



BEAUTY'S BACK!

Salons are reopening, but it'll be different for a while. We checked with Bergen owners to find out how. By Haley Longman

Put away those clippers. As of June 22, per Gov. Phil Murphy, the county's hair salons and beauty shops were permitted to welcome customers once again. But the salon experience looks a little different in this post-COVID world, and it will for the foreseeable future. Stylists must wear masks, face shields and gloves, while clients are required to have face coverings on. BERGEN interviewed salon owners in the county to pinpoint seven changes you can expect when you decide that, at last, a fresh cut or a new 'do is for you.

Waiting has changed. You're reading a magazine right now—why not take it along to the salon? The well-thumbed copies you're used to finding there may have gone AWOL. In fact, your car may be your new waiting room, as many salons are doing away with waiting areas entirely—or at least removing high-touch surfaces such as comfy seats, coffee makers and magazine stacks. Instead, The Strand Salon in River Edge has invested in a new messaging system that sends out automatic texts to alert customers when their stylist is ready for an appointment, says owner Hanie Tadros. Giovanni Carfi, owner of Bellezza Salon & Spa in Glen Rock, asks his clients to park in designated spots and text upon arrival; an assistant then escorts them inside when their stylist is ready.

Taking your temp. Touchless thermometers are becoming the norm at many places, salons among them. Bellezza, DaVinci Hair Studio in Englewood and Allendale Hair Studios will all be using them to take the temperatures of both staff and customers upon arrival. DaVinci owner Sandra Bracken says her establishment

also provides each customer with a labeled clear plastic bag. It contains a disposable robe and gloves, and it's a place to hold keys and a phone, as purses must be left in your car. Tadros says The Strand is also the only salon in the U.S. to have a "sanitization tunnel," which checks body temperature, looks for viruses in the body and spritzes a mist of organic sanitizer upon entering. "This machine takes care of 99.9 percent of our fears," he declares.

Super sanitization. Beauty parlors generally seek to maintain high standards of cleanliness; for example, tools such as combs and scissors have long been dipped in the disinfectant solution Barbicide between clients. But they're pushing things up a notch post-COVID. Tadros at The Strand is arming each of his stations and restrooms with disinfectant spray and paper towels, has purchased triple the usual amount of towels and capes and has installed two molecular air filters that clean and recirculate air. Allendale Hair Studios has hand sanitizers at every station and does a Barbicide wipe-down after each client. Meanwhile, Bellezza's Carfi purchased a "defogging sanitation device to sanitize each area as the client leaves," he says, and DaVinci was additionally sterilized and repainted while it was closed for the pandemic.

Fewer bodies. Expect salons to be just a little bit emptier for the time being. Stylists will be working half-day shifts at The Strand to minimize their time in the salon, Tadros says, and he'll only have half of his staff, or about five or six hairdressers, working at a time on five or six clients. Meanwhile, DaVinci will be serving only three clients at a time, compared with its usual five or six.

Social distance. Just like the rest of us in everyday situations, salons are required to maintain a distance of six feet between customers wherever possible. For some businesses, such as Bellezza, this means removing every other chair and putting hand sanitizing stations in their places. Both The Strand and DaVinci have installed plexiglass partitions at reception desks, sinks and stations, while Allendale has placed clear partitions between stations and solid dividers in the shampooing area. "Now we have an added element of privacy there too," says owner Doree Mortillo.

Increased ventilation. Helping air circulate throughout the shop is integral to maintaining the health and safety of clients and staff, so salons are making changes here too. The Strand ordered two new windows to replace old ones that wouldn't open. Clients at Allendale Hair Studios will relax in an outdoor covered seating area with chairs, music and WiFi while they get their color processed, reducing their time indoors. And DaVinci "converted one of our rooms into a blow-dry service [space] to avoid air contamination," says owner Bracken.

No-contact payments. Some salons were using contactless payment prior to the pandemic, but our business owners agree that Apple Pay, Venmo or having the front desk staff keep their customers' credit cards on file are now decidedly preferred payment methods instead of cash. Still, that's no reason to skimp on tips if you appreciate the extra pains taken by salon workers for your safety (as well as their own). The Strand, for example, has set up a box at every station for gratuities to make the process contact-free.