

HIGH-RENT

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ON A
BEAUTY
BUDGET



HAIR BY DAVID AT JOSEPHMARTIN SALON, BEVERLY HILLS. MAKEUP BY CHRISTY GARAN.
CLOTHING STYLIST: GEORGE BIODWELL/CLOUTIER. PHOTO BY CHARLES BUSH.

by VICTORIA WURDINGER

Finding a great stylist is no problem if you just inherited a bundle, but finding a hair Houdini whose prices won't make your hair stand on end requires ingenuity and a little groundwork.

The first step toward finding a fabulous hairstylist who you can afford is to put aside the notion that the more it costs, the better quality it must be. Not so, say thousands of women who got burned, including a First Lady or two. Next step? Know what you want up front. You might think the Gabor sisters or Ann Landers could look better for their bucks, but clearly, they're getting what they demand.

ARMED AND READY

Armed with attitude (hey, hairdressers have plenty,)

make a preliminary list of questions that you want answered before a single lock falls to the floor. These might include: What do you recommend for fine hair? Can I keep my hair long and get a new look? What can I do about... (something you dislike)? What will work best for my facial shape? Will you teach me to style my hair at home when we're done?

If any of the answers indicate that the stylist wants to force his or her ideas on you, take a pass. If the stylist asks you additional questions, chalk up plus points.

NETWORK A LITTLE

To find someone you even want to query, ask friends—or even strangers—whose cuts you like where they get their hair cut. Narrow this approach further by targeting someone in the job position in which you'd like to be. If you want an executive position, join the appropriate networking group and ask the top pros for recommendations. You can also take a Saturday stroll and camp outside a salon to observe the work that walks out the door. Sleuthing skills help.

Sometimes, you'll get invited inside. Don't be shy but make it clear you're window shopping for the moment. If the salon offers you a free consultation, take it.

INSIDE TRACK

The previously discussed approaches will net you the usual suspects; now, here are real insider's tips:

If you read about a hairdresser over and over in magazines, all it means is that he or she has the cash to hire a public relations pro. While this does indicate some level of skill (how else did the salon amass the money to pay for PR?), it doesn't mean he or she is

the best you can find. And if someone told you to look at hair "credits," which are printed alongside of fashion photo shoots, forget it. Editorial stylists are terrific at styling models' already luxurious locks, but many of them can't cut any better than your grandmother. You want someone who cuts hair for a living, not someone who styles someone else's cut.

Just like stocks, there are blue-chip salons and junk salons. Memberships and affiliations give you clues as to where an establishment falls.

Top-notch, pricey salons are most touted by the media. Who hasn't heard of Frederic Fekkai, Umberto or Louis Licari? If the stars go there, you can bet they are getting good cuts—and paying the price. Next come Intercoiffure salons. Intercoiffure is an organization that doesn't allow just anyone to join and usually, members keep up on the latest cuts and techniques. Some cost over \$50, others are at \$50 or under—their address is often a tip off. High-rent zip code, high-rent hair.

In any of these better salons, a cut from the owner will cost more than one from a staff member. Ask about the salon's training program to determine how good a staff member might be. Most Intercoiffure salons have training programs for as long as a year; if they do and a stylist has been there two years, chances are he or she is well-trained and highly skilled. Vidal Sassoon Salons are notorious for their rigorous apprenticeship programs.

In addition to professional memberships, some salons are affiliated with specific manufacturers that

require a certain amount of education to carry their product lines. What you want is an affiliate whose educational requirements go beyond product ingredient knowledge and sales training. Usually, these salons are actually designated "official affiliates," as opposed to salons that simply carry product. Official Redken salons, ABBA Affiliates, Matrix Synergy Success Club Members and Toni & Guy Salons all fall into this category. To locate these salons, call manufacturers whose products you like and ask for an official salon in your area that participates in hair cutting and coloring education.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Brand new stylists aren't always a bad bet. If they've had a great training program, they'll be able to give you what you want at almost half the price of well-established stylists. And while they're training, they need clients on whom to practice. This brings us to another great way to find affordable hair wizards. Call salons in your area (especially if you've heard they have a good reputation) and ask if they have a training night.

Many salons offer super-reduced rates during training night and the work is always supervised by a highly regarded trainer. Just a few salons that have special training nights are Frederic Fekkai and Bumble and Bumble in New York; Louis Licari and Bobs in Beverly Hills and Metro Hair in Philadelphia. In Scarsdale and Mount Kisco, NY, Artista Salons hold training nights on Wednesday (cuts are well-supervised and free!); Tuesday and Wednesday, perms and color are 20% off.

Whatever salon you like,

it never hurts to ask about training nights, new stylist rates and discount days.

Salon chains almost always have official training programs, aimed to please because the reputation of the entire chain is at stake and are usually reasonably priced. Ones such as the nationwide Regis Hairstylists are double the bargain on training nights. (Call 1-800-777-4444 for a salon near you.) The low-rent, \$10 a cut chains do have training, but usually it's in a fixed repertoire of styles. If your hair's hard to deal with or you want something other than the standard 5 cuts, forget it.

SLICK TRICKS

There are two more great ways to get the cut you crave at a price you can afford. Some salons offer money back guarantees of their work. Usually, this is printed on literature found in the salon; it isn't widely advertised. Just one, Eric Fisher Salon in Wichita, KS, even guarantees perms and hair-color if you follow the salon's home-care advice.

The final trick is for those who crave a precision, geometric cut. Some of the best scissor-sharpshooters are old-time barbers. We've seen flat tops botched by \$50 stylists and made perfect by \$10 barbers. Guys have been harboring this secret for some time; women have avoided barbers because they usually want their hair styled and blown dry before they leave and barber cutters aren't the hottest at "finishing" hair. But if you want a great short cut or a geometric style, give them a try and tell them you'll dry your own hair. The cheapest—and best—cut we've ever found is Atlas Barber School in Manhattan, where \$5 does the trick.