



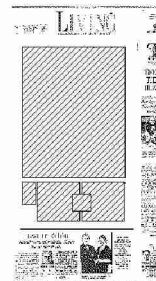
BACKSTAGE AT FASHION WEEK, A
NEW ORLEANS HAIRSTYLIST
STANDS UP TO THE PRESSURE OF
REVAMPING MODELS' TRESSES AS
THEY DASH FROM SHOW TO SHOW

Quick-change coiffures



ABOVE: WELLCAN MEDIA; TOP OF PAGE: RICHARD DREW / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Chris Guidry styles a model's hair backstage at the Charles Nolan show earlier this month during New York Fashion Week. The New Orleans hairdresser was part of an Aveda team that also worked the Iodice, Ports 1961, Y&Kei and Karen Sabog shows.





**SUSAN
LANGENHENNIG**

On the Runways

NEW YORK — Behind his chair at the Paris Parker Salon on Prytania Street in New Orleans, Chris Guidry chats with clients, many of whom he has known for years, listening to tales of their romances and routines as he clips the latest bob, trims some split ends and pins an up-do.

Backstage at New York Fashion Week, where Guidry recently was part of an assembly line of leading Aveda hairstylists, he is lucky if the women in his chair get off their cell phones while he works.

A model is not necessarily a model client.

"The models have their iPods in or are on their phones. They don't want to chat. They're not being rude, but they're getting pulled and prodded in all directions," he said last week over orange juice at a hotel breakfast bar just blocks from the tents at Bryant Park, where spring collections were rolling down the runway.

"I always make it a point to introduce myself and ask if I can get them something before we get started," he continued. "But I never let them get up. If I do, they'd run into Helena or Ursula or someone and be off chit-chatting and we don't have the time for that."

For the corps of global hairstylists working at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, precision timing isn't just a slogan for the sponsor's expensive line of cars.

Hairstylists here are trained to work fast, under intense, often cramped, uncomfortable conditions while they craft the perfectly tousled ponytail.

Stylists and makeup artists bump elbows, electrical cords tangling, shoulders brushing as they wield flat-irons, blow dryers and clip-on extensions.

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The willowy models, many rushing between back-to-back shows, are more commonly late than on time. When they arrive, the beauty professionals pounce.

Guidry, a charming man with close-cropped hair, a faint brush of a beard and a Russell Crowe grin, knows the drill.

A professional hairdresser for 12 years, he has styled models backstage at New York, Paris and Milan fashion weeks — once working in a tent under the Eiffel Tower before a Viktor & Rolf show. He twisted Madon-

na's famous blonde tresses into a bun the night she kissed Britney Spears on the MTV's "Video Music Awards," and he has run his scissors through the hair of Nicole Kidman, Andie MacDowell and Spears.

Last week's spring 2009 ready-to-wear collections were his first time back in the tents at New York's Bryant Park in four years.

Growing up in Hammond, Guidry got his start a long way from the glamour of fashion's biggest spotlight. He attended Southeastern Louisiana University for five semesters, but the books weren't pulling him into any particular career direction.

A friend, who now lives in London, had become a hairstylist and was having a blast. Guidry thought, why not?

"I wanted something I could do that would be mobile," he said.

So he signed up for a course at Roberts Beauty College.

After graduating, he joined Paris Parker, a family of salons and spas owned by Neill Corp.,

a Hammond-based company that distributes Aveda products in 10 states.

Eventually, though, he was tempted to try his hand at a different side of the industry. Guidry made his way to New York, signed on with celebrity hairstylists Rodney Cutler and Luigi Murenu, and magazine editorial shoots and fashion shows around the globe followed.

In between, Guidry would fly back to New Orleans every six weeks to see his longtime clients. One of his clients ended up liking more than her haircut. They married three years ago, and now his wife, Shane, is pregnant with their first child, due in February.

After a year in New York, Guidry came home to stay. The Big Apple had glamorous appeal, but he was tired of the backstage trenches.

"It was a great experience," he said. "But I really wanted to get back behind the chair cutting hair."

Returning to Paris Parker, Guidry melded once again into the life of a salon stylist, the days of jetting off to Milan for magazine shoots temporarily behind him.

Until last summer. That's when Guidry and Edwin Neill III of Neill Corp. were brainstorming ways to raise the company's profile.

"We were trying to think of things that we could do to separate us from other hair salons," Guidry said. "We decided to do Fashion Week."

Guidry had the contacts and the experience and could quickly re-acclimate to the scene. He joined a team of Aveda stylists, attending a Fashion Week prep class last summer to learn such things as the company's preferred methods for making a ponytail.

Before the shows, a lead hairstylist works with each clothing

designer to come up with a hairdo that reflects the mood and movement of the garments. Once a style is perfected, the lead stylist teaches the team of hairdressers how to execute it.

There's no room for interpretation. Each look has to be exactly the same.

Guidry worked five shows, with styles ranging from 1950s finger waves to big, highly textured curls to a look he calls "slicked-back mermaid hair."

For that one, he used gobs of gel and hair spray to make the hair seem wet. He then pulled it into a ponytail, pushed the ponytail into the nape of the neck and let the remaining hair cascade down like a waterfall.

Each assignment tests the stylists' skills. "You really have to know how to do everything efficiently," Guidry said.

The hair often is as stressed as the conditions backstage. Worked multiple times in a day, strands are shellacked with pounds of styling products; extensions are sewn, clipped or taped into place; and locks are straightened, curled, then straightened again, often within a matter of hours.

No time to wash it out,

Guidry used a brush and a blow dryer to "break" the products' hold on one model's hair as she sat down in his chair. She'd come to him with a top-of-the-head up-do, and he needed flat-iron straight hair.

Even under pressure, Guidry is calm, charming, unruffled, his speech showing a slight Southern accent.

"You know how to do all this, but you've got to be able to do it fast. It's an assembly line," he said. "One person cuts; one person sticks on extensions with double-sided tape.

"We go quick; it takes 10 minutes. Back home, in a salon by yourself, it would take two hours. It's just a different pace."

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