



HOW TO AVOID A BAD HAIRCUT

Clear communication is the key to heading off haircutting disasters.

BY VICTORIA WURDINGER

There are more reasons than one to seek out stylists who are involved in higher learning. Not only do they know all the latest looks, chances are they've received special training in how to conduct a consultation that keeps clients happy. Inspiring Champions in San Diego, CA trains salons in the Perfect Consultation System, while Redken teaches the Art of the Consultation. But even if your stylist did not get specialized training, you can lead him or her along the right path by employing the same principles that the consultation classes do. Get the right dialogue going, and you won't end up a head case.

FROM THE TOP

Start by booking free consultations

at three or four local salons. By the time you're done, you'll be an expert in getting what you want. No time for exploration? Then choose a salon that specializes in your hair type or that's right for your price range. Naturally, it helps if you have photos to illustrate what you want.

Before you walk in the door, set some boundaries for yourself regarding what you will and won't do. This helps prevent the possibility of getting talked into the latest look or something else you're not ready for. Set not only length limitations, but any others that matter to you. If you're easily swayed, leave credit cards and cash at home so you'll be able to avoid the service that day.

Once you're in the chair, what should you say, what should you ask, and what do you want your stylist to ask? Debby Russek, a senior stylist at Cutting Loose

Salon and Spa in Sarasota, FL who trained in the Inspiring Champions Perfect Consultation, says, you should ask:

- Will short hair look good with my face shape?
- Will short hair look good with my texture?
- What will the maintenance be? (Short hair needs to be shaped more often.)
- What products will I need to use when my hair is short?

"You should also consider how much time you want to spend styling your hair," says Russek. "If you can't easily duplicate a look at home, ask if a styling lesson is included in the price of the cut."

Stylists should always ask what challenges you're having with your hair, what you like best and least about it, and what you'd definitely like to change. If your stylist doesn't, be sure to tell him or her anyway. Then, says Russek, once you and your stylist have discussed various options, she should be able to tell you what she recommends and why, how she's going to create the cut and what you'll love about it.

THINK AHEAD

Redken trains hairdressers to take the following steps to further ensure you'll be happy with your hair, and they're worth talking about if you can make them part of the conversation!

1. Perform a Physical Analysis of your hair's color, condition, porosity, chemical-service history and percent of gray.

2. Discuss Lifestyle. Two key questions help stylists narrow down choices. Who do you want to be? (This helps her identify your self-image, be it tailored and successful or sexy.) And, what big event do you have coming up? (This question enables stylists to suggest a cut that you can make red-carpet-ready.) If your stylist doesn't ask, tell her.

3. Create a Custom Hair Plan. Just as a personal trainer creates a personalized program that's continually reassessed, your stylist should create a custom hair plan that includes a goal. Think about how often you want to change your look, and let your stylist know. Ask her what she would suggest today, knowing you'll want a change in 6 months.

MAKING THE CUT

After discussing all these issues, ask for three options, then be sure you understand what it will take to style and maintain each one. Unless you're convinced you've found the right look, tell your stylist you want some time to think about the choices. Then, see what another salon has to say. If two stylists suggest wildly different things, ask yourself which is more in keeping with your self-image.

Once you're ready to go for it, make sure your hair is in tip-top shape. No matter how fabulously a cut is executed, it won't look its best on dry, damaged hair.

GETTY IMAGES.