



NOT just for men

IN 2018, BARBERING IS NO LONGER THE PRESERVE OF MEN – ESPECIALLY IF THESE WOMEN HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT IT

Some barber shops may celebrate a retro vibe, as places where ‘men can be men’ – but the idea that barbering is traditionally a man’s game is a distant memory.

“More women are entering barbering than even five years ago. We are seeing an increase in women joining courses at London School of Barbering, which is amazing,” says Bryony Holman, educator at London School of Barbering.

Another key indicator is that more women are entering barbering competitions than ever before, according to statistics from The Bluebeards Revenge and the British Barbers’ Association. The figures show that 23 per cent of the entries to this year’s Britain’s Best Shave were female, up from just eight per cent back in 2014.

Nick Gibbens, spokesman for The Bluebeards Revenge, acknowledges “making an impact on the barbering world

hasn’t been easy for women”, and even remembers the days when men would refuse to sit in the barber’s chair if the barber was a woman.

But times are changing and last year even saw Welsh barber Sophie Collins of Soph’s Barbers make it to the final of Barber UK. Sophie attributes the rise in female barbers to the trade press. “Female barbers have been given more coverage, have been able to promote their work and, as a result, grown in confidence,” she says.

Jessica Zeinstra Rosen, Andis education manager, agrees: “Every time you see another female barber on the cover of a magazine, win an award or taking to the stage at a show, it gives courage to other women.”

Confidence is certainly a factor, but Sophie Skye, a barber at Cut & Grind, winners of the 2017 Most Wanted Salon Team award, also believes it’s about acceptance. She explains: “It’s a confidence thing, but it’s also become more accepted in the industry and among clients to have women in a barber shop. Gone are the days of it being a ‘men’s club’. I think clients are happy to see more diversity in the shop.”

Hayley Kemm, who owns The Wild Hare barber shop

in Tooting, London, along with her sister Georgie Wynes-Devlin, believes the surge in female barbers is down to the power of social media. “It has made women more aware of the barbering industry and it lets them see it’s not just men doing it.”

Barbering didn’t always look as attractive or as lucrative as it does now; it’s been in the past six or so years that it has witnessed a revival. And as more male barbers see their star rise, it’s natural female hairdressers would want to pursue opportunities.

Sophie Skye always had barbering in the back of her mind when she started out in hairdressing, but wanted to get more experience before pursuing it fully. “I started a hairdressing apprenticeship when I was 19 and I was attracted to cutting, so I pursued that part of the industry,” she explains. “At the same time, a work colleague was telling me about her friends who were barbers and I thought: ‘That’s something I’d love to do.’”

Sophie loves the vibe of a barber shop, but stresses that a sense of humour is needed. “Guys tend to be more relaxed, honest and direct, but they love the fun and the banter of a barber shop. Men come in for a cut, but also

the chat, which makes it a fun place to work,” she says.

The rise in female barbers has generally been received positively, but there will always be some who do not embrace change. Sophie remembers on one occasion a client looking shocked when she introduced herself as his barber. “I love beards, but he was disappointed that I, a young woman, would be doing the service,” she remembers. “But after I looked after him and showed I cared about his beard and getting a great result, he now only lets me do his beard.”

The Wild Hare’s Hayley has also found men cautious, but that this was changing. “I once did a 70-year-old man’s hair and it was the first time a woman had cut his hair,” she laughs.

Sophie still gets get mixed reactions when she tells people what she does, but they are mostly positive. “You will always get people who doubt and don’t understand your passion. But it drives me to prove them wrong.”

London School of Barbering’s Bryony got into barbering after a friend offered her a job in their barber shop. “I’d spent some time out of the industry, but my friend’s offer reignited my passion for hair,” she says.

Bryony then attended a barbering course with London School of Barbering, before enjoying it so much that she became an educator at the school.

She feels many clients actually enjoy it when they discover their barber is a woman. “It changes the atmosphere, while it’s quite calming to have different conversations,” she explains. “Some say they prefer having their cuts with female barbers as they pay more attention to detail.”

And as most female barbers come from hairdressing backgrounds, it’s an opportunity to help barbering grow in a new direction. “Customer service is huge, it’s more than just a haircut it’s about the whole experience – something I definitely brought from my hairdressing past,” says Laura Howlett, who joined Ruffians in Edinburgh six years ago.

“Barbers could learn more about how to style hair as well as colour techniques from hairdressers,” adds Andis’ Jessica. “It’s something that isn’t widely taught in classic barbering. On the flip side, hairdressers could learn about structure, balance and head shape from barbers.”

When it comes to women considering entering barbering, Bryony advises: “Don’t worry about being female in a once male-dominated industry. Once you start doing your training, you will see that there are so many women learning the trade, too.”

It’s also important to show women just where barbering can take them. “Between your clientele, being an educator or brand ambassador, editorial work, endorsement deals and so on, you can make a serious living as a barber,” says Jessica. As more women become barbers and more clients become accustomed to seeing women in barber shops, more and more female stylists will realise another avenue in the hairdressing world is open to them. As Jessica eloquently puts it: “Eventually, we won’t be classified as ‘female barbers’, we will just be ‘barbers’, too.”