

Some Outlaw New Yorkers Bend the Rules to Shake Lockdown Funk

The ban on non-essential businesses has created a gray market for in-home beauty services. ‘I felt trapped and now I feel liberated.’

PHOTO: ROB WILSON FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Anne Kadet

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TEXT

After Manhattan barber Sal Salzano’s shop closed in March, he spent two weeks in quarantine at home in Yonkers. Then he got on his phone and texted every client he knew: “I’m offering home haircuts.”

Thanks to this and ads he’s posted online, Mr. Salzano has been driving around the New York City area all month cutting hair in customers’ homes for rates ranging from \$60 to \$120, depending on location. His clients have included a Scarsdale chief executive, a Bronx nurse, a firefighter and three cops.

“They need to look good,” Mr. Salzano says of his police clients. “They’re still patrolling.”

Mr. Salzano says his clients have a common characteristic—they’re strong. “People who are trying to keep America going. People who are trying to keep life going. They get in their chair, and they’re loud and vocal about what they want.”

Sal Salzano shortly before the pandemic shut down his Manhattan barbershop.

PHOTO: SAL SALZANO

When haircuts are outlawed, only outlaws will get haircuts. Not surprisingly, the ban on non-essential businesses has created a gray market for at-home beauty services. On certain internet forums, you can find providers still offering everything from an at-home blowout to a bikini wax.

Overall, beauty bookings are down 80% since the lockdown started on March 22 in New York, says Danielle Cohen-Shohet, co-founder and CEO of GlossGenius, a New York City-based booking and payments platform for salons and spas. But she’s seeing a 30% rise in appointments for in-home treatments. About 40% of current bookings are for such services, she says, with the remainder performed virtually. Generally the rates are the same, she adds.

Darryn Taylor, who lives in Manhattan and works in fashion, spent four weeks in isolation before he broke down and asked his barber, Rene Guemps, to come by and give him a haircut.

“My hair grows really fast, it’s very short on the sides and long at the top,” says Mr. Taylor. “I just hate having to feel hair on my ears.”

When Mr. Guemps came over, he stopped in the alcove, removed his jacket and shoes, sprayed himself with Lysol, applied hand sanitizer and donned a mask.

They agreed to not talk during the haircut. “Which was awkward,” Mr. Taylor says. “We’re both very social people.”

Mr. Guemps, who has provided in-home barber services for years, says he's kept busy this month, as clients aim to avoid what he calls "Werewolf Syndrome."

"There is a look they need to maintain," Mr. Guemps says. "They have Zoom meetings and chat with their clients online."

Rene Guemps gives Darryn Taylor a haircut in Mr. Taylor's Manhattan home.

PHOTO: DARRYN TAYLOR

Many providers have no intention of performing in-person services during lockdown, of course. Manhattan board-certified dermatologist Jessica Weiser says that since closing her Soho practice, Weiser Skin MD, she's been turning down clients asking her to visit them in the Hamptons on Long Island. Instead she's offering virtual skin-care consultations from her kitchen table.

The visits, conducted over Zoom, typically include recommendations for treatments clients can perform themselves to maintain the results of previous procedures.

While her clients are stuck at home, some are more concerned with their looks than ever. "We all have time to sit and think and obsess over minutia and detail," Dr. Weiser says.

Paul Labrecque Salon and Skincare Spa in Midtown Manhattan, meanwhile, is delivering custom hair color touch-up kits to clients who don't want their roots showing.

The \$75 "Quarantine Color Kits" are a hit with clients who include "typical Upper East Side finance, media and fashion executives, and ladies who lunch," most of whom have never dyed their own hair, says Brian Cantor, co-founder and co-owner. "I think they're proud they're getting through this."

"If you're feeling a little bit depressed and stuck at home, the one thing you can control is how you look," adds partner Paul Labrecque. "You do your hair, you take a shower. Otherwise you're drinking a lot, and that's not a solution."

Hayley Gripp, a philanthropist and disabilities advocate who lives in Manhattan's West Village, says giving herself a haircut and henna treatment earlier this month stopped a downward spiral.

Hayley Gripp, a philanthropist and disabilities advocate who lives in Manhattan, says she needed 'something to get out of this funk and take control of what I can.'

PHOTO: HAYLEY GRIPP

Ms. Gripp, who has a primary immunodeficiency disease and lives alone, started to panic when her doctor warned that catching Covid-19 could mean a death sentence—he advised her to put her affairs in order.

Then the former hair model, who typically visits a salon weekly for blowouts, hit on the idea of a new 'do.'

"I said I need to do something to get out of this funk and take control of what I can," Ms. Gripp says.

She called one of her stylists, who agreed to guide the procedure over FaceTime for a \$500 consultation fee—and half-jokingly requested an extra-large tip for what she suspected might be an ordeal.

The result? A darker color, new bangs and a sense of victory. “It’s weird that cutting my hair at home feels like a giant achievement,” Ms. Gripp says. “But I felt trapped and now I feel liberated. I think that’s the power of doing it yourself.”

Should stylists worry that clients will continue the DIY routine after salons reopen?

In Ms. Gripp’s case, probably not. “It’s a week after the cut,” she says, “and I can already tell it’s growing in at a slant, which my hairstylist will have to fix.”

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