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The Shorn Identity

Going bald has never been so beautiful

By CHRISTINA BINKLEY

Bald is hot. Jason Statham, Guy Ritchie's burly leading man, is shorn. So are Bruce Willis, surfer god Kelly Slater and famous footballer Thierry Henry. Contrary to the ego-shrinking stereotype of baldness, the minimalist look gives these gents mettle.



Goodbye, bad comb-over. Hello, baldness. Bald is beautiful and bald is back. WSJ's Christina Binkley says the shaved head look is back in fashion for men, whether they're movie stars or the everyman.

A man's shaved head—whether it's to-the-skin or with slight stubble—can suggest a sigh-inspiring combination of intellectual depth and machismo. This may be because early adopters included both artists and Marines. When Levi Pharaoh shaved his curly locks down to stubble last month, the 31-year-old marketing executive at apothecary MiN New York says "women in particular found it sexy." They told him he finally looked like a real man.

The Bald Index

Our guide to the coolest cropped heads in the land.



Getty Images

THE ORIGINAL: **Yul Brynner** is the ultimate "power bald." His freshly shaved head exudes power and authority. If it was enough to seduce Deborah Kerr in "The King and I," it could work wonders for you, too.

Hairlessness also turns back the clock, making it difficult to tell a man's age. And it highlights a fellow's bone structure and eyes. Frederick Blacksher, a 22-year-old aspiring actor in Los Angeles, cut his thick black hair (no thinning in sight) to a few millimeters because "it makes my features stand out." But for most men, a head shave is a



Getty Images

THE PERFORMER: **Jamie Foxx** is a singer, stand-up comedian and Oscar-winning actor. He's also been rocking a barely-there buzz recently. What does that tell you? The look has serious box-office appeal.



Getty Images

THE BAD BOY: **Bruce Willis's** smooth crown delivers a cool, noncommittal swagger. It's tough and manly, with a touch of refinement.



Getty Images

THE DUDE: Although beach-blond bowl cuts are standard issue for surfer dudes, bald is a surprisingly acceptable style for laid-back brosefs like pro wave rider (and super stud) **Kelly Slater**.



Getty Images

THE ATHLETE: The long locks **Andre Agassi** once was famous for were enhanced by a toupee, which came loose during the 1990 French Open. The distracting hair piece cost

white flag in the battle against male-pattern baldness.

Receding hairlines spur otherwise sane men to torture themselves cosmetically, often with unfortunate results. These include the dreaded comb-over, Rogaine fuzz and the crop-like appearance of hair plugs. Compared with this, a Gillette razor and a pot of shaving cream should seem like a walk in the park.

Yet when I recently tried talking my husband into shearing his receding locks, I learned that even balding men can be timid about taking the plunge. Mr. Pharaoh says taking it (nearly) all off took some getting used to: "It's like going out in the world naked."

Rickey Pitino, a 35-year-old revenue controller for a Manhattan law firm, waited until his two-

him the tourney. The lesson here? If you're thinning, help your game. Shave and shave early.

week vacation in Italy to try out the style. That was three

years ago and he's still shearing it all off.

There was a time when it was iconoclasts who shaved their heads. Telly Savalas built an acting career on his bald head and icy Kojak stare. Before him, so did Yul Brynner. Neo-Nazi skinheads scared folks off the look for a while in the '80s and early '90s, but once they'd receded into the background of political consciousness, the look gained allure.

A shaved head took "The Shield" star Michael Chiklis from dweeb to stud. A shaved head has helped actor Patrick Stewart ("Star Trek"'s Captain Picard) extend his sexy years into his 70s. Both men look as though they'd be as comfortable drilling holes in the sidewalk as speaking in iambic pentameter—and that's the magic of bald.

Despite appearances, though, a man's scalp is not tough. John Scala, founder of the New York Shaving Co. on Elizabeth Street in Manhattan, offers consultations for do-it-yourselfers. Fully shorn himself, he begins with a diagram to map the direction a client's hair grows. He then recommends a routine that begins with preshave oil to smooth the razor's path over any bumps, and ends with applying an SPF sunblock for both summer and winter.

Many barbers recommend a safety razor for the cleanest shave. Men who aren't prepared to go fully nude can set an electric razor to one or zero, leaving hair so short it can be measured in micrometers.

No barber I spoke with recommended trying a straight razor on oneself, and most of them use the word "weapon" when referring to those sleek instruments. MiN New York sells them, but as collectors items, not shaving tools.

At Groom-It Industries in Los Angeles, Les Kovacs sells safety razors, including disposable models designed strictly for the head. In this shop, he has a wall full of professional-grade electric razors, trimmers and other devices. He has even been asked to adjust electric razors to shave more closely than a zero setting permits—thereby eliminating some of the safety aspects of the devices.

Vote: Better Off Bald?



Do these men look better with hair or with shaved heads? Cast your vote.

Mr. Kovacs says he's been selling increasingly to do-it-yourselfers for five years or so. Their numbers are so great these days, he says, "I'm waiting for women to start doing it."

The Naked Truth

When it comes to shaving his head, a gentleman has two choices: manual or electric

THE SAFETY RAZOR



Merkur Solingen adjustable Futur safety razor, \$70, min.com

For a smooth shave, many men use disposable razors, usually with a triple blade. Your barber does not—with good reason. The old-fashioned safety razor, with replaceable blades, is easier on the scalp as well as the environment. Merkur's version comes weighted so that it need only be pulled across the head, without applying pressure. The single blade doesn't yank at hairs, so

it's kinder to the skin, and you can shave in two directions for a smooth finish.

THE HAND-HELD



Dovo Soligen stainless-steel head shaver, \$35, min.com

Other razor varieties have been designed specifically for the head. This Dovo model—a razor with slots for three fingers—can be pulled across the head with the same motion used for combing hair.

THE ELECTRIC



Wahl 9243-517N clipper, \$40, factoryoutletstore.com

Most barbers and many experienced do-it-yourselfers recommend avoiding the drugstore variety of rechargeable razors. Instead, go straight to professional electric tools, like this Wahl clipper, which will last longer, shave more surely and won't trim off the top of a mole. It can also be set to cut at varying lengths if you're not ready for the full monty. That's helpful to men who suffer from ingrown hairs as well as those who want that rough-hewn stubble look.

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