

Mountain View Beauty Salon Gains Popularity by Pampering Men

By Julie Patel

Looking for a guy with great hair, buffed nails and smooth skin who likes football and beer?

You could have found him parked in front of "Monday Night Football" with a Gorgon Biersch in his lap and his tootsies soaking in bubbles at the American Male beauty salon in Mountain View's San Antonio Shopping Center. It claims to be the only beauty salon just for men in California, and it represents the growing phenomenon of the metro-sexual, the male-diva, today's superman __ bread-winner, ballplayer, trendsetter and master chef, all in one. It also represents the desperate attempts at "cleaning up" these guys, say some of their wives and moms.

A former military man, a maintenance manager and several businessmen swigged beers and watched the Rams-Eagles game in the salon Monday while getting primped with facials, haircuts and manicures. It was hard to tell what was the bigger debate: Which hair dye looks more natural __ ash or light ask__ or whether the 49ers have ever been so sorry.

Since the salon opened in September, Darren Barthel has made several visits to have his hair dyed -- or "camouflaged," as American Male stylists call it.

Barthel's only 39, but he realized a few months back that he needed a change after seeing a photo of himself topped with a shocking white mop.

"I can't walk into a bar or club like that," said Barthel, a single information

technology specialist/nurse who spent 15 years in the military. "It's like, 'Whoa, look at grandpa.'"

No flowers, no hoods

He said he tried traditional salons but the experience was embarrassing. He didn't care for the "chatty" conversations, flowery aprons and especially the hair-drying hoods.

"You're sitting in there cooking... And you have to wear a bag on your head. It's not cool," he said, gulping a beer, his words flavored with a Southern drawl.

But a place where the walls are lined with golf clubs, tennis rackets, surfboards and other sports paraphernalia?

That's macho enough for Kevin Rarick, a Yahoo executive, whose wife sent him to American Male as a Christmas present. He got "the Executive" -- a massage, pedicure, manicure and facial. \$105 -- plus tip. Rarick confessed he would go back if his wife pushed.

"He'll go back," Inger Rarick, his wife, said the next day. "He looks handsome and cleaned up. These are things men don't think about often enough."

That's changing.

Beauty companies that traditionally focused on women are coming out with product lines just for men, said American Male's general manager Phil Sacino. And like his salon, they're catering to both gay and straight men.

Facials -- which clean, exfoliate and moisturize skin -- cost anywhere from \$48 to \$60. Brow and neck waxes each cost \$15, and chest and back waxes are double and triple that. For \$20, you can get you hands

“detailed.” Don’t call it a manicure, stylists warn.

American Male, which has 14 salons across the country, isn’t the only salon just for men. Rooster’s Man’s Grooming Centers, another just for chain, boasts salons in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Michigan and Texas. It started in 1998 and has a “manly flavor” to it, said Joe Grondin, Rooster’s CEO. He said men can get their cuticles trimmed at Rooster’s.

But “we draw the line,” he said emphatically. “We don’t do paraffin hand dip.”

Barthel tried a hand dip for the first time Monday. His first reaction: “How am I going to hold my beer?”

And once the wax was removed: “Wow, I’m not going to need any lotion for a while huh?”

Jerry Loison, 58, of Los Altos admitted he enjoys being pampered with hand dips and manicures at American Male. But he said he mainly does it because he has to shake hands all day in business deals.

“I do it for looks. I want to be professional,” said Moison, a real estate investor, who had his slacks rolled up as a technician clipped his toenails last week.

Hanging out

Sacino said the salon is gaining reputation – though not just for its services. It’s a popular hangout, especially as football playoffs and bowl season heats up.

“Some guys come in and say, ‘You’re the place that gives free beer right?’” Sacino said. “We’re like, ‘Yeah, and we give decent haircuts, too.’”

That’s right. Stylists greet customers with a beer – or coffee, soda, or water – right when they walk in.

And although the products American Male uses are designed for men, single women won’t be turned away.



a full service salon for guys