

CUTTING HAIR THE VIDAL SASSOON WAY

REVISED EDITION

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**VIDAL
SASSOON**

WAY

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VIDAL
SASSOON
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SECOND EDITION

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The book is further illustrated with photographs from
the Vidal Sassoon Library

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DEDICATION

I believe that the sharing of knowledge and ideas provide the most positive way to encourage innovation and creativity within our profession. This book sets out the basic principles that I have found invaluable. Some of these ideas were gifts. Others I evolved through trial and error. It is my hope that this text will serve merely as a foundation from which your own style and individuality will emerge.

Victor Samsonov

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'IT'S THE CUT THAT COUNTS . . .'

This startlingly simple philosophy is the basis of one of the most famous and successful hairdressing empires ever known. It is the philosophy of VIDAL SASSOON, the world's leading authority on the care and the cutting of hair.

Since Vidal Sassoon started his first salon in London, the name has become synonymous with all that is best in haircutting. Once he made his first impact on the international fashion scene, the unfailing variety, innovation, and appeal of Sassoon cuts – many of which have become classics – have never ceased to be a credit to the profession, and today the Vidal Sassoon organization is acknowledged as the major influence on hairdressing all over the world and an inspiration to hairdressers everywhere. How did it all begin? Vidal was born in London on 17 January 1928 and his family lived for some time in the East End where Vidal, as a small boy, enjoyed roaming around Petticoat Lane, one of London's most colourful street markets. At the outbreak of war Vidal's mother, Betty, decided London was not safe for her young son and packed him off to the country where he worked in a glove factory, learning very quickly how to cut leather with an expertise that served him well later on!

But Vidal missed his family so badly that his mother agreed to his returning home in 1942. This was the time of the regular German air raids on London and Vidal got a job as a messenger boy, riding a broken-down bike through the Blitz. In his spare time he played football with his friends and at one time dreamt of making football his career. But his mother, with her usual good sense, decided that her fourteen-year-old son must learn a proper trade and apprenticed him, somewhat against his will, to 'Professor' Adolf Cohen, a well-known hairdresser in Whitechapel Road, a bustling thoroughfare in London's East End. The apprenticeship was not easy; whatever needed doing, Vidal had to do it, from sweeping the floor to making the tea, and it was some time before he was allowed the privilege of becoming a shampoo boy. He admits he did not like hairdressing very much but he knew he had to earn his own living. So with characteristic enthusiasm and determination he made up his mind that if he had to be a hairdresser then he was going to be the *best*.

As Vidal recalls, 'Professor' Cohen was a talented and kind man and he tried to teach his newest recruit all he knew. Vidal sensed, however, that to get to the top in what was now his chosen profession he must work in the centre of London and therefore he decided to find himself a job in the more elegant West End.

He had his share of refusals but eventually he was taken on and trained for short periods by several of the leading London hairdressers of the time. He learned something from each and when he had absorbed enough, he moved on to the next. It was a hard and demanding time for a youngster but it provided Vidal with the firm foundation on which his whole future career and generous philosophy has been built.

The last stop in Vidal's run-up to independence was with Raymond whose originality, dash, and energy were revitalizing London's hairdressing scene in the early fifties.

Of Raymond, whom he still regards as one of his mentors, Vidal says, 'merely to watch him experiment and try out new techniques was an education . . . he boosted my confidence and encouraged me to think along entirely new lines'.

In his autobiography, *Sorry I Kept You Waiting, Madam*, Vidal writes of a major turning point in his career:

‘Many people helped to mould me. In doing so, they brought me to the end of an era. I realised that the time had come for *me* to do some moulding! Around me I could see clothes that had a wonderful shape to them, and all because of the cutting. I wanted to see hair keeping up with fashion, maybe jumping ahead of it, leading it along a certain line, instead of lagging behind it. I wanted to shape heads as the new young fashion designers were shaping bodies. I wanted to cut hair as they cut cloth. I wanted to be in on the revolution that was simmering—but I knew that I would not rebel while I was working for other people. So, when I left Raymond, I did not look for another job. Instead I looked for a salon of my own.’

So, in 1954 Vidal opened on his own in Bond Street, Mayfair—just one small room up a steep flight of stairs. Legend now has it that Vidal was a success overnight. But, as Vidal confirms, this is far from the truth. Business for the first few years was far from easy. His ideas about hair were revolutionary and he refused to compromise. He spent those first years perfecting and polishing his techniques of cutting that were to cause a total revaluation in every major hairdressing salon round the world. Gradually word got around that there was this crazy young man in Bond Street who was trying to do something really new with hair. Actresses, top models, and one or two far-seeing journalists realised his potential and became excited and enthusiastic about the Sassoon philosophy—‘It’s the cut that counts’. This fresh approach to hair—combined with an irresistible, irrepressible Cockney sense of humour—often drew people to the Sassoon salon out of curiosity. But they liked what they saw, they liked their new-looking hair, and they came back for more, bringing their friends with them.

The so-called ‘Swinging Sixties’ which put London on the world fashion map proved to be the watershed in Vidal’s professional life. In fashion, in beauty, in hair, it was all happening in London and Vidal played a major role in producing a look to match the changing lifestyle of women everywhere. Nothing would ever be the same again. In 1964 Vidal created the first, famous Five Point Geometric Cut on a young model named Grace Coddington, who is now the Fashion Editor of British *Vogue*. The photograph of this cut—which Vidal still considers his finest—went around the world and provided the cornerstone of his international success.

London’s brightest fashion revolutionary, Mary Quant, was also doing her own exciting thing in a tiny room in the now famous King’s Road in Chelsea. She saw Vidal shaping hair in the same sharp, simple way she cut fabric and soon she too had a Sassoon Geometric style. They became friends and ideas sparked from one to the other, neither of them ever being totally satisfied with what they did. As innovators, as creators, they did not stand still. This is still true today.

Famous fashion designers in Paris and Rome invited the young British hairdresser to create styles specially for them and in 1965 Emmanuel Ungaro, a dramatic new force in unprecedented modern design, asked Vidal to produce a style to complement his collection in Paris. The result was the Asymmetric Cut, acknowledged around the fashion world as yet another important new Sassoon concept in cutting.

In 1967 Vidal created another sensation with The Greek Goddess. It was, in his words, ‘the geometric cut gone curly’. It was a basic Sassoon blunt cut, permed and dried with a heat lamp while the stylist ran his or her fingers rather than a brush or comb through the hair.

By this time Vidal’s reputation was truly international and by 1965 he had taken another major plunge, opening his first salon in New York. A perfectionist, as always, Vidal realised that his arrival in America had to be an EVENT—and it certainly was. The party was acknowledged as a sensation: sausages and

mash, mugs of beer, and stunning model girls with haircuts the like of which had never been seen in New York. So many people came, both invited and uninvited, that the party spilled out into the street. Vidal had arrived in grand style and the next day the newspapers were hailing him as a dazzling new star in the American fashion firmament.

Immediately the name Vidal Sassoon became the password to style and anyone who wanted to be considered as part of the New York scene simply *had* to have a cut by the Master. Other Sassoon salons followed – Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and now there is a chain of salons and schools in the United States, Canada, Germany and, of course, England.

So the boy from London had ‘made it’ and, just as he had done at home, he had revolutionized the craft of haircutting in the New World.

Success brought nationwide fame; he appeared on the most popular TV shows and hosted, along with his No. 1 Creative Director, Christopher Brooker, huge cutting demonstrations across the country. Leading newspapers and magazines featured the Sassoon lifestyle.

American women who loved the new freedom movement in hair soon ‘adopted’ Vidal as an honorary citizen. He was talented, he worked hard, he had a tremendous sense of humour, and a deep social conscience. There had never been anyone even remotely like him on the American hairdressing scene before and the entire profession there, as elsewhere, benefited greatly from his influence. What Vidal had done was to free women from the elaborate ‘dressing’ of hair. The world had changed, so had women’s lives and they no longer wanted to spend hours every week (and some even every day) sitting in rollers under a hot dryer.

They wanted hair to complement their new more mobile lives—rushing out in the morning to go to work or take the children to school—and then feeling confident enough to go out in the evening without having to worry about having their hair ‘done’. So the Sassoon slogan ‘It’s the cut that counts’ became the order of the day as women found that if they had a good cut once a month they could easily look after their own hair in the intervening weeks. *But* and this is an important ‘but’, in the Sassoon philosophy, a good cut cannot succeed with hair in bad condition. Smoke-filled rooms, air pollution, normal wear and tear, chemical treatments and, above all, too much summer sun take their toll and hair must be ‘fed’ regularly to keep it in tip-top condition.

To encourage women everywhere to regard their hair as a precious asset requiring specialized, gentle treatment, an extensive range of Sassoon Hair Care products for both consumer and trade have been developed. These products, sold internationally through very many professional hair salons and retail trade outlets are revolutionizing thinking everywhere about the right and wrong way to keep hair clean and healthy. In today’s environment it is now recognized that hair, like skin, needs a cleanse, tone, and condition regime and this is the basis of the Sassoon philosophy.

However, if hair-care is No. 1 priority in Sassoon thinking, then there is one other contender for top place. In a world where specialized knowledge is closely guarded the Vidal Sassoon organization is acknowledged as unique. It believes now, as it has always done, that its talented and creative team have a responsibility to hairdressers of the future which goes far beyond its own staff.

To further teaching and to raise the standards of the entire profession, schools and academies have been opened in the UK, and the United States.

The purpose of the Sassoon educational programme is two-fold. The first is to train staff for the Sassoon salons. At the end of the training period there is a stiff test and no one is allowed on to any salon floor

until he or she is qualified. The second is to offer courses to experienced hairdressers from all over the world to learn the specialized Sassoon techniques. Thousands of hairdressers – from beginners to experts – enrol every year to perfect their techniques and learn from the Sassoon Creative team what ideas are in the air. Because Vidal Sassoon took the conscious decision to pass on the secrets of his expertise, it is now possible for a fashion-conscious woman to get Sassoon-style haircutting virtually anywhere in the world.

Men are not neglected by the Team and Vidal Sassoon Barber Shops are as successful as the ladies' salons. These Barber Shops are carefully designed with men in mind, even if some of the clients do want a permanent wave.

The international headquarters of the Vidal Sassoon Group of companies is now based in Los Angeles. As Chairman of his fast-growing 'empire', Vidal rarely has the opportunity today to get behind the chair. But his eagle eye is constantly on everything that goes on. With his team of international stylists headed by Christopher Brooker, International Creative Director and Anne Humphreys, International Head of Colour and Technical Research, he travels all over the world giving demonstrations, promoting the company and its products and, of course, regularly visiting the salons and schools.

He is tireless in striving to maintain the highest possible standards and wherever he goes he gives confidence and inspiration to each and every member of his vast staff. One reason why he is able to do all this is because his enthusiasm never wanes and because he keeps extremely fit. His regime is strict: plenty of exercise (swimming and jogging), fresh air (he walks whenever possible) and healthy eating. His diet is based on fresh fruit and vegetables, salads, wholewheat bread, and honey which, in his own words, 'boosts the energy level'.

To spread the good word about the good life, Vidal and former wife Beverly wrote a book entitled *A Year of Beauty and Health* which was published in 1976 in North America, the United Kingdom and Australia. It stayed on the best-seller lists in America for more than six months and is now available in a paperback edition.

So now you know what Vidal Sassoon is all about . . . read, mark, and learn from the rest of the book and if you want to make your hair your business it should help you on your way. Everything that follows is dedicated to hairdressers everywhere . . . to those who are inexperienced but interested as well as those who are experienced but willing to learn more.

And even to those who think they know it all already!

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HAIRCUTTING

How to Make a Perfect Match between Client and Cut

WHEN THE HAIR IS DRY

There are many factors to be taken into consideration when choosing the right haircut for your client. The amount of time you spend with her **BEFORE** cutting is every bit as important as the time you actually work with your scissors.

Take a long, careful look at your client's total appearance as she comes into the salon. Direct your professional eye away from the style and condition of her hair for those first few moments. Concentrate instead on *her*, her height, her build. These will give you an indication of the length and cut she could and should wear. **THE CUT MUST ALWAYS BE IN PROPORTION TO THE SIZE AND SHAPE OF THE BODY.** For example, a tall, slim woman with a short crop will look even taller and thinner, and a short, plump woman will not look her best with hair way past her shoulders.

Study the way she dresses and how fashion-conscious she is. What you see should tell you how adventurous to be with the cut you are about to do.

How old is she? Should her age influence what you do? Hair, in fact, can be cut to almost any length at any age and look good. It is bone structure and hair texture, not age, that should determine cut and style throughout a woman's life. What *should* change is the degree of softness and movement in the cut. An older woman will find that a softer edge, less geometry and more waves or curls or gentle movement will be more becoming.

Find out as much as possible about your client's personality during that vital initial chat. Personality is not always easy to judge on a first meeting, and there are no rules for making observations or coming to conclusions. It will be a technique you learn and improve upon as you go along. **DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS!** Your client's lifestyle is of the utmost importance so try to find out, for example, if she has a lot of leisure time or whether her schedule is hectic. Does she lead an outdoor or indoor life? And what about the type of community in which she lives? Try to gauge what she expects from a haircut, and how well she would manage it between visits to the salon.

All these factors determine the kind of cut you should give her, not only to make her look her best but to ensure that she feels happy and confident with the result. Give her the wrong cut and no matter how expertly it has been done, she will be self-conscious and uncomfortable.

Remember, your client when she leaves your hands and your salon takes your reputation with her. And everyone in the world outside who sees and appreciates your work *could* become a future client.

WHEN THE HAIR IS WET

It is essential that hair should be thoroughly shampooed and conditioned before cutting and you should approach your cut when the hair is wet.

There are a number of reasons for this:

1. You have better control over the hair in its wet state, because it will not slip through your fingers or away from the scissors.

2. You will be able to see the shape of the head quite plainly and, as you cut, the shape will emerge more clearly.
3. The curl you may have thought natural when the hair was dry might have been achieved with rollers.
4. A smooth blow-dry may have been hiding a profusion of natural curls or waves. With wet hair you will be able to see the natural movements and capitalize on them.
5. A simple point, but an important one—IT IS MUCH MORE HYGIENIC TO DEAL WITH CLEAN HAIR!

When the hair is wet, you will be able to observe the natural growth pattern of the hairline, particularly in the nape. For example, if the nape hair grows upward and stands out, a flat-naped cut will not work. NEVER FORCE THE HAIR AGAINST ITS GROWTH. Whatever peculiarities the hairline may have and whatever difficulties this may present, it will be a major factor in the design of your cut and could well form the positive basis for it.

Hair always moves from a natural point on the crown. Your very first move should be to find this point. When working from the crown, a parting should always start from or end at this point. You can place the parting anywhere as long as the natural growth pattern of the hair is observed and followed. This pattern should be followed throughout the whole cut, so that the finished result will complement the shape of the head.

Hair is the only substance on the human body which can be moulded and shaped into different forms. So use the skull as your basic foundation and the hair as your 'material' when shaping these forms.

PROPORTIONS

When you look at a face, you see its individual features—those which make every person different. What is not obvious at first is that all human faces have a certain common symmetry. Try these simple tests and see for yourself.

1. If you measure from the top of the head to the chin, the eyes will always be at the middle point.
2. A measurement from pupil to pupil of each eye will be equal to measurement from the bridge of the nose to its tip.
3. The mouth will always be a quarter of the way up the total measurement of the face to the chin.
4. The length of the ears is equal to the length of the nose, and both are on the same level.

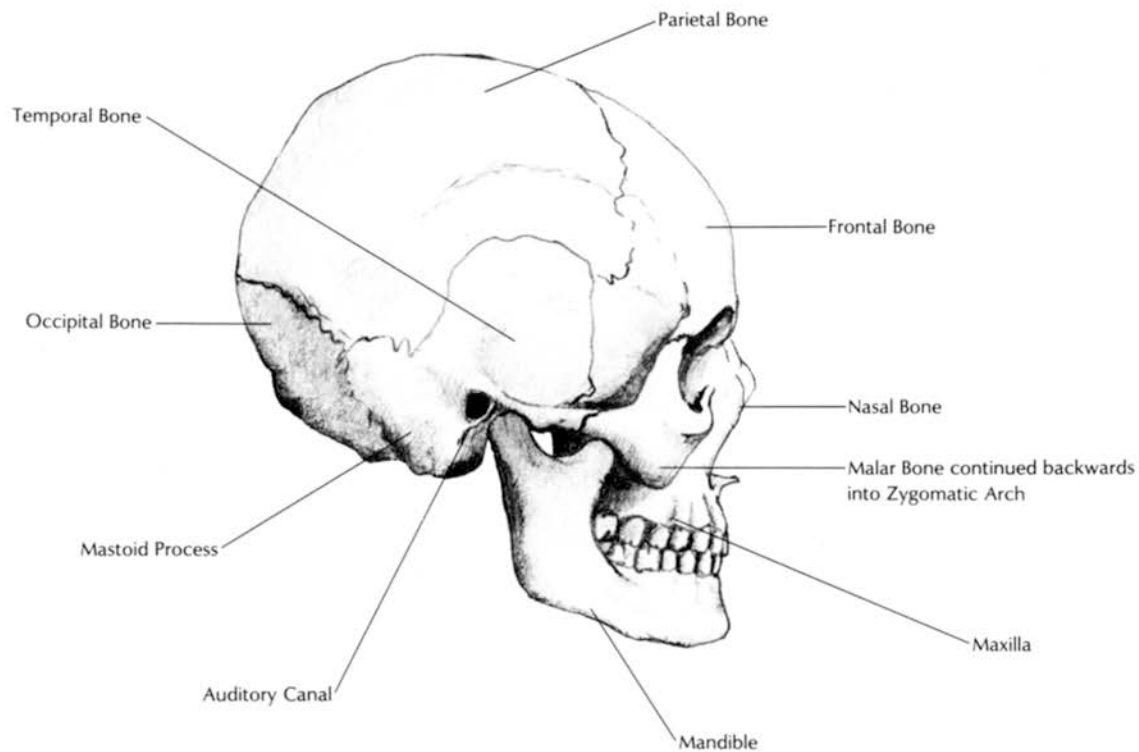
These proportions are used by artists when painting or drawing the human face. Use them as a guideline for your cut.

If you are aware of all the factors mentioned in this section, you will achieve greater precision and accuracy in your cutting technique.

BONE STRUCTURE

The study of bone structure should be an important part of any haircutter's training. When you look at a face and see its features, you should also look beyond these to the basic bone structure, which is the

foundation of the shape. There are no *rules* for cutting to bone structure because a haircut must, above all, be individual, but there are important factors of which every haircutter must be aware. In general, the female skull is usually smaller than the male and the external occipital protuberance and the curved lines are less defined. Although in most cases the differences in bone formation between the male and female can easily be seen, there are female skulls which do have male characteristics and here very severe haircuts should be avoided.



How the outline of the head is determined by the skull.

HAIR CARE AND CONDITIONING

The main theme of this book is how to achieve the excellence in haircutting which is synonymous with the name Vidal Sassoon. However, it would be incomplete without mentioning conditioning and hair care. The secret of beautiful hair relies as much upon conditioning as it does upon superb cutting. If the hair is in top condition, the finished result will look better and last longer. Cuts will shine and swing, curls will be bubbly and free from frizz.

The five stages of hair care:

1. **Cleanse and Prepare**

Healthy, shining hair starts with the correct shampoo, used in a proper manner. There are three vital things to remember:

- (a) The shampoo you use should be acid-balanced which leaves the scalp and hair in the required slightly acid state. Today's modern shampoos employ various conditioning and moisturizing agents to compensate for the deep cleansing action of the shampoo itself. Pro-vitamin B-5 and micronized proteins are examples of excellent materials which penetrate into and act upon the hair giving it additional body and strength.
- (b) Shampoo should be used in small quantities, with sufficient activity to cleanse the hair. If, during the first application there are lasting stable suds, they demonstrate that all waxes, oils, and grime have been totally emulsified and there is still additional activity in the shampoo, and one application is sufficient. Only if the suds dissipate rapidly is a second shampoo necessary.
- (c) All traces of shampoo must be rinsed away very thoroughly. Residual shampoo is highly undesirable and many 'dandruff' complaints are the result of insufficient rinsing and the resulting residual activity on the scalp which creates dryness.

2. **Conditioners**

The list of damaging agents affecting the hair includes chemical processing, illness, sun, improper or over-frequent blow-drying, heat, water and, of course, the increasing age of the hair itself as it grows.

Liquid Hydrolyzed Protein is the finest known reconditioner of damaged hair, both internally and externally. A small amount of this substance when applied, actually becomes a part of the hair itself! Properly acidified (pH 6.0), a liquid protein conditioner not only strengthens the hair shaft, but smooths the cuticle of the hair, restoring lustre and sheen. In effect, it fills in the damaged areas of the hair shaft. After conditioning, all excess material not absorbed should be thoroughly rinsed away. No client will thank you for leaving hair in a sticky, lack-lustre condition.

3. **Texturizing**

Modern chemistry today provides a means of 'texturizing' hair through the use of a finishing rinse. A proper finishing rinse removes all tangles from the hair shaft and will add pro-vitamin B-5 in sufficient amounts to give extra body to the hair. Rough, wiry hair will remain in the desired softened condition if cool water is used to rinse off any excess. Fine and/or oily hair will maintain the additional body but will fluff if warm to hot water is used. Upon completion of the rinse, the acidification and moisturizer will leave the hair with the required sheen.

4. **Seal and Protect**

Sealing and protection can be given to the hair shaft with periodical use of the Sassoon Protein Pac Treatments. Micronized proteins are absorbed by the hair and special protective moisturizers 'plate' the hair, creating super sheen plus protection against the harsh action of blow-dryers, hot irons, etc. Treatments are generally used when hair is in a severely damaged condition with dry and frizzy ends and/or breakage. Two or three treatments are usually necessary to restore the hair to good condition and from time to time these should be carried out professionally in the salon. It is important for your client to understand that one treatment cannot work miracles. As with health and diet, a regime of continuous care is needed to achieve and maintain the desired results. Your reward and your client's reward will be beautiful and healthy hair to complement the creative stylist's haircut.

5. **Home Hair Care**

It is very important that the client understands that a home hair-care maintenance programme be followed to keep the hair in its luxurious condition once the professional has accomplished the reconditioning. The same super quality shampoo should be used in conjunction with remoisturizing creme treatments. A monthly conditioning regime should become part of your client's own programme to *maintain* sheen, flexibility, and hair health.

One final thought:

A regular haircut will remove dead, split ends and the untidy effect of irregular growth. It will emphasize the beautiful, free-swinging movement of hair which will be as thick at the ends as it is at the roots.