



Au Naturel

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Community Events

Please note that Poetically Correct will resume in January 2008. Ordinarily, we would hold the next event on Friday, Nov. 16th. However, that's my mother's birthday. With Thanksgiving being the following week, and December being December, we'll just go with the flow and re-emerge in a New Year with renewed energy. I look forward to meeting you on the poetic plane in 2008!!

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From *Schatzi's*, with Love...

Well, October was a whirlwind month that started off cold but ended rather warm. I was relieved because I don't flourish well in the cold. Don't get me wrong, I know it creates balance in nature and is necessary. I appreciate the cold; I just don't flourish in it. Cold goes straight to my bones. My girlfriend, Christine, says I just need to eat a nice juicy steak! I'm vegetarian, so that ain't happenin'. What else to do?

As far as salon updates, we have good and bad news to share. Ms. Latisha McClam, our receptionist, has accepted a position as an assistant childcare director with a local day care center. Up until now, Latisha worked part-time at the child care center and part-time as our receptionist. Well, the center knows talent when they see it and swooped her up! ☺ Poor us! ☹ It's all good though. Latisha has an amazing gift with children. I have seen her work with some of the children here at *Schatzi's* and I can honestly say that she shines when dealing with children. She has a far greater gift than I in this respect. There's a brilliant young man who comes to our salon regularly and talks the WHOLE TIME HE'S HERE!! He talks about the science club, designing planes, nature, you name it! I must confess however that I tune out after a few minutes. When I reconnect with my environs at different intervals, I hear Latisha chiming right in synch with the conversation and adding her own highlights. The first day I saw that, I was humbled. I thought: "My word! This woman is truly a teacher, a nurturer and a listener." She is well placed within a childcare center. As a former employee of Smart Start and as a mother, I know professionally, empirically, practically and intuitively the power of her gift and the good service that she will provide in her new position. The good news is that she will remain with us as a stylist, working primarily on week-ends. So, it's a win-win!!

What does that mean for receptionist duties? It means that in the interim, I am walking with the salon cell phone and appointment book in my back pocket (*so to speak*). We give thanks for the power of cell phone technology which makes multi-tasking possible and ensures that no one is chained to the salon. If you have to leave a voice mail message, just know that I'll get back to you with all urgency. If you have your stylist's cell phone number and want to schedule an appointment, please feel free to contact them directly. They'll update me accordingly for salon purposes. It works, so we'll roll with it for now. Thanks in advance for your understanding, when things don't flow as smoothly as they would with Latisha's professional prowess on standby. We love you, Latisha! Best wishes and thanks for continuing to support our communal vision!

Thematically speaking, it was after seeing a precious baby boy recently that I was inspired by the beauty of life and innocence. I reflected on time and tide and why we make the sacrifices that we do, if they can be so called. In life, we strive always for the protection of our kind whatever we define it to be. With that thought, this edition of *Au Naturel* is dedicated to *baby steps*; taking life one day at a time while providing a platform to support the next generation, ultimately honouring our own existence.

Embrace the Beauty of You.

What Happened to My Hair?!

Preface: Before opening Schatzi's, I envisioned a place that would have a positive impact on the lives of young girls within the sphere of our influence. I believed that to be our raison d'être. In a recent conversation with our stylist Shaundrelle, I noted that most of our clients are young to middle-aged women, not young girls. I said, "Well, let's hope that we are inspiring our clients to make a positive "au naturel" impact on the children that they raise." In typical Shaundrelle style, she countered with words to this effect: "Schatzi's IS here for little girls! What about the little girl in me who never heard the things that you're telling people! What about the little girl in me who did not have a mother as knowledgeable as yours to teach her how to love herself! There's a little girl in all of our clients who has not been nurtured. Schatzi's is here for them."

I almost cried at the power of her words. I am moved even in reflecting upon her conviction in stating them. So, it is in the spirit of staying true to our mission that I present this article of raw and unadulterated truth. I apologize for the offence that may be caused to those who may take offence. But as they say, the truth is an offence. If we can't face the naked truth, how can we hope to recapture the grace and beauty of the little girl within us all who longs for social acceptance and self-love?

As many of our readers know, we introduce our client's to our salon experience through a consultation process. At that time, we're really just trying to get to know you and your specific hair care and/or massage therapy needs. Through the hair consultation exercise, we find out about your current hair care needs and your goals. Invariably, clients want healthier, stronger, sometimes longer hair. Clients often ask me, "When will MY hair get to be long?" My response is naturally very guarded when proffering a response. The first thing that I explain is that hair growth is determined mostly by genetics. I explain how hair growth occurs and how hair is shed naturally and healthily from the body. Typical hair growth is anywhere from ¼ to ½ inch per month. This growth rate, coupled with the life cycle of the hair follicle (which varies considerably across and within ethnic groups) determines how long a person's hair will become. This explanation is usually sufficient to help the person understand that it's impossible for me to tell them when or if their hair will become "long", whatever that means. All the same, they are typically appreciative of the increased awareness of how hair grows.

Always curious about the client's individual hair journey and eager to help her find the elusive answer that she seeks, my next approach is typically to ask a series of questions. Through this probing exercise, the most important thing that I want clients to realize is what changed to alter the health and vitality that their hair once had. Questions that I've often used are:

- 1) To your recollection, when was your hair the healthiest?
- 2) When did your hair stop being healthy?
- 3) What do you perceive as the steps that were taken between your hair being healthy and less than healthy?

The typical interview unfolds as follows: 'Well, when I was a little girl, my hair was very long. It fell below my shoulders, etc. When I was in high school or college, I noticed that my hair was not in such good condition anymore.' Clients are often in denial about the specific action step(s) that led to the demise of their once enviable mane of hair so my next prompt is to ask: Did you ever chemically treat your hair to achieve straightness, and if so, when? This is typically the "EUREKA" moment for people! At this point, many of them realize that when they left their hair alone and

cared for it as it presented itself, it was in its best condition. When they started to chemically treat it, they became chained to the stylists' chair with the threat of losing their hair completely if they did not return for regular touch ups every six weeks, or thereabouts. I don't blame anyone for wanting to chemically treat their hair. When I was a teenager, I was not equipped to care for my own hair. I had insufficient knowledge to do so. With my mother in grad school, I demanded to get a relaxer! It was an imperative if I was to maintain my sanity. It was that or the scissors! I truly understand why these series of events occur. However, I lost my own enviable mane within one year's time. After learning how to properly care for my hair, I reclaimed my lost locks. So, I often close this leg of the discussion by stating, 'You can have the hair that you once had as long as the damage to your hair follicles is not irreparable.' Then, the treatment program begins.

Black Hair Psychology 101: The Evolution of BAD HAIR

It's not rocket science. It's just a little biology, some chemistry and a good deal of psychology! Lots of psychology!! Many women never get over the psychological hurdle to realize the goal that they seek. It's sad but true. Others sail over this hurdle with minimal effort. It reminds me of a conversation I had with my girlfriend recently. Her teen-aged daughter came home in tears because the kids made fun of her two-strand twists. "They look like you have worms coming out of your head," they said. She felt horrible. It took me back 25 years. I empathized deeply. All the same, I did not feel sorry for her because I know that she loves her natural hair. My response to my friend: 'Now, she will see if her character can withstand the test of peer pressure. It's not easy. But in the end, she will either be who she wants to be or who others want her to be. The decision is ultimately hers. I can only provide encouragement. She's doing the best thing for her hair though. She should remember that foremost.'

The young girls that I see in our salon have beautiful, healthy hair and bright shiny faces. They embody grace and innocence, and they take great pride in the natural beauty of their hair. So what happens to this healthy hair as the girls mature? Typically, it's the "hairstylist" that happens. From a professional standpoint, the "hairstylist" is most interested in stylishly coiffed hair. From a business standpoint, she's interested in maximizing profits. After all, she's an entrepreneur! So am I, though perhaps atypical. Anyway if the "hairstylist" can style 8 heads of hair in one Saturday at \$60 per head, why would he/she EVER want to settle for styling only 4 heads of hair per day at the same rate? It would be considered an unwise investment. Natural hair takes TIME...unapologetically so. The faster it can be styled, the more clients that can be served in a day. The result is that the "hairstylist" seeks to convert natural hair to chemically treated hair to ensure that the styling process can be completed in the minimal amount of time possible. But for this conversion to take place, the first thing that must occur is that you must *believe* in the need for conversion. So, you're inclined to hear: "Boy, you got bad hair! You need a relaxer. Whoo, it's going to take all day with this stuff! A mild texturizer would be perfect for you." So on and so forth. Or, one of my personal favourites, "Your hair is too thick! Do you want me to thin it out for you?" My thought was always: Wouldn't that mean cutting plugs of my hair out AT THE SCALP and throwing them in the trash? WHAT?!!!! 'No baby, you just need a relaxer.'

At the end of the day, the result is a deflated self-image and "belief in the hype." The tragedy occurs when young girls internalize this negative energy and believe that their hair IS bad—or said another way, *in need of correction*. So what to do about this newly deflated self image? Enter stage left, the hero who has come to save the day: the chemical "*TREATMENT*." Hero: "Hi Ma'am. You don't have to suffer with your hair any longer. I'm here to relieve you." Damsel: "My hero!" So after enduring a few minutes of nerve tingling, toe curling PAIN (No lye does NOT always mean no

pain! But ‘no pain, no gain.’) ...Voila!! Tamed and corrected locks--now, freshly shocked into submission. The stylist says: “Now, you look great.” The stylist thinks: ‘Now, I can style your hair in about one hour. And, you have to come back to me within two months for another treatment. More profits, more smiling faces.’ No harm done, so it’s all good. Right?

Except for one unfortunate reality: Black women are *GOING BALD AT ALARMING RATES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!* What the Hell!!! (That was ME talking.) There are two reasons for this baldness: braids that are too tight and chemical treatments. Braids that are worn too tightly often exacerbate the tension on already over-processed, chemically damaged hair. The result is hair loss around the edges of the hair. This is an easy fix if the stylist is sensitized to this issue and actually cares enough about your hair to safeguard against this eventuality. We will address this issue of *traction alopecia* more directly in a future issue. For now, we will leave this pattern of baldness alone because *braids* had nothing to do with the origins of “bad hair.”

On the issue of relaxed hair however, stylists say: “Clients experience baldness because they don’t come back like they should for their regular *treatments*. (I call them shock therapies—BAD Patient!) The stylist says, “If they came back on time, their hair wouldn’t fall out or break off.” With this argument, I concur. This is true IF (and that’s a big “if”) your “hairstylist” is good. Thousands of women have beautiful, relaxed hair because they’re meticulous in observing their regular trips to the salon. If you can afford that, have at it. But, I still ask the question: So why does MY hair need so much “*TREATMENT*”?

The Cambridge online dictionary defines *treatment* as:

“the way you deal with or behave towards someone or something”

It goes on to provide one definition of *to treat* as follows:

“to use drugs, exercises, etc. to cure a person of a disease or heal an injury”

Hmmm...A DISEASE!! HEAL AN INJURY!! What’s implicit in the usage of the terminology is that something’s wrong with my hair because it needs so much treatment. Thus, the evolution of the term “BAD HAIR!” Bad hair needs regular treatment. True, there are other types of treatments: hot oil treatments, protein treatments. But these treatments are designed for transient conditions and thus are called conditioning treatments. Chemical treatments are called *permanents*. But this term is a misnomer because there can never be anything permanent about a treatment for hair. The hair is always growing!! So, the *permanent* reference applies only to the segment of the hair strand that has been introduced to the chemical change agent. My hair thus needs regular *treatment* because it’s always growing. That means REGULAR and timely visits to the stylist’s chair.

What is implicit in the use of all of this technical jargon is that if the hair that comes out of my scalp needs treatment at the moment that it presents itself, then it must really be bad! It needs immediate correction! I often hear ladies refer to the urgent need to get to salon to prevent the kink from seeing the light of day. Good people and good hair don’t need *permanent treatment*. They just need a *good conditioning*. These are the subliminal messages that we send to our children when we engage in these practices, whether we want to accept it or not.

So what about the issue of balding? When I’ve spoken with some clients about their hair care woes, I hear “I’m balding a bit but that’s because I’m aging.” While some of this may be true, not all of it is. Firstly, we’re all aging!! I haven’t met one living soul on Earth who isn’t. Have you? Yes, some women are genetically coded for

baldness. But, I do NOT believe all of the women that I see with baldness are coded for baldness. Case in point: my own family. Since opening *Schatzi's*, one of my relatives confessed that she was experiencing baldness at the crown of her head for the first time in her life. Yes, she's aging as are her brothers. She was deeply concerned and wondered if she was coded for baldness. She asked me what she should do. Well, seeing as her brothers have lost not one fiber of hair to baldness in all the years I've known them, I assured her that this was unlikely. She decided to try going natural. She now sports a beautiful natural, and the baldness at the crown of her head has disappeared. Call her hair loss genetics? I call that one a lie—hype—a mask to distort reality. In the race for African-American capital, the prize goes to those who can convince the consumer that what is normal and natural is less than optimal. The place to start is logically within the mind of the consumer. That's Marketing 101: Make the customer believe that they can't live without the product that you provide.

So with all of this natural hair and the lack of permanent "treatments," where does that leave the natural hair stylist in the arena of profitability?

The Natural Hair Niche: Is It Profitable?

Good question. In light of the billions of dollars being made in the Black hair care industry, many people wonder why we even bother to try to *convert* people to natural hair. I say, "We're not converting. We're resurrecting, redeeming, reclaiming, reiterating. And in many respects, we're redefining!! One locked brother that I considered recruiting into the salon a while back said, "Why focus only on natural hair? You can't make everyone like YOU." I thought, "Is this brother really wearing locks!!!" Then, I put myself in his shoes and I understood. As a licensed cosmetologist and a barber, he is taught how to cut and/or chemically treat natural Black hair. That is all! Caring for natural Black hair is not part of the licensing curriculum! Truly! So, to only treat natural hair means that he cannot use the vast majority of the skills that he has developed through his years of training. In his words, "You're saying goodbye to good money when you ignore services for relaxed hair." Implicit in his argument is the idea that people who wear natural hair can opt out of the salon completely. Natural hair care is something they can do completely on their own with no assistance from anyone. I quickly realized that this brother and I would not work well together. We were antithetical to each other. But, I wish him well...sort of.

So, where's the profitability? Isn't this venture a shaky investment? Surely, there's a reason that *Schatzi's* is the first natural hair salon in Raleigh, NC. In short, it is true that we are limiting our profit margin by focusing on natural hair. Yes, we are leveling our growth curve when we provide natural services that do not chain clients to the stylists' chair because they have the freedom to stay home (like millions of Caucasian, Asian and Hispanic women around the world). Yes, we are further narrowing our growth potential when we exclude weave services which prize synthetic hair over the clients own tresses. So, why gamble against the odds? In a word, because the next generation demands it of us. That's all. And that's enough. Pure and simple.

On a personal note, my whole life, I've played it safe. Playing the game with my cards close to my chest, hedging my bets, gambling to always minimize my losses. Then one day, I decided to make a change. Why? Because I knew the need existed and because I knew that the cause was/is worthy. Sure, I've hedged by bets in this venture to. That's what I do! *Momma didn't raise no fool!* But all the same, I am excited daily at the prospects of this communal venture of which I cannot predict the outcome. It's exhilarating! Yes, it's scary too, at times! But, whenever I go there, I just pray and let go. I don't have time for the negative energy. There's much too

much to be done. Profitability is something I don't obsess about. I let the "hairstylists" worry about that. Because as long as they're relaxing and chemically treating, there will always be clients coming to *Schatzi's* for repair work. In fact, hairstylists create my core base of clientele. They support our very existence. Do I worry about them competing with us? Well, not really because natural hair requires discipline, patience and nurturing above and beyond the love of money. So much for entrepreneurship. Additionally, the fact is that when a new client leaves our salon, we don't always know when or IF we will ever see them again. In my view, that's how it should be. We don't tie our client's purse strings to our appointment book. Man is born free and should remain so! We don't fear the unknown because where there is natural hair, there is always a woman who would occasionally like to be pampered and have someone else appreciate her beauty for her. For a nominal fee, it's not a bad trade off. We price our services at a reasonable rate because it's the right thing to do. I've heard many stories of highly priced natural hair care services. We endeavor to create an environment that you want to return to again and again.

So in the area of profitability, perhaps *Schatzi's* is playing against the odds. It's really too soon to say. I wouldn't say that we've arrived by any means. We have a ways to go. But, my fellow business associates have assured me, that if I'm not prepared to hang in for 3-5 years of uncertainty, I'm wasting my time. Well, I've never been a quitter. And based on current trends, I would say that we will beat that 3-5 year time horizon with the grace of a gazelle!! There are surely perils and pitfalls in the road ahead, but I'm undaunted. God has blessed us with an exceptional team of people, all of whom are equally committed to the dream. Somehow, talent finds us at the right time. These small miracles have occurred so frequently over the past year and a half, that I know that our continued existence has very little to do with what I've done right and much more to do with the blessings of our Creator. So, I play my role and hold on for the ride! Sometimes, it's a thrill ride! But aren't those the best kinds?! After all on the winding road of life, the real excitement lies in the journey itself, now doesn't it? Taken one step at a time. ☺

Embrace the Beauty of You.

Poetically Speaking...

As some of you are aware, Poetically Correct was cancelled this month in favour of a sponsored community event titled Poetic Paradise held at Jamaica Paradise Café. This event took place on Thursday, Oct. 25th. Overall, the event was an enjoyable one. The host Monica Daye was prolific in her poetic prowess and her friend and fellow poet laureate Trina Thoughtz was equally provocative. (I kept my friend under raps on Thursday and left the mike to the experts.) These ladies take poetry to a 'hole.....nuva.....level. True dat! (You have to watch MADD TV to get that one. ☺) I thought I would have one of their soul stirring pieces to include in this latest edition of *Au Naturel*, but truly, the written word does not do justice to what those sistas put down. They transformed from ordinary sisters into extraordinary poet warriors with profound messages of change and social awareness that cannot be easily described. Monica in particular became another person in front of the mike! With a voice that projected from a realm of pain and anger and righteousness, her inner poet emerged with a vengeance!! She spoke prolifically and unapologetically against hypocrisy and physical and sexual abuse of women and children. It was deep! Trina's message was to the rappers primarily, as she lyricized about the mike being her "glock." Her mike was that and more! It was her instrument of change and her prop as she conjured images of the Middle Passage suggesting that we "*Lean with it.*" I was inspired!! Another brother was equally provocative with his message of social awareness for African-American youth, particularly young males. To read their poetry is to know maybe 1/5th of the story. Needless to say, their stuff ain't in

here. Sorry. You had to be there.

Truly, it's unfortunate that the rain kept some of our anticipated crowd at home. With extended drought conditions throughout NC, it was refreshing to see the rain stay a while throughout that week-end. It was that ground soaking type of rain. I didn't mind at all. While looking out of the office window on that Thursday, I confessed to an office colleague how I would much rather be at home in bed, looking out the window. It was perfect sleeping rain. Not enough to fill the reservoir by far but, we'll take it. So with that said, what do I share? Hmm...

*As I sit here communing with my green tea,
Mellowing to the captivating sounds of Floetry
I wonder, what should I parley...*

*My mind is alive with energy
My emotions are free and expressive
I am at Peace.*

*There is nothing that I can say that hasn't already been said.
There is not an idea that I can share that has not been read.
Not a reflection that has not been captured.*

*So I say only...
Peace.*

Special "Beauty" Report: Erasing Ethnicity

(Abstract of an article posted on MSN.com, October 27, 2007 – The quotes around 'beauty' are my addition.)

When I saw this article posted on MSN.com, it immediately caught my eye. (The quotes around *beauty*, noted in the title, are my emphasis.) The main reason I was drawn to the article was because of the photo which accompanied the article caption. It showed a young Asian woman lying on a surgical bed having eyelid surgery. I WAS TOTALLY GROSSED OUT!!! I found the photo very disturbing but insisted on looking further. The sub-title of the article is "What some women will do for beauty." Well, I would beg to differ because the definition of beauty is clearly very narrow and extremely Eurocentric. I don't argue the beauty of European features by any means. But do we all need to look the same?!!!! I took no solace in knowing that African-American women are not the only ones with *ethnicity issues*. As such, I'm including this article primarily as a reminder of why *Schatzi's* exists: To counter the elements of society that seek to ERASE ETHNICITY. The article is not very well written, but it makes the point.

Embrace the Beauty of You.

Extreme Makeovers: What Some Women Will Do for Beauty

From eyelid surgery to leg-lengthening and calf-narrowing, it seems there is little some women won't do to achieve that iconic look.

Extreme Makeover: Part 1: Double-eyelid surgery (aka Asian blepharoplasty)

WHY IT'S DONE: About 50 percent of Pacific Asians do not have an upper-eyelid crease. For those who do, the crease falls about 7 mm above the lashline, whereas for Caucasians, the crease falls about 11 mm above it.

HOW IT WORKS: During the most popular version of this outpatient procedure, a crescent-shaped incision is made along the new crease line, and a small amount of skin, tissue, and fat on the upper eyelid is cut away. When the two sides are sutured

back together, the incision is hidden under the newly created crease.

PROCEDURE LENGTH: Approximately one hour

RECOVERY TIME: Sutures are removed after about a week. Bruising and swelling usually subside after a month.

COST: \$2500 to \$5000

ORIGIN: 19th-century Japan. The popularity of the procedure jumps whenever there was a significant Western presence in Asia — for example, during the Korean War.

HOW COMMON: Almost 300,000 Asians in the U.S. had the surgery in 2006.

Extreme Makeover: Part 2: Calf reduction

WHY IT'S DONE: In general, Asian women have shorter legs and thicker calves than Caucasian women. These features are thought to be unsightly in their culture (some refer to them as "radish legs").

HOW IT WORKS: Two small incisions are made at the top of the calf in the back of the leg, where an endoscope is inserted and the muscle is separated from the membrane. The protruding muscle is cut away, shrinking the circumference of the calf. Patients usually recover in six months.

POTENTIAL SHRINKAGE: 1 to 3 inches

COST: About \$2800

MOST POPULAR IN: South Korea, but gaining popularity all over Asia; it has yet to make its way to the U.S.

RISKS: Excessive bleeding, shapeless legs.

Extreme Makeover: Part 3: Leg lengthening

WHY IT'S DONE: The Chinese are so height-conscious, jobs and even schools often post height requirements. To apply for the foreign ministry, women must be 5'3" (the national average), whereas flight attendants must be at least 5'5". As a result, being tall — or short — can have a direct impact on one's livelihood.

HOW IT WORKS: Calf and shin bones are broken and pierced with steel pins, which are fixed to an external frame with screws. Then stretching — by means of turning those screws and lengthening the bone at the point where it was broken — is carried out over the next several months. The steel pins are left in for another year as support for the newly regenerated bone

RANGE OF GROWTH: 1 to 5 inches

COST: \$15,000 to \$25,000

RISKS: Horror stories include misshapen legs, feet that splay outward, and bones that never heal properly and break easily. In November 2006, China restricted the procedure to select hospitals that offer postsurgery care and rehabilitation.

MOST POPULAR COSMETIC SURGERIES BY ETHNICITY

In the past five years, the number of plastic surgeries performed on minorities jumped 65 percent — compared with an increase of 38 percent for the overall population. Why the spike in minority candidates? Higher incomes and access to a wider range of ethnic-specific techniques.

A GLOBAL LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE KNIFE

In an attempt to preserve traditional Eastern looks, plastic surgery was banned in China until 2001. Now, it's a \$2.4-billion-a-year business. Add Japan, which spends \$18.4 million on plastic surgery annually, and India, where cosmetic surgery has experienced a 15 percent growth in the past three years, and Asia is now the world's second-largest plastic-surgery hub. The U.S. is still in the lead, with its whopping \$8.4 billion industry.

THE QUEST FOR A SKI-JUMP NOSE

Unlike the rhinoplasties performed on Caucasians (often to straighten a bridge or remove a bump), nose reshaping for minorities generally leads to narrower nostrils, a higher bridge, and a pointier tip — shapes typical of white noses.

TOP COUNTRIES FOR BREAST AUGMENTATION

Spain, Italy, U.K., Sweden, Finland, India, Norway, Slovenia. In the U.S., the

procedure ranks #1 for Hispanics and #2 for Asian-Americans among minorities.

Are Blue Eyes Better?

Don't it turn their brown eyes blue?

Would Aishwarya Rai, the stunning former Miss World and Bollywood darling, be as popular if her eyes weren't a glowing green-blue? Would she have snagged a L'Oréal cosmetics contract or crossed over to Hollywood?

Since color contacts by FreshLook became available in 1984, women of color — including Naomi Campbell, Lil' Kim, and Ziyi Zhang — have been eager to experiment. "Our largest market is with dark-eyed and dark-complected women," says Jeff Cohen, vice president of global marketing for CIBA Vision (makers of FreshLook), citing African-American, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern women as the top customers in the U.S. "Color contacts are huge with Middle Eastern women because their clothing often covers everything except their eyes. It's one of the only ways they have to express their originality."

With this uniquely exotic notion of lighter eyes coming into vogue, colored-lens users climbed to 2.7 million in the U.S. alone last year.

Skin: The New Status Symbol

Has the West's fixation with tanning finally challenged the East's centuries-old belief that pale skin is synonymous with high social standing?

In June 2007, the first-ever tanning salon opened in Beijing. Called DB Salon, it serves legions of women under 30 with a strangely specific goal: to have the caramel coloring of American pop princess Christina Aguilera.

In India, Bollywood stars are going for the burnt-sienna hue one sees in Malibu, achievable only via a bottle.

And in Japan, bronzing goods account for \$140 million in sales.

Natural Hair Color and Texture — Why Don't We Want It?

BLONDE AMBITION

While only about 2 percent of the world population is born blonde, the rest are still going for gold:

34% of the hair dye sold in the U.S. last year was blonde.

80% of Koreans in their 20s lighten their hair.

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE: THE LABOR, COST, AND STRESS OF RELAXING BLACK HAIR

HOW IT'S DONE: A petroleum base is applied to the scalp, then a relaxer with sodium hydroxide (basically, lye) is put on the hair. It stays on for 25 to 30 minutes and is then washed two or three times with a neutralizing shampoo. Finally, a deep conditioner is applied and rinsed, and hair is styled.

TIME: 2 to 3 hours

COST: About \$225 for virgin hair; \$110 for touch-ups

MAINTENANCE: A touch-up is needed every 8 to 10 weeks. Because of damage caused by the chemicals, hair can only be washed once or twice a week.

RISKS: A too-strong relaxer causes excessive breakage and scalp burns.

The Japanese Secret for Winning Miss Universe

Hint: look less Japanese

When Ines Lignon was hired by Donald Trump 10 years ago to pull Japan out of its Miss Universe slump (the country hadn't spawned a winner in 48 years), she jumped at the chance. A former IMG modeling-agency promoter, French-born Lignon trained the Japanese contestants to adopt typically Western practices like sitting up straight, making eye contact, and tanning.

Part of her program is even spent emulating the body language and pronunciation of characters from shows like *Sex and the City*. "Japanese culture places an emphasis

on blending in and thinking like a group," says Ligrón. "I teach them to stand out, be different, and show their personality."

This year, the well-trained 20-year-old Riyo Mori snagged the title. But instead of praise, the media focused on her failure to represent Japanese culture, which advocates being cute, pale, and submissive. Ligrón, however, doesn't care: "My market is young, cool, hip, fashionable people. You cannot please everyone." She adds, "I have a lot of women supporters — my enemies are men. They are afraid of powerful women."

2007 Miss Universe Riyo Mori is a statuesque 5'9" and speaks fluent English.