

*From short bobs to chignons,
women throughout the world
have followed his lead*

ANTOINE OF PARIS: the Hairdo King

by J. D. RATCLIFF

EVERY DAY millions of women look into their mirrors, get a detached expression on their faces and exclaim, "I *must* do something about my hair." At that moment they become potential grist for the beauty mill of Antoni Cierplikowski.

More widely known as "Antoine of Paris," this gentleman is unquestionably the world's most famed barber—with fees ranging up to \$1,000 for a single hairdo.

A generation ago he started women bobbing their tresses and raised a storm of protest that is only now subsiding. After testing blue dyes on his white borzoi wolfhound, he started tinting the hair of older women. He was the first to use lacquer to hold hair in place, and originated the "sculptured curl," a permanent wave molded to fit head contours. The streaked forelock of white or blonde was also his idea.

Antoine gave Claudette Colbert her famed bangs, the Duchess of Windsor her "Italian madonna" hairdo, Greta Garbo her feminized long bob; and in "South Pacific," Mary Martin washed that man right out of her Antoine haircut.

Antoine, whose exact age is a closely guarded secret, looks a vital 50. At an age when most businessmen have retired, he keeps a shrewd eye on his worldwide enterprises and devotes his time to thinking up hair styles women will be wearing a decade hence. To this end he spends hours in museums seeking ideas from Velásquez, Goya, Botticelli and other painters; and plays Bach on the pipe organ in his Paris home seeking inspiration.

Antoine served his first customer when he was eight years old in his native village of Sieradz, Poland. The customer—his six-year-old sister, Salome. He dressed her hair but found it wouldn't stay in place. So he "set" it with honey—and attracted a swarm of bees.

The son of the village cobbler, Antoine was apprenticed to a barber-surgeon where he learned to



ANTOINE

pull teeth, extract splinters, dress wounds, cut and curl hair.

In his march to fame and fortune, he paused briefly in Lodz, Poland, to work in a hairdresser's shop; then moved on to Paris where he proceeded to parlay a curling iron and a pair of shears into a globe-girdling, multi-million-dollar business. Antoine salons—67 of them—stretch from Los Angeles to Chicago, New York, London, Paris and on to Melbourne, Australia.

Close to 5,000,000 women visit Antoine salons each year, and approximately 10,000 people work in his various enterprises which include cosmetics manufacture and beauty schools. "In this business," he says, "you have to be part actor, part doctor, part diplomat and part artist."

Antoine plays all his roles with consummate skill and a sense of showmanship that P. T. Barnum would have envied. A lavish spender, he has a highly developed knack of attracting attention to himself—and thus to his salons.

"You act all the time," Sarah Bernhardt once told him.

In 1927, he spent a fortune on a house he had built in Paris. It was constructed almost entirely of glass—and made headlines around the world. He furnished the house with specially made glass furniture and for the opening, sent 750 invitations engraved on crystal. Fifteen hundred people came. As a final touch he bought a glass coffin—and used it as a bed.

A dandy who would have been at home in Louis XIV's court, Antoine likes eccentric dress. Short in stature, he wears specially built high-heeled shoes to add an inch and a half to his height. A high curly pompadour, now graying, adds extra height.

Most short men try to hide their now-you-can-be-as-tall-as-she-is heels. Not Antoine. For a fancy



ANTOINE



dress party he once had his heels studded with diamonds.

For awhile he wore white satin evening clothes; and instead of the customary board-stiff evening shirts and collars, he had pleated shirts and pleated collars specially made for him.

He likes "harmonious" surroundings, and when harmony is lacking, he erupts. On a visit to his Dallas salon several years ago, he was escorted to his hotel suite.

"I could never live in this red plush Victorian horror," he snorted, and stalked out of the hotel to a nearby park where he bought a cake and started feeding it to the pigeons.

The manager coaxed him back to the hotel, however, and Antoine finally settled for a bare room used by salesmen to display samples. "Just move a bed in and it will be quite satisfactory," he said.

Deciding he wanted a "simple" home in the country, Antoine bought an old house in Gragny, a suburb of Paris. His idea of a simple house included a swimming pool and a landing field for his private plane. He has accumulated other homes too, including an apartment in New York City; a cottage at Fire Island, New York; a magnificent villa overlooking the Mediterranean at Cannes, France; a duplex apartment in the fashionable Passy district of Paris.

When he arrived in Paris as a boy, he worked several years for various hair-dressing establishments, and married Marie Berthe Astier, a French manicurist who worked in one of them. By 1911, the young couple had saved enough money to open their own shop at 5, Rue Cambon, in the heart of Paris' smartest shopping district.

Stars of the stage like Sarah Bernhardt and Eleanora Duse became customers and so did the fashionable ladies of international society. One day a modest looking, plainly dressed woman appeared for an appointment.

"I do not believe I know you," Antoine said.

"I am the Queen of Spain," the woman replied.

In 1937, Antoine took 65 hairdressers to London to beautify court ladies for the coronation of King George VI. The same year he prepared another noted lady for her

ANTOINE

wedding: Mrs. Wallis Warfield Simpson, the present Duchess of Windsor.

"She treats her dress and appearance as if it were a business in itself," Antoine says. "When there is a great deal of social activity, she will have her hair dressed three times a day." For her, he devised a special shampoo containing the yolks of three eggs and a jigger of rum.

One of the most unusual visitors to his Paris salon was Madame Molotov, wife of the Russian foreign minister. As head of the Soviet cosmetics trust, she was shopping for capitalist ideas which might help beautify Russian women.

In 1953, Antoine supervised the preparation of court ladies for the coronation of Elizabeth II. He worked all night, and saw the coronation on television.

One of his most famed customers was Mata Hari, who spied for the Germans in World War I and was executed by the French. Though time and romantic journalism have made her beauty a legend, Antoine thinks otherwise.

"If the hundreds of women I have known were ranked in the order of their beauty, she would be far down on the list," he said. "I called at her home one day to dress her hair and her careless negligee revealed enough to show that she had far from the body of a goddess."

HAIR BOBBING began more or less by accident in 1910. The French actress Eve Lavalliere, who was 45 years old, had been cast as a girl of 18; and Antoine was pondering the problem of how to make her look younger when a girl came into the actress' boudoir to deliver a letter. The child had short hair and bangs. That was the answer.

Antoine cut off the actress' hair and soon other women were besieging him to cut theirs also, to make them look younger. It took several years for bobbing to become a world-wide vogue. When it did, the storm broke.

The new style was denounced by press and pulpit. In the U. S., department stores refused to hire women with shorn tresses; bobbed-haired women were barred from English courts; and Japan passed a law against bobbing.

Women, characteristically, paid not the slightest attention. An explorer returning from Mongolia in the early 20s reported that short hair was the new craze among women of the nomadic desert tribes. In 1938, a famous hold-out submitted to Antoine's shears—Eleanor Roosevelt.

The vogue of dyeing hair blue came into being when American-born Lady Mendl put the problem

ANTOINE

to Antoine: what should she do about her graying hair? A blue tint seemed to be the answer.

Hair had never been dyed blue before and Antoine experimented on his white borzoi. Ever the showman, he led the blue dog around the streets of Paris. It created a sen-



sation and he decided blue hair on women would do the same. He dyed Lady Mendl's hair and millions of older women fell in with the idea.

As Antoine's fame increased, so did his prices. When he opened his New York salon in 1922, an Antoine bob was priced at \$25. He doubted anyone would pay it—but was booked solidly for months. Since then prices have fallen to more reasonable levels.

The highest fee Antoine ever received was from Lady Wimborne. Asked to come to London to do her hair for a party she was giving for the King and Queen of Spain, he set the ridiculously high fee of \$1,000. She agreed without a quibble. Another Antoine client had a hairdresser from the Paris salon travel regularly to Vienna—a 20-hour train ride—to dye her hair.

"Women come to us," Antoine says, "shopping for a new personality. Every woman is an abler and better person when she knows she looks well. All have some elements of beauty. To a great extent our work is correcting nature's deficiencies. If a woman has bad ears, we hide them. If her forehead is too high, bangs will shorten it. Upswept hair will lengthen a low forehead. Hair on top of the head will give a sense of height to the short woman, and a long bob will shorten a woman who is too tall. There is no such thing as a 'standard' hairdo. Every woman is an individual problem."

In his various establishments, Antoine is an absolute boss who stands for no interference. Normally mild and tractable, he flared back at one recalcitrant customer with: "You act and talk like a truck driver. If you do not believe me, go have your voice recorded. I do not see how anyone could tolerate you, much less love you."

The lady calmed down and submitted to the hairdo he proposed—and liked it.

To another unruly lady, he snapped: "I don't like your taste

ANTOINE

and don't want your money. Please leave." Chastened, she was back the next day.

To a lady who directed that he snip her hair only lightly, he observed: "If you know so much about it, why do you come to Antoine?"

The greatest expansion of Antoine's enterprises came during World War II. He left Paris for America in 1939 to take care of contracts and was unable to go back when the Nazis occupied France in May, 1940.

In the five war years he expanded the chain of Antoine salons coast-to-coast, set up a cosmetic manufacturing business and established a school for training technicians. He became an American citizen in 1946.

Recent Antoine innovations include golden butterflies stenciled on the hair—and washed off once the party is over; the streaked white or blond forelock; and wigs which customers can try on as they would dresses. If a brunette with a long bob wants to see what she would look like as a frizzle haired redhead, she can try on a frizzled wig. If she likes what she sees in the mirror she can have her hair done that way.

Today, active as ever, Antoine commutes between Europe and America. On the spur of the moment he will decide to go to Cannes, Paris or London, summon his plane and be on his way.

Most of his life he has been a chain smoker. A few months ago an assistant offered him a cigarette. "I don't smoke," Antoine said.

"When did you stop?" his assistant asked.

"Two minutes ago," was the answer.

These days he rarely touches a customer's hair. He will advise, but leaves the actual work to assistants. His wife, an able businesswoman, manages all Antoine enterprises.

Antoine himself spends most of his time creating new hair styles. Working with a headform, pins, curling iron and strands of hair, he creates dozens of new ones each year.

Women may not know what they will be looking like five years hence. But Antoine has a pretty good idea—with one exception. The exception is his wife. In all their years of married life he has never touched her hair, currently an upswept, chestnut brown pompadour.

"Why?" asks Antoine. "In order to keep peace in the family."

Coronet

January, 1955

p. 100