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HOT SHOP VANCOUVER

Great hair, please – hold the scissors

BLO BLOW DRY BAR

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BY AMY VERNER

When Nicole Starkey wants to feel fabulous, only a real blowout will do. Which is to say, she tops in at Blo Blow Dry Bar where someone wielding a zig, pink hair dryer ensures that her long, brown locks look magazine-perfect in the time it takes Rachael Ray to cook dinner.

"I have two kids hanging off me; I can never get my hair that slick and polished," says the Vancouver mother of a newborn and a two-year-old, who works with her husband in Web design. "This is a big luxury for a small price."

For just \$29, the Yaletown shop, which opened last month, promises a cheap and chic coif with no snipping. (The only salon devoted to blowouts in Canada, Blo represents the evolution of the wash and set.

Eight Philippe Starck Louis Ghost chairs replace traditional swivel seats. And glossy, white counters with pink Lucite overlays prove Blo is more of a swanky lounge than a salon for blue-haired ladies.

Most importantly, there are 10 scissors or foils in sight. "We're being strict about not calling it a salon," business partner Val Litwin says.

Even so, time-strapped, stress-stressed women are flocking. "The business is



Blo Blow Dry Bar in Vancouver's Yaletown specializes in blowouts. The sleek decor includes Philippe Starck Louis Ghost chairs.

blowing up – it's a horrible pun, but we've just been smokin' busy since 7 in the morning till 9 o'clock at night," he adds, with more colour but less noxiousness than hair dye.

His cheeky personality reflects the Blo brand, one that even includes a "blocabulary."

To wit, "Blo Bros" refers to male clients, who get an extra-long scalp massage and pay only \$20.

The concept is the brainchild of 20-year-old Devon Brooks, who presented the blowout business plan while studying at the London College of Fashion last year.

She received such glowing marks from her professor that her mother, Judy, assembled a team who helped bring it to life back home in Vancouver.

A second location is in the works, with plans to franchise within the next six months. Blo's brand even includes an exclusive line of clip-in exten-

sions and hair-care products.

That beautiful hair is an easier confidence booster than a beautiful body is not lost on those behind Blo, who also realize that clients have different needs.

The mane menu (developed by master stylist Jon Paul Holt and wingman Kevin Lai)

offers eight looks: "Executive Sweet" is ramrod straight, "Red Carpet" channels Sophia Loren and "European Chic" is a classic ponytail.

A Blo Tab gives patrons eight sessions for the price of seven.

This is particularly appealing to Blo Cadets. (That's "blospeak" for regulars. Calling them addicts would not be wise, given that "blow" is also slang for cocaine and white stuff is always frowned upon in a hair salon.)

And don't worry about snubbing the stylist who cuts your hair, Litwin says.

"There's no cut, there's no colour, there's no risk involved – it's no big deal. And the irony is that hairdressers prefer not to do blowouts because their chair is worth more to them," he explains.

To those who see this as an exercise in extravagance, Litwin counters: "The environment is so cool, the product is irresistible and it's an affordable price point. It's the Starbucks of the beauty regime."

And while a coffee perks you up temporarily, great hair can brighten your whole day.

"I was feeling icky and I needed some sprucing up," Annabel Perry, 37, says of her decision to check Blo out last week.

Did she head out on the town with her Executive Sweet? "I'm six months pregnant, I'm not going anywhere," she says.

Surely her husband could appreciate a good Blo job? "He's out of town, but it's okay. I noticed and that's all that counts."