

BEAUTY

Smooth Moves

When hair trends favor a natural approach to texture, straightening becomes a statement all its own. Sloane Crosley goes on record in defense of the blow-out.

In recent years, there's been a call to arms for women to give their actual arms a rest by putting down the blow-dryer, unplugging the straightening iron, and showcasing a pastiche of natural beauty instead. I'm all for this. To see the world's individuality reflected back on the runways has been both heartening and logical. We are women, after all; not Lego figurines with one-size-fits-all wigs. Our stories about unruly hair thus tend to conclude the same way, with a burst of self-acceptance. But I must warn you in advance: This is not one of those stories.

BEAUTY > 302

FLAT AND HAPPY
AS THE BEAUTY WORLD EMBRACES CURLS, KINKS, AND FRIZZ, HEAT-STYLED HAIR HAS BECOME FRINGE. MODEL HOYEON JUNG IN A BURBERRY PONCHO. MAISON MARGIELA BUSTIER. BALenciAGA EARRING. PHOTOGRAPHED BY SEAN THOMAS, VOGUE, 2018.



I have blown my coarse hair straight, or ceded the task to a professional, my entire life, and I have no intention of stopping—not now, not ever. Which presents a problem in our new hair-confident culture: People like me, for whom silky strands are inextricably intertwined with selfhood, have been inadvertently shamed for our adherence to the blow-out. For starters, we are often seen as finicky, extravagant, or even self-hating (I am of Russian Jewish descent but favor styles more commonly associated with East Asian and Scandinavian genes). And that’s merely the social stigma. Logistically, our lives are configured around our hair. Though not completely sapped of spontaneity, my people are accustomed to scheduling trips to the gym before blow-outs, and important work events after; to guiding our partners away from

Leave In Conditioner; GHD’s professional-performance Air hair dryer (if it’s good enough for backstage at Alexander Wang, it’s good enough for me)—although all of these tend to be a stopgap until I can get to a Drybar. Which isn’t a sure thing either.

“A lot of what’s happened with these blow-drying bars,” says Kevin Mancuso, global creative director of New York’s Nexxus salon in SoHo, “is that it’s basically like sending your Céline sweater to a random dry cleaner. Sometimes it’s OK, and sometimes you’re going to get someone who takes this fragile fabric and tears through it.” I am visiting Mancuso to get a protein-boosting Keraphix treatment, a new service that utilizes nourishing black rice to gently make hair easier to blow out. Which Mancuso sees no shame in. “With your face shape,” he says, assessing all of my

follicles, “your hair probably does look better straight.” And my frizz and curls? They actually contribute to a better blow-out, continues Mancuso, who praises the “natural airspace” between my fibers.

Legendary hairstylist Garren, who pioneered many of the most iconic blow-outs of the nineties, from Linda Evangelista’s to Madonna’s, is also well aware of straight

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hair’s recent reputation. But he suspects we’re approaching a more balanced place. “We’ve been on a journey the last six seasons where, when in doubt, designers make all hair look natural. It’s gotten to a point where fashionable women feel that unkempt is the road to cool. But what if it’s just not in your spiritual DNA to have natural hair? Not everyone is Solange Knowles or Sonia Rykiel.”

Sensing a glimmer of acceptance for my straightening habits, I am further heartened by spring shows, such as Bottega Veneta and Tory Burch, where “partial blow-outs”—how Guido Palau refers to unfussy but groomed styles—recently debuted. Palau has witnessed, even facilitated, the move from textured hair to hair with polished personality. Hair that’s not taut but has clearly been on the business end of a blow-dryer. Allowing my hair the indulgences of a “partial blow-out” is out of the question (I give it an inch, it’ll take the whole head). But it sure is nice to be included again.

“For some women,” Palau muses, “having a blow-out makes them feel more like themselves. I love the way we are celebrating different textures and sending out this message that everything can be beautiful, but the blow-dry is particular. There’s something soothing about it,” he says, “that feel-good factor.”

And this is precisely why I keep trying out products and processes, no matter how ridiculous I look with my head in the freezer. I love the sensation of straight hair running up my neck as I untuck it from a jacket collar, of the way it moves in the wind like a rudder or catches on my lip like a Marilyn Minter photograph. It doesn’t always come cheap, but there’s great satisfaction—and perhaps even a hint of empowerment—in being able to identify what makes you feel the most like yourself, and then achieving it. □



SUPPORT SYSTEM

A NEW ROSTER OF SMART TOOLS AND PRODUCTS BRINGS THE BLOW-OUT BAR EXPERIENCE HOME. CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: OUAÏ LEAVE IN CONDITIONER, THE ONE BY FRÉDÉRIC FEKKAI THE TAMED ONE ANTI-FRIZZ BALM, R+CO ROUND BRUSH, AND ORIBE STRAIGHT AWAY SMOOTHING BLOWOUT CREAM.

oil-generating finger-grooming; to sticking our heads in the freezer in August; to diagnosing the air’s humidity with our baby hairs the way arthritic men do with their knees.

Before I grew comfortable with these practices, I tried to circumnavigate them. In my 20s, I got three Japanese hair treatments in as many years. In my early 30s, I moved on to Brazilian keratin treatments, which still broke the sulfur bonds of my hair but were kinder about it. Today I try to straighten my hair at home when I can, giving myself every advantage with both classic techniques and whatever cutting-edge styling aid has recently hit the market—tech-backed round brushes; Oribe’s new heat-activated Straight Away Smoothing Blowout Cream; Ouai’s thermal-protecting