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Interior of Blo, the blow-dry bar in Yaletown modelled after London and New York sites. The concept is a return to the days when women went to the beauty parlour just to get their hair styled.

JOHN BLACK PHOTO

Pick from a hair menu for a blow-out style

■ **YALETOWN** Sit back for a pampering and polish, where there's no cuts, no colour and no guilt about cheating on your hairstylist

BY JOANNE BLAIN
VANCOUVER SUN

As much as I'd like to be, I'm really not an updo kind of gal. My feeble efforts to create a chic chignon always end up looking like a rapidly collapsing mess of dishevelled tendrils and cascading hairpins.

So I was more than happy to put my hair in the hands of someone who isn't all thumbs, and Blo has no shortage of those. The Yaletown outlet, which opened about a month ago, is for heads what Pure Nail Bar is for hands and feet — a stylish spot to get a quick hit of pampering and polish.

Co-owner Val Litwin says Blo is the first blow-dry bar in Canada, modelled after ones in London and New York. That means no cuts, no colour and no guilt about cheating on your hairstylist — consider it a harmless flirtation rather than a full-blown-dry affair.

"The whole concept of the blow-dry bar is a bit of a throwback to the days when women would go to the beauty parlour just to get their hair styled," says Litwin.

It was "absolutely ripe for a renaissance," he says, because many women want to get their hair professionally styled between cuts for an important business meeting or a big night on the town. And where else can you get a bad hair day fixed in 30 to 45 minutes, with or without an appointment?

At \$29, "it's a pampering luxury that women can justify because it's so cheap," Litwin says. "If you go to a hair salon, you probably have to book two weeks ahead of time, and prices may start at \$50 or \$60 [for a shampoo and style]."

Blo is also ideal for the commitment-phobic. "When you get your hair cut, it's a big deal," he says. "But there's no risk involved with a blow-out."

As you might expect, it's mostly a

chick thing, and women often arrive in groups before a big event to get their hair styled together. All that's missing is a cute bartender making martinis. "But if a group wants to come in and bring a bottle of wine, it would be fine if they opened it themselves," Litwin says.

Guys aren't completely left out — for \$20, they can have a "Blo Bro," a shampoo with a scalp massage and blow-dry. For parties, photo shoots and pre-wedding preparations, the studio also offers "Blo on the Go" — stylists will come to wherever you are to whip your hair into shape.

A "hair menu" takes a bit of guesswork out of the equation by letting you choose one of eight styles, all created by top Vancouver stylist Jon Paul Holt, owner of Avant Garde Hair Studio and one of the co-owners of Blo.

Choices range from the popular Holly Would, which Litwin describes as "kind of like Sophia Loren waves, very bouncy, very

sexy," to the boardroom-ready Executive Sweet, "which is razor-sharp and flat."

Naturally, I opted for the Bardot Updo, "tight and high at the back and soft at the front," which Litwin says is popular among the cocktail crowd. Never mind that I was headed to a backyard barbecue — good hair works everywhere, and I was eager to see if one of Blo's stylists could pull off the classic look that had always defeated me.

After a shampoo, I sat down in a trendy Philippe Starck Ghost chair at the pink-topped blow-dry bar and put myself in the hands of Chris, who I hoped was up for a challenge. He soon had my hair whipped up into a Texas-sized mound of sleek, soft curves, and that was just the beginning.

A flurry of backcombing and hair-spraying followed, leaving me at one point looking like American Idol castoff Sanjaya. But I soon saw there was method in this madness, to give me volume where I had none before.

As Chris and "Blo boss" Sarah started smoothing and pinning my hair back, I realized that they had accomplished what for me had long

AT A GLANCE

BLO

1150 Hamilton St, 604-909-9495,
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Open Monday to Wednesday 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Thursday and Friday 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., Saturday 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Some hours by appointment only; check the website or phone for more information.)

been mission impossible — creating a slick updo with some casually tousled tendrils and a smooth sweep of bangs. And it didn't all collapse like a house of cards within a few minutes, like my inept efforts.

I kind of wish I'd had a red carpet to walk that evening instead of just a barbecue, but I did have the satisfaction of knowing the only things there better dressed than my hair were the burgers.

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