

Hair Journal International™

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF HAIR FITNESS, REPLACEMENT AND RESTORATION

THE RENAISSANCE HAIR STYLIST!

The men's hair replacement market we know today was largely created by a group of talented immigrants from Italy who brought their styling skills to the new world and turned the industry upside down to found a new, fashion-forward industry. In the next few issues, we are going to profile some of these entrepreneurs and let you share their journey from the villages of southern Europe to the most dynamic cities in America. Today, we are talking with Anthony Provenzano from Anthony's Hair Salon in New York. Anthony learned his craft the hard way, serving as a barber's apprentice from the age of 14 years. Even then, he knew he was going to do things his way. Always anxious to learn new techniques and bring more flair to a traditional business, he was constantly experimenting and looking for new experiences. A few years later, he left his homeland and came to the United States. He spoke no English, but he was good with his hands. And he was very good with hair. The rest, as they say, is history, but we'll let Anthony tell his own story in this poignant interview.

HJI: Anthony, take us back to your childhood. You started working with hair at a very early age.

AP: In those days, an apprenticeship was a very serious thing. It was how you built your skills. You started at the bottom and worked your way up. If you didn't learn the basics, you didn't move forward. It was a methodical process. There were no shortcuts.

HJI: Do stylists still need this kind of intensive education?

AP: It's a must. And not just for the haircutting business; for every serious professional; everybody has to be updated about what goes on in their world. I've been teaching for the American Cosmetology Association and different hairpiece companies, but I'm still learning.

HJI: Are you trying to pass on a lifetime of acquired skills through your platform work?

AP: I've discovered you learn by teaching; sometimes from people who don't know much. They ask really basic questions and all of a sudden a switch turns on my mind.

HJI: Has your search for new experiences led to any innovations in the way you do business?

AP: I try to improve everything I touch. Even tools. I've had tools in my hands that I look at and say, "This is a good tool, but if I add this or that it's going to be much better. I do this all the time."

HJI: Any examples?

AP: I devised two shears that I use all the time. Actually, it's a combination of thinning shears and regular shears that I use in one hand and get fabulous results, especially with people who have really thick hair. The last half-an-inch of the ends of the hair gets thinned, while the rest of the hair remains as it is. This is great when I need that last half an inch to have movement. Many times when I give demonstrations people say, "Where do you buy that tool?" Then, when I slide the two shears off my fingers, they are amazed.

HJI: You like to innovate?

AP: I love to do things other people don't do. I'm a

right-handed guy, but there was a time when I said, "I've got to see if I can train myself to cut hair with the left hand." Isn't that crazy? I mean, I'm busy all the time, so why do I think of these things? But I did it and I succeeded. Now there are days when I just switch the shears to the other hand and clients say "Anthony, you've been cutting my hair for many years and I never knew you were left-handed." Then I switch back to the other side just for fun.



"My name is Anthony. Were you recommended here by someone or did you find me on the Internet?" Then I look at their hair, and say, "I want you to tell me about your relationship with your hair. Do you have a good relationship with your hair or a bad relationship? Does your hair give you a hard time?"

HJI: After all these years, do you still enjoy what you do?

AP: I never get bored. When I start working with a client, I like to vary my routine. People say, "I thought you started from the front," but sometimes I'll start from the back or from the left side or from the middle. I tell everyone, "I don't do any mechanical work. My work is always creative." A creative person never does things the same way all the time.

HJI: Hairdressers and stylists are also their clients' friend and confidant aren't they?

AP: We're not mechanics who perform a routine job and go home. We're also psychologists. Maybe the stylist of 30 or 50 years ago could only talk about the weather or the racetrack, but things are different

today. You need social skills to enter the beauty world.

HJI: Do you see a different kind of person entering this field?

AP: There are a lot of people I know who go to college for two years or four years and then enter the beauty world. Good hair stylists can make a lot of money.

HJI: How does a college education help in client relationships?

AP: It's all about dealing with people. When I have a new client in my chair, the first thing I do is say, "My name is Anthony. Were you recommended here by someone or did you find me on the Internet?" Then I look at their hair, and say, "I want you to tell me about your relationship with your hair. Do you have a good relationship with your hair or a bad relationship? Does your hair give you a hard time?"

HJI: You stress the importance of working at an intimate level with your clients. What troubles them most about their hair loss?

AP: For a young person, it's not that they're losing their hair; they're losing their confidence. And because of that, they're losing points on many other things in life. We might argue that it's not about the hair, but it is for that person. Hair loss is a big thing. The most important thing we as hair replacement specialists can do is step back and let the person talk.

HJI: Looking healthy and young in the workplace is a key factor in an image-driven society isn't it? Especially perhaps in a slowing and more competitive economy.

AP: That's true in virtually every job situation, but nowhere more so than the fashion or entertainment industry. If the guy is an actor, you know that the hair is not just part of his ego; it's a professional necessity. He has to look a certain way in order to get cast in specific roles. The public gets its styling cues from movies and TV.

HJI: Anthony, take us into your salon on 57th Street. Walk us through the door and tell us what we're going to see and experience.

AP: 445 Park Avenue is a building between 56th and 57th Streets in Manhattan. It is a prestigious location, but I tell people who call for an appointment that they're going to find a humble Anthony who will feel privileged to work with them. I have pictures on the wall of famous clients and that makes me feel good; but what makes me feel better is having a new client in the chair and asking myself, "How am I going to make a difference in this person's life."

HJI: What about the décor? You are Italian, so I'm thinking marble and stone and statues.

AP: There's some of that. The entrance of the building is all granite and marble, but my salon is not intimidating. It's relaxing. I have pictures of opera scenes. I'm an opera lover. I love poetry and literature. I like to write too. Some of my poetry has been published.

HJI: Anthony, your career has truly gone full circle; from your apprenticeship in the hills of Italy to your salon in the heart of the world's most dynamic city. Because you have kept your zest, culture and creativity alive, we'd like to christen you....

"The first Renaissance Hair Stylist!"