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Looking sharp

It's cool for men to care about their looks and local barbershops are offering more than just a trim — they're offering a grooming experience

The barbershop chairs are vintage, from the 1920s to the 1950s. There are antiques and antlers and oddities scattered about. What's with the leopard skin? And the barbers, well, they sport some serious tattoos. Spearhead Barber and Supply is not where your dad cut his hair. But the vibe recalls an earlier era, when men took pride in their appearance and made time to get a hot shave and trim their beard along with their bangs. It's fashionable now for men to spend more time grooming. The well-groomed beard is experiencing a renaissance. Sometimes it's a bushy lumberjack look. Sometimes it's a careful goatee. Facial hair is back, helping men express their own style. "I like to look older," says Brenden Johnston, 24, as he settles in for a beard



Lynn Haddrall

trim and haircut with Spearhead owner Mitch Bright. Johnston, a University of Guelph graduate, prefers the mature image that a beard provides. He trusts Bright to keep him stylish. Pierce Cowan, 22, comes in for a totally new look. He's lopping off a foot-long ponytail and donating it to the Canadian Cancer Society. "I've had it for seven years. That was the last time I had a real haircut. I needed a change, something fresh, and I've known Mitch for a little while and saw his



Instagram stuff and thought 'Let's get a haircut, man,' " says Cowan. Bright, 25, opened Spearhead Barber and Supply on Laurel Street in Waterloo in the spring, after playing music and touring Canada and the U.S. with a band called Die Atlantic. When bandmates couldn't get the haircuts they wanted, Bright picked up the scissors. His mother, Lynn Bright, has owned a Waterloo salon for many years. "I thought my mom has been doing this for several years. Chances are I can probably do it," he recalls, smiling. "But that wasn't the case. I was really bad at it." After practising on friends, to whom he will forever be grateful, Bright decided to "go full tilt" and train. He went to hair school, worked at barbershops and salons and decided to focus on men's grooming.



"I started to build myself as a brand and really tried to sell myself and sell my lifestyle and not just my haircuts." His shop reflects his desire to make a trip to the barber an experience rather than just an errand. "I really want to keep it to the old-school way, traditional ways where we're doing slick haircuts and making everyone look good and making people comfortable," Bright says. "A lot of guys now are spending more time on their hair, they're spending more time on their beards and how they look. And I think that's how it should always be." It takes time. Shaves involve prepping with hot towels and moisturizing with oils. "I get a closer look at how the hair grows and in which direction I need to shave. You



"What men are looking for is an experience that is just a little more substantial, a little bit more refined."

DEREK REID, OWNER OF THE ARTFUL BADGER

Mitch Bright, left, cuts Brenden Johnston's hair while Dave Brown styles Everett Wood. A leopard skin adorns the vintage barber chair in the background.

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never want to go against the grain. That's going to cause irritation. You always want to go with the grain and then across. I get to see how I can give the closest shave."

Bright has started his own product line to offer grooming options.

"Men should have access to any products that women have," he says. "I want to be able to make a face mask for a guy and he can feel comfortable taking a selfie and posting it on Instagram if he wants."

Derek Reid, owner of the Artful Badger in Stratford, thinks young men are finding new ways to express themselves through grooming. He sells "affordable luxuries for the modern gentleman," which includes everything from straight razors and moustache wax to coffee presses and leather bags.

"What men are looking for is an experience that is just a little more substantial, a little bit more refined. I think a large part of that is because they have grown up in a world where everything is instant, everything is disposable, and there is no real substance to a lot of things," Reid says.

"This whole idea of having proper personal care, a proper grooming regimen, the romanticism of doing things in a more traditional way where it takes a little bit more time, a little bit more intention, that's very important to them."

Reid opened his store in May 2015 on Downie Street, across from the Avon Theatre. He recalls when a group of teenagers attending student performances visited his store that first summer.

"They looked like they walked right out of a movie from the late 1940s. They had the tapered pants, the bow ties, the slicked-back hair. And you could tell these guys were very conscious of their appearance and wanted to take care of themselves.

"They all immediately gravitated toward the display of the safety razors and shaving brushes, sort of looking at them with awe. And one of them goes — 'Oh, I wish we shaved.'"

"They hadn't even hit the age yet. I kind of laughed and said, 'Hey guys, come back next year.'"

Reid thinks young men are also concerned about the environment.

"With the old-school shaving, there's no waste. The blades themselves are recyclable. The razor is something you will have forever. The brush has a lifespan of at least five to 10 years."

In naming his store, Reid knew that shaving enthusiasts would understand the badger reference because the best shaving brushes are made from badger hair. Others will just see a playful mascot.

Both Reid and Bright draw customers from youth to seniors. Many clients are willing to travel for the quality service they crave.

Tristan Packwood-Greaves, 22, is working his university co-op term in Mississauga but comes by to get his hair styled by Spearhead barber Dave Brown.

"Dave's been my go-to guy for a year or more. The trip is worthwhile. I didn't have a lot of style sense and having a barber who could give advice has been, like, really helpful. Mitch and Dave always have input on what to change."

Grooming inspiration comes from many sources in a world where men are finding new ways to express themselves. For example, professional athletes such as Toronto Blue Jays baseball players Josh Donaldson and José Bautista have fielded questions about their grooming along with their play. Bautista joked in a Twitter interview that his beard is the source of all his power. Donaldson kept a "Vikings" vibe with his haircut after a cameo appearance on the popular History television show.

While a good haircut and expert shave might not make someone swing the bat with Bautista's power or snag a line drive like Donaldson, it can bring some swagger.

"A guy with a good haircut will feel confident and walk down the street feeling good and looking good. I just want to be able to help with that," says Bright. 

For more information:
Artfulbadger.ca
Spearheadbarbershop.com



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