

## Return of the barber

**Ronald Cassar is witnessing a renaissance for the barbering tradition. He recently went out to investigate this latest fad.**



Make no mistake about it... barbers are back and barber shops are en vogue... the place to be again.

Men's barbering is a long tradition going back since ancient Egypt and Greece.

In days gone by a men's barber shop had a strong presence in society and apart from being a place of exclusive grooming, the barber would perform additional services, including administering medicine and tooth extraction.

During the 1980s and 1990s the traditional barber somewhat went out of fashion and the trend for unisex hairdressing took over on an international platform.

Gone was the tradition of male grooming for a period, until the late 1990s, when the term metrosexual male was devised.

Metrosexual was defined for a male who was particularly meticulous about one's own appearance and self-grooming and would often invest time and financial resources into his appearance.

This led to a boom in men's grooming products and specific men's line in haircare products.

Moving on into the millennium, the trend for the barber shop was reignited with passion and suddenly became cool again. Men wanted a space to groom, socialise, converse and be taken care of in style.

Retro was in again and styles of the 1950s became fashionable once more, presenting short or shaved sides with a styled longer top.

It was reported that in the UK alone over 150 men's barber shops opened in the past couple of years and this trend has followed through to Malta.

I visited one recently, Barnuz Barber in Gżira, launched by stylist Adrian Buhagiar, who has 12 years' experience, including some of them working in Sydney, Australia.

When Buhagiar returned to Malta, his dream was to pursue the barber tradition. After travelling to London and New York he



Adrian Buhagiar's dream to pursue the barber tradition was realised when he opened Barnuz Barber.

witnessed an increase in men's barbering and the trend was becoming even more in demand.

He says: "Suddenly it was not just about getting a haircut. Receiving a service is now of paramount importance for the male client entering a barber shop.

"The barbering trade became cool again and competition abroad is fierce. A good cut is no longer enough. For today's man, going to the barber is all about the experience".

Buhagiar continued his training in a specialised full-time course on barbering at the London School of Barbering.

This, together with his vast experience in the trade, gave him the key to all current trends, techniques and core elements that make up the barber tradition.

Barnuz has been launched with the priority of giving the client a highly skilled haircut but also an excellent level of service. Clients are offered espresso coffee, beer or whiskey.

Buhagiar says: "I felt it was the right time in Malta to open a traditional men's barber shop. Times were changing and people are starting to expect good service.

"I wanted to offer the client a complete package and turn Barnuz into a social hub for men. Come get a perfect haircut, traditional shave, have a great espresso and good conversation".

Although in a busy road, once you go into his shop it is very homely and inviting. A memorable male aroma fills the air. Smell of wood, wintergreen and apples are distinctive and Adrian will greet you with an addictive smile.

We started with a haircut. Barbers are trained to cut with clippers, it is the main tool in cutting a man's hair. The scissors is sparsely used. After a wash and an expert haircut, you can get a great shave too. And Adrian will give you a traditional single-blade razor shave like a true barber would do.

A man has not lived until he experiences the pleasures of a traditional shave by a barber. I reclined in the plush chair then the shave commenced. Adrian first wrapped a hot towel around my face. Next, he massaged in a cream to clean out my pores. After, another hot towel was applied.

By then I was feeling nice and relaxed. He then massaged another cream to soften my stubble and took a piece of razor sharp metal and scraped it off for the closest, best shave I ever had.

To finish it off, I got another hot towel wrapped on my face along with a final face massage with a soothing cream. When I stepped out of the shop, I felt like a new man, ready to take on the world.

*Barnuz Barber is at 160, Vjal De La Salle, Gżira. Open Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 7pm. Tel: 9940 1980.*