

Altitude Slickness

The updo, once seen as starched and stuffy, is on the rise again.
Vanessa Lawrence holds her hair up high.

THE SCENE AT THE ANNUAL fall Alzheimer's Association Rita Hayworth Gala at New York's Waldorf-Astoria was an overwhelming pastiche of sequins, satin, and six-foot-long trains. On one side of the ballroom was the actress Patricia Clarkson in a red plaid gown trailing yards of fabric; at another table Princess Yasmin Aga Khan, the event's lead organizer, wore a red lace floor-grazing number; while the evening's cochair, Anne Hearst McInerney, went with a draped blue look that had a strappy black bodice. The theme of the event, after all, was Hollywood glamour.

But while their outfits spoke to the night's dress code, their hair fell a bit flat—literally. Sleek blowouts, tousled strands, and Veronica Lake waves were about as sophisticated as things got from the neck up. Where were the Audrey Hepburn French twists, the Grace Kelly ballet buns, the high and tight chignons of Faye Dunaway? Go to any number of society events and scan the room during dinner. Until the ladies stand up in their five-figure dresses, they could just as easily be at

Sunday brunch, judging by their casual locks. It seems as if the once glamorous updo has gone the way of the dodo.

"I think women believe it's more modern to leave their hair down," laments Stefanie Henriquez of Frédéric Fekkai, who gets a lot of requests for a "messy curling iron look" from her gala-hopping clientele. "Some women feel more comfortable having their hair down. It's a security blanket."

Count me as one of those girls who like to hide behind their hair. For years I ignored pleas from my mother to pull my hair off my face. And even with a job that has me regularly making the black-tie rounds, the highest I'll go is a low ponytail or a half loop. I've always chalked up my low-maintenance approach to youth—I'm a 30-year-old often wearing a dress worth more than my entire savings account, so the nonchalant 'do helps me maintain my downtown cred.

Lately, however, I've started to realize that I don't look effortless; I just look like I didn't make an effort. I decided it was time to up the ante and attempt a proper going-out 'do. I headed to the Kenneth salon, whose founder has crimped and coiffed into elevated extravaganzas the locks of everyone from Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis to Marilyn Monroe. I was curious to see what magic could be performed with my stick-straight hair. As a girl who doesn't even own a blow-dryer, I was slightly terrified by the prospect of helmet head. Turns out, a mushroom cloud of hairspray isn't the only reason women fear the updo.

Kevin Lee, creative director of Kenneth salon, cited "not looking sexy" as the modern woman's No. 1 fear. But it wasn't always a concern. There was a time when one would not deign to leave the house for a night on the town with the kind of carefree strands seen at parties today. Lee has witnessed his share of updo evolution since joining the salon, in 1987. As he coaxed my hair into what he referred to as "a little fucked-up bouffant French twist," he recalled how Ivana Trump revived the updo in the early nineties after her divorce from Donald.

"She redid herself," he said. "She brought back Brigitte Bardot. It was kind of flat in the back with a lot of height in the front. It was very retro, but it was the best she had looked in years—it softened her up and made her seem thinner than she actually was." (Apparently, there are some body parts for which extra volume is in fact desirable—and proves a distraction from those where it isn't.)

Nowadays, those who want their hair up go for the back knot, a safe permutation of the comfortable ponytail. And to hear Lee tell it, more women should follow suit.

"You can have a little volume with it, and then you soften the face and bring out what you want. If someone has a very weak jawline or no cheekbones, the hair can be styled to compensate," he said. "But if it's too starched, it looks dated—unless there's irony. Like this French twist," he said, motioning at my head, which, with its roughed-up vibe, was a deviation from the classic. "If I hadn't done it in a deconstructed way, you'd look like Tippi Hedren from *The Birds*. And although she looked fabulous in the movie, people seeing it on you would be like, 'Is she trying to look 50?'"

I'm not going to lie: Though Lee's creation was transformative, lending elegance to my understated J. Mendel cocktail dress, it was still a lot of hair. Could I pull it *Continued on page 237*



off? Or was I going to look like I just stepped off the set of *Mad Men*? My driver, Bob, was my first test: He initially balked when I reentered the car post-salon visit, not recognizing me beneath my cotton candy confection; but he quickly gave me the thumbs-up. When I arrived at the Princess Grace Foundation-USA's awards, Fe Fendi praised the look: "I love your hair like that. It's more formal for the prince and princess!" (The Prince and Princess of Monaco were in attendance.)

Surprisingly, underneath all that follicular fanfare, I was comfortable. With my hair all done up, I felt less like I was playing dress-up in fancy clothes. Even better, as a pathological hair twirler, I was forced to keep my hands to myself. (My mother would be proud.)

Though I enjoyed my neo-beehive moment, there were more relaxed options to test-drive. Inspired by the hair at Chanel's spring 2012 show, Henriquez at Frédéric Fekkai in the Mark hotel in Manhattan gave me a dual-textured low chignon—wet and shiny in the front and back-combed and undone in the rear—that was the perfect foil for the minimal black J. Mendel dress I wore to the aforementioned Rita Hayworth benefit. "You should always wear your hair like that," said



Above, from left: The writer in a pompadour ponytail from Whittemore House Salon; a topknot from Ion Studio salon; a bouffant French twist from Kenneth salon.

accessories-branding guru Tim Schifter, as he swooped in to greet me. "I saw you from across the room."

At the subterranean Whittemore House Salon in the West Village, Angela Soto gave me an appropriately edgy, high and tight corkscrew ponytail with a modified rockabilly pompadour in the front that was perfect for my Carine Roitfeld-hosted cocktail event at the French Embassy. (It also added just the right polish to my floor-length Gryphon T-shirt dress.) Apparently, it was quite the 180 from Soto's more popular evening-out requests. "Kim Kardashian is the biggest hair reference I get," Soto said.

Jérôme at John Barrett in Bergdorf Goodman also fields his share of "Victoria's Secret beachy hair" requests, but he has seen a rise, so to speak, in updos among his ladies. "It's coming back. It's one way to feel special," he said as he created what he later deemed "an updown," putting waves in my hair before folding it into a woven tapestry against my head. "You don't want to walk out with something that you could have done in the bathroom."

Nor do you want to look like you're about to walk down the aisle. Jérôme blames the wedding industry for some women's big-hair phobia. "I think the whole thing starts with a bad experience at a bridal event," he said.

There was little chance of a plus-size bouffant from Ion Studio salon in SoHo, where co-owner Pasquale Ferrante gave me a messy topknot to offset my ladylike Carolina Herrera frock for an event at the Met. I waltzed in feeling like the ideal hybrid of downtown nonchalance and uptown poise—and the reactions proved me right.

"Oh, my God, I didn't recognize you until I heard your voice," exclaimed the model Arlenis Sosa, greeting me after I had attempted several times to get her attention. Wedding-dress designer Lara Meiland-Shaw, in a train-bedecked ballgown, seemed to have some hair envy (her mane was glossy, but it was down). "I used to wear updos more," she sighed. "But it's just so much work." Another woman eyed my topknot with yearning. "I wish I could do a fun bun," she said, touching her shorn locks.

I was liking my "fun bun" so much that I wanted to experiment with a slept-on version of it the next day—but when I awoke, I had a throbbing headache. What I thought was a hangover turned out to be said fun bun pulling on my temples and my eyebrows. (Note to future self: This could be a less scary alternative to Botox.) As I untied the string, and my forehead slowly lowered about three inches, it felt much like undoing a corset at the end of the night. Updos are certainly fun, but they don't fare particularly well in the light of day. That said, would you go to a black-tie dinner in a sack of a dress simply to avoid a little discomfort? ♦



WELL COIFFED

In the world of high fashion, hairstylists can be a colorful breed: peacocks, tyrants, Casanovas. Though he has certainly earned the right to diva status, Bob Recine opts to play the quiet genius. After his start doing headpieces for Henri Bendel's windows, he went on to collaborate on some fantastical creations for magazines, including a Joan of Arc-looking bobby-pin "crown of thorns" on model Sasha Pivovarov for *Vogue Italia* in 2008 and a group of what look like overgrown flower heads for *W* in 2009 (*below*). Out this month, *Bob Recine: Alchemy of Beauty* (Freedman Damiani), a coffee-table retrospective of his work, proves just how far-reaching his artistry is.

JANE LARKWORTHY



Clockwise, from left: Diane von Furstenberg; Dolores Guinness; Ivana Trump; looks from Badgley Mischka spring 2012; Louis Vuitton fall 2009; Rochas spring 2012; Badgley Mischka spring 2012; Antonella Agnelli.

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