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AP Article – Philadelphia

By Deborah Yao

Steven Wooke takes a swig from a bottle of Heineken as his left hand rests on a small table, his fingers spread out like a fan of playing cards.

He's getting a manicure – or hand detailing, as the salon calls it – and it's pampering the 24-year-old information technology manager has learned to enjoy.

"My girlfriend notices it," Wooke said during a recent visit to an American Male salon for nail grooming sans polish. "I try to come in every two weeks."

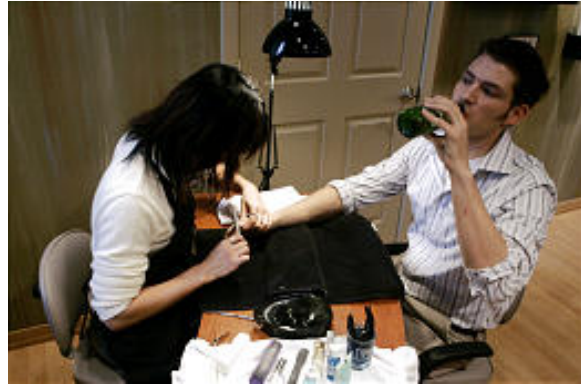
American Male – which is opening its 15th salon in Las Vegas, in February – is one of a growing number of salons devoted to men who want more than just a barbershop haircut but don't feel comfortable sitting in women's beauty salons and wouldn't be caught dead entering a froufrou day spa.

The salons are catering to an apparently growing interest by men in grooming. Sales of men's skin care products sold through department stores rose 13 percent last year, more than double the growth for the women's market, according to NPD Group, a marketing research firm in Port Washington, N.Y.

Retail sales in the U.S. men's grooming market are expected to reach \$10-billion by 2008, up 25 percent from last year, according to Packaged Facts, a unit of MarketResearch.com in New York.

From the décor to the terminology they use, men's salons are seeking to put some distance between themselves and beauty salons.

Some have strong sports themes, including TVs turned to sports channels.



Steven Wooke, 24, got a manicure at the American Male Salon in Philadelphia (AP Photo)

Some offer free beer. And at least one lets clients light up cigars. Prices for haircuts, waxing, manicures, pedicures, facials, shaving and massages start at about \$20.

"Men don't really like going to salons. They don't like being with women in there and they don't like the smell of the salons," said Howard Hafetz, chief executive of Raylon Corp., American Male Salons parent company. "They don't want to look across the aisle and see their buddy's wife over there."

Raylon, based in Reading, 50 miles northwest of Philadelphia, operates or licenses salons in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, California, Illinois, Oklahoma and Colorado.

Other chains catering to men's grooming include Art of Shaving, which is based in Miami and has eight locations in four states and is opening 10 more by the end of 2006; Sport Clips of Georgetown, Texas, with 300 franchised locations; and Roosters Men's Grooming Centers of Round Rock, Texas, with 13 salons open with five under construction.

“Men are getting more vain,” said Martin Salzman, author of *The Future of Men* and director of strategic content at ad agency JWT in New York. “There’s more pressure to look young and sexy. Even young boys are waxing their bodies to be hairless.”

But is male grooming a lasting trend or will it dissipate as quickly as nail polish remover?

“I do think it’s viable,” said Michael Flocker, author of *The Metrosexual Guide to Style: A Handbook for the Modern Man*. “I think the presentation of the concept is very important. If it looks at all girly, it will be intimidating to men. If it looks sleek, men will respond to it.”

Joe Grondin, a barber and founder of Roosters, understands that many men won’t go to a business that could expose them to ridicule by their poker buddies.

What Roosters does is get rid of hair that men don’t want, wherever it is, Grondin said.

“We do a lot of eyebrows, you know, to get rid of the unibrow thing,” he said.

American Male salons take care to avoid flowery accents, pink or red hues and whiffs of hairspray or nail polish. At the Philadelphia location, sports memorabilia, including black-and-white pictures of baseball greats Joe DiMaggio and Jackie Robinson, adorn one wall.

Steering clear of feminine terms, American Male has dubbed manicures and pedicures hand and foot detailing; covering one’s gray is called camouflage. The salons also offer eyebrow, chest and back waxing and massages.

Hafetz said male salons are trying to fill a need traditional barbershops did not.

“The barbershop was part of the American fabric in the ‘40s, ‘50s and ‘60s,” he said. “The barbers lost touch with what their clients really wanted.”

Last month, Mac Morgan went to a male salon for the first time.

Before the stylist started his haircut, Morgan was led to a corner of the salon where a vat of orange-hued wax awaited. As part of the hand paraffin treatment, the stylist dropped his hand into the wax until it formed a second skin that moisturizes. Plastic gloves go on and then fluffy cotton mitts.

The 25-year-old software engineer from suburban Philadelphia then reclined by the shampooing station where his feet were propped up on a taupe leather ottoman and a warm towel spread over his face.

Morgan booked the “Quality Grooming Experience” package: a \$38 dollar treatment that comes with a mini-facial, scalp massage, haircut, shampoo, conditioning and styling.

As the stylist alternately washed his hair and massaged his scalp, she asked how it felt.

“It feels good,” Morgan said. “I’ve been to women’s salons. But I feel comfortable here.”

**** This article appeared all over the country in newspapers such as The Boston Globe, The LA Times and The St. Petersburg Times – ranging from one end of the nation to the other!**



a full service salon for guys

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