

Women's locks can be the bonds that tie them to hair-care practitioners, who can be part professional groomer, part therapist and part-time soulmate

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HAIR

is considered a source of power and beauty. Women often bond with each other by talking about hair. They also form strong bonds with their hairstylists. A woman's visits to a favorite hair artist often becomes a time of renewal and inspiration. Deep friendships can be formed. For the following handful of San Diego women, stories about their hairstylists go beyond cut and style.

BY KAREN KENYON • PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAMONA D'VIOLA



Alison McGrath
& Robert Howes

Alison McGrath, co-owner of Café Chloe (with husband John Clute and Tami Ratliffe), has a special bond with stylist Robert Howes of Model Call on Park Boulevard.

McGrath moved to San Diego four years ago from San Francisco. "At first I despaired of finding a good stylist," she says. "Then someone told me Howes did the best blondes in town." Color, she feels, "is even more important than the cut. He took me to the color I've always wanted—the color my hair was as a child. Now Chloe [her 5-year-old daughter] and I have the same color."

Before she met Howes, her hair was unhealthy because of highlights. He gave her an "all-over honey blonde tint, and eventually the damaged hair grew out," she says. Now her golden hair is healthy and long.

"I'm far too busy to spend time on my hair," says McGrath, "but with Robert's cut and color I can wear it either straight or curly, pulled back or down.

"I adore him. I feel blessed. He's beautiful—and a seeker. He can be playful or serious. We talk about everything but hair."

Howes says, "It's a 50-50 relationship." McGrath appreciates his artistic endeavors, and "I value her as a woman, as a parent. Her openness is special." The two bonded immediately, "and that is rare," he says.

When someone is working on your hair, McGrath says, "It's a very intimate thing.

"Now my husband goes to him, and so does my business partner and two servers at Café Chloe. He's the official stylist for Café Chloe."



Nancy Bamberger

Retired instructional designer Nancy Bamberger has bonded with stylist Chanra Chheun of Salon Avalon, in Mission Hills. When Bamberger first came to Chheun (who then worked at Snipz), she had what she calls “a gray, scraggly ponytail.” Before Bamberger and husband Bill climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, she needed a “do” with style and convenience. Now, she sports a shorter cut that has served her well on subsequent trips to Borneo and Turkey.

But it was a personal revelation by Chheun about her childhood village in Cambodia that really created a bond between the two women, and even had a global impact. Chheun told Bamberger about the needs in Prey Tauch, where every family needs a bike in order to go to school and to haul rice and supplies. Yet few have this necessity.

Since the Bambergers were planning their anniversary party, it was decided to make a side focus of the party a chance for guests to donate money toward bikes. “Chanra cried when I told her what we’d like to do for her village,” says Bamberger. They raised \$2,500.

The first \$1,000 was delivered to the village by Chheun’s mother, who flew to Cambodia and chose 10 needy families. For each she purchased a bike, a sack of rice and other goods. In January, the Bambergers and Chheun delivered the rest of the money in person (a total of \$4,000 was collected).

“Sometimes a hairdresser can style you and help you find your soul at the same time,” says Nancy.



Lisa Stefanacci

Lisa Stefanacci, owner of The BookWorks in Del Mar, says hairdresser Wendy Sammons, of Salon Mia on Claremont Mesa Boulevard, has been with her since 1990, through all her major passages. Stefanacci came to the area in 1990 to work on her Ph.D. in neuroscience. While still a student in the lab, she found Sammons.

As a result, Stefanacci’s hair became a more important part of her life. “I’ve never used makeup, and I don’t care much about clothes, but I do like to do things with my hair. And have fun!”

“Hair is another accessory,” says Sammons. “You can play with it.”

When Stefanacci married, Sammons styled her hair for the wedding. The day before Stefanacci’s son was born, Sammons cut her hair. Sammons went to Stefanacci’s Ph.D. dissertation defense.

Now that Stefanacci owns The BookWorks, she feels she’s “on” more and can be hipper and more eccentric, since the store is a place of thought, freedom and creativity.

She keeps her natural brown hair medium-length, but with a wide light streak. “I once wanted to live a bohemian life in New York,” she says. “The streak is my bow to the life I can’t have now.”

“Wendy is the next best thing to a therapist. And she tells me about her life, too. She is my most-long-lasting female friendship. Friends have come and gone, but every 10 weeks, I get my hair cut.”



Myla Stokes Kelly

Myla Stokes Kelly, a librarian at MiraCosta College’s San Elijo campus, loves to dress in beautiful Indian clothing, with matching jewelry. Her long hair is often pulled back straight in a clip or held in a wrapped ponytail, emphasizing her profile.

She has her hair straightened and trimmed by Tia Wheeler, owner of Madame Tia’s House of Beauty in Poway. Stokes Kelly appreciates the hair care—and also the relaxing atmosphere and sense of privacy. Wheeler’s small shop, with velvet maroon drapes and lace curtains, offers soft music, the scent of essential oils and tea served in china cups.

When Stokes Kelly went through a health crisis in 1995, diagnosed with Graves’ disease, Wheeler was able to help and support her during that difficult time as her hair started falling out.

“Tia was a stress reliever,” says Stokes Kelly. “She cared enough to want to work with me. By using various conditioners, she was able to take care of my hair.” Now, after medication, and with more peace in her life, Stokes Kelly’s disease is in remission.

“Tia has been right there with me,” she says.

They also share a love of creativity. The two enjoy colors and textures. Stokes Kelly has worked on crocheting a blanket while in the shop (straightening can take two to six hours), and Wheeler takes painting and drawing classes.

“We don’t hang out together,” says Stokes Kelly. “But we get to hang out in her salon.”





Louise Hay & Jean-Claude

As author of numerous self-help books, including the classic *You Can Heal Your Life*, Louise Hay has a public role, with lectures and TV appearances. But last fall, she was having trouble finding that stylist.

"I tried three," says Hay, "and none of them could do what I wanted them to do. So I went to my favorite psychic—isn't that what all of us do?" she asks, laughing. "I said, 'I'm having a terrible time finding a hairdresser.' The psychic said, 'He has dark hair, and his initials are J.C.'"

Louise related this story to the woman who gives her facials, and was told, "Then you need to go to Jean-Claude" (owner of Jean-Claude Atelier/Salon).

"The minute I walked in," says Hay, "I knew I was in the right place, because Wayne Dyer's voice filled the shop. I later learned Jean-Claude plugs in his iPod at the shop, and usually it is all music. But because he had stepped out for a minute, Wayne Dyer's voice had come up."

For Hay, this was perfect because, as founder of Hay House Inc., she puts out inspirational author Dyer's books and CDs.

During that first appointment, Hay asked for hair color only. "I wanted to see how I liked that first." The brighter, warmer tone was just what she wanted. In a week, she returned for a shorter cut, and loved it.



Jean-Claude was born in Paris and came to San Diego in 1986. He owns two shops, one on Fifth Avenue and another on Cedros Avenue in Solana Beach. His creativity appeals to her, as does the ambience of the shop, where clients are surrounded by music and paintings.

"It's important to have rapport," says Hay, "and he is an artist."

Therese Muranaka & Peter Garcia



Therese Muranaka is an archaeologist (for the state of California) who defies the stereotype. "I'm neither Margaret Mead nor Angelina Jolie's *Tomb Raider*," she says. Therese has found in stylist Peter Garcia, and his shop, Genesis, on West Washington, a place where both her archeologist self (hard hat, muddy boots, bugs) and her traditionally feminine self (the woman who wants to be pampered) can merge. ("I once took nail polish to archeology field school," she admits.)

Muranaka discovered Garcia when she admired his wife's hair 14 years ago, at the school their children attended. Muranaka immediately started going to Garcia, and his cut has tamed what she describes as "great hair, but too thick." He helps her protect her hair from sun exposure. The two have an ongoing discussion about her work when she comes for appointments.

"We talk about San Diego's past," she says. "He's fascinated and curious. We talk about stone tools and carbon dates."

"It's my heritage," says Garcia, "so it's interesting to know the artifacts she finds."

On the day of her haircut, she will often "pull that sweaty hard hat off and rush to his salon. I come in with muddy boots. While I'm there, he validates me and also gives me a beautiful haircut. Then I have to put on my hard hat again and go back to the mud." ■



Hair They Are

Chanra Chheun
Salon Avalon
910 West Washington Street
San Diego, CA 92103
619-297-2200

Jean-Claude
Jean-Claude Atelier/Salon
107 South Cedros Avenue
Solana Beach, CA 92075
858-755-5067
and
3445 Fifth Avenue
San Diego, CA 92103
619-298-6104

Peter Garcia
Genesis
320 West Washington Street
San Diego, CA 92103
619-295-4166

Wendy Sammons
Salon Mia
7878 Clairemont Mesa Boulevard, Suite B
San Diego, CA 92111
858-864-5717

Tia Wheeler
Madame Tia's House of Beauty
12759 Poway Road, Suite 100
Poway, CA 92064
858-748-0653

Robert Howes
Model Call
3741 Park Boulevard
San Diego, CA 92103?
619-296-8021