know that by midmorning of a bad hair day, I almost always feel unattractive and even depressed. To remedy the situation, I have been known to squeeze a haircut in on myself while some good-hearted soul shampoos my next client. (Check out Chapter 7 to find out more about these self-beautifying trims.)



I believe that doing minor trims to your own hair under ideal conditions is a good thing. But impulsively cutting your hair in elevators, at stoplights, or seconds before dashing out on a date — as I admittedly have done — is a bad idea. Even minor trims take planning and a sensible work area so you can concentrate on what you’re doing!

And take note that I’m only talking about minor trims. Unless you happen to be a contortionist, cutting the back of your own hair is never a good idea. Even highly skilled hairdressers shy away from giving themselves complete haircuts unless, of course, they’re really desperate.

Chopping your children’s hair

Most children’s haircuts are simple designs that require mastering less than a handful of skills. From the child’s perspective, having a parent cut his or her hair is often easier than going to a hair salon, especially if you follow this advice: When cutting young children’s hair, be prepared to abandon several of your parenting principles, including resorting to unabashed bribery.



I’ve cut children’s hair for many years, but I didn’t master the art of what I call the *quick-and-dirty haircut* (which doesn’t labor over end finishes, layers, or elaborate blow dries) until I had my own son. Successfully following in my shoes when cutting your own young children’s hair requires the following:

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- ✓ Keeping the styles simple
- ✓ Carefully planning your cuts before you put them in the hot seat
- ✓ Quickly diving in before they have time to become bored



This entire setup usually gives you a good 20 minutes to complete your task — a full five minutes longer than you need for any of the quick-and-dirty kids' cuts that I share in Chapter 12. For even more info on cutting your kids' hair, turn to Chapter 20 for a list of solid tips.

Clipping a companion's hair

Cutting a friend's hair can work well for both of you, especially if you never attempt a haircut without at least some guidance. To ensure you always do a good job, follow the easy haircuts in this book. I include step-by-step instructions on women's short, medium, and long styles (Chapters 8, 9, and 10), as well several arty cuts like shattered (Chapter 16) and disconnected shapes (Chapter 15). I even include chapters on clipper cutting (Chapter 14) and quick-and-dirty adult cuts that take as little as five minutes (Chapter 13).

Making Someone Else's Hair Your Business



You can cut your kids' hair, your companion's hair, and even your neighbors' hair — for free. But, when money is exchanged, you're acting as a professional stylist. Being a stylist for hire is forbidden unless you have a license. Besides, if you're so good people want to pay you for a trim, you should become a licensed stylist anyway!

Getting licensed

Deciding how far your cutting ambitions can go hinges on the regulations in your state or province. In most states, the *Consumer Affairs Board* — the same agency that oversees other service businesses, such as restaurants — is responsible for establishing rules that apply to cosmetology. Most states forbid people to work as cosmetologists — exchanging labor for money — without a state-issued cosmetology license. Depending on the state, the educational requirements needed to even test for this license may be as low as a few hundred hours or as high as more than 2,200 hours.

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Cutting your friends' hair, family's hair, and your own hair normally doesn't fall within state guidelines unless compensation is involved. However, if you decide to hang up a shingle, service customers for money, and advertise in your local newspaper, you're subject to the regulations of your state. The only way to know exactly what those regulations are is to contact your state regulatory agency that supervises cosmetology. Otherwise, you may have a stern-faced inspector show up at your door confiscating your scissors and demanding to see your license!

Being bitten by the beauty-school bug

Being smitten with hair enough to go to school for it is a good thing. But unless you attend a high-powered beauty school, getting through a cosmetology course requires true grit and plenty of patience. Most beauty schools are understaffed, under stress to teach only the basics, and often attract elderly clients who refuse to wear contemporary styles.



You can have a wonderful time in school by

- ✓ Being willing to travel to another city or even another state to receive the best education. This can be as simple as attending a local beauty school — even if it's focused on the basics and servicing blue-haired beauties — while taking advantage of the many classes offered by manufacturers and independent educators in metropolitan areas.
- ✓ Attending as many trade shows as possible.
- ✓ Joining worthwhile trade organizations like the National Cosmetology Association (Internet: www.salonprofessionals.org) and The Salon Association (Internet: www.oneroof.org).

After you're in school, finding out about these great opportunities is easy because flyers and informative trade publications are sent to all schools. By doing these things, you'll be far better equipped to quickly *get on the floor* (a term used to denote that you're ready to work on real clients) and carve out an exciting salon career.

If you're fortunate enough to live in a state that has a *junior licensing program*, you can also receive on-the-spot training at a participating salon. The plus to this situation is a more realistic, hands-on education; the drawback is that these programs generally take twice as long to complete as regular beauty school. In essence, you assist top-notch stylists with their clients, study textbook stuff to pass your state board examination, and receive special classes to help you pass your test and ably take care of clients. Check with your state regulatory agency that handles cosmetology for more information about this program.



Being cosmopolitan about cosmetology

Although there are many good cosmetology schools, my personal favorites are those that teach both advanced and basic techniques, prepare students for the real world of hair-dressing and their state test, and inspire everyone attending their schools to experience everything that their future license will allow them to professionally practice. I also look for a pretty setting. Who wants to be sequestered in a dumpy business for months? The school

should also provide plenty of classes featuring guest artists who are making a great living in the beauty industry.

Many fine institutions offer wonderful cosmetology educations, but my personal picks are Vidal Sassoon Academies in Los Angeles and London; the Brown Institute in Mentor, Ohio; Paul Mitchell, the School, in Costa Mesa, California; and the Von Curtis Academy in Provo, Utah.



After you complete beauty school, the world can be your oyster as long as you carefully guide your career. Look for salons that offer advanced training to recent graduates, take as many classes as you can, and never — I mean never — forget the basics of haircutting that you learned in beauty school.

You may also want to explore all the possibilities that extend beyond directly caring for clients. The industry is hungry for educators, and beauty product manufacturers consider having licensed cosmetologists on their corporate teams as a plus. You can also go into beauty sales or crossover to another part of the beauty business by entering the retail market where your expertise is equally valuable. I talk more about different beauty careers in Chapter 22.

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