Salons

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Haircolor's Disappearing Act

SPANNING THE CENTURIES

LELAND HIRSCH: A COLORFUL MAN

By Chantal Todé. Illustration by Nick Higgins

Ask anyone in the professional beauty industry for just one word to describe Leland Hirsch, ceo and co-founder of ARTec Systems and co-founder of the trade show Haircolor USA, and "passionate" is what you'll most likely hear.

Hirsch, who will be honored on Feb. 20 with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the North American Hairstyling Awards in Los Angeles, had his hands in many of the important trends in haircolor during his 40-year career as a colorist. But, whether as a product development consultant at Redken and Clairol or as a champion of the movement to separate the functions of stylist and haircolorist, it is his drive to do things right, or not at all, that has impressed his colleagues most.

Bill Peplow, an executive with John Paul Mitchell Systems, who met Hirsch in the early Seventies when they worked at Redken, says that, even then, the young man's desire to elevate the status of haircolorists was hard to ignore.

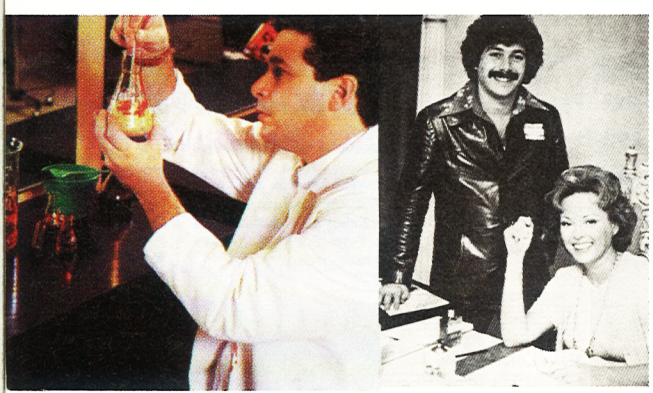
"Leland had no reservations about trying things, about jumping the gun and pushing through," Peplow says about those early days. "I think that is the reason for his success—that he goes right for the jugular."

Peplow is not alone in his assessment of Hirsch.

"The word 'passion' just jumps out of my brain when you talk about Leland," says Bill Decker, an executive with Wella USA, who worked with Hirsch at Clairol in the Eighties. Both were part of a team, with Beth Minardi and Jack Missoni, that developed the Logics haircolor brand. "If the average person on the street were to talk to him, they would think he is a lunatic, but he's not. He just cares so much," he continues.

In addition to his contributions as a product developer, Hirsch broke new ground in 1987 when he partnered with Jesse Briggs, co-owner of Yellow Strawberry salon in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., to found Haircolor USA. What made the trade show so unusual was that its education wasn't affiliated with any manufacturer, so the focus was really on learning color techniques and not on pushing any particular product.

"Leland's biggest contribution to this industry is that he brought together color manufacturers and colorists from all over the world to exchange and share ideas with one another when he believed that education in haircolor was at an all-time low," says Briggs.



Another era: Hirsch in the lab and with Redken co-founder, Paula Kent Meehan.

But, the passion admired by some could be difficult for others to deal with. In the 10 years that Briggs and Hirsch owned and managed the show, Briggs admits that, on several occasions, he had to step in and smooth over a situation when Hirsch felt that someone wasn't paying the attention to detail that he wanted.

"If you have ever seen a Steven Spielberg movie—the detail that they contain—that's the way that Leland approaches haircolor and he expects the same out of people," notes Briggs.

It is Hirsch's passion and eye for detail that helped launch his career and why, today, his claims to fame include developing the haircoloring level system—which is used to gauge color—being one of the first to use foils for coloring hair and championing the need for two distinct departments in a salon—one dedicated to styling and the other to haircoloring.

In the Sixties, when Hirsch first started pushing for departmentalized salons, most stylists had their assistants apply color because they felt their time was better spent elsewhere. Today, as haircolor continues to be one of the fastest growing categories in the beauty sector, more and more salons are adopting this departmentalization strategy.

Still, if you were to ask Hirsch what is his biggest contribution to the professional beauty industry, he would say his best is yet to come.

"I was thrilled when I heard about the nomination, but I think I'm still so young, so I was a little shocked," he says, adding that he feels it will be as a haircolor manufacturer that he will make his biggest contribution.

"I am part entrepreneur, part creative person," he continues. "Most people have bought into me as a colorist, but as a manufacturer we haven't come out with haircolor and that is what people expect from me."

Hirsch promises that the new color line that will be launched by ARTec this year, with two patents pending, will offer tremendous technological breakthroughs in the category. "It will be the most innovative thing that I've ever done," he says.

Hirsch and Michael Mazzei started ARTec in 1990 with $40,000 and limited distribution. And, even without the backing of a major marketing company, the company went national in 1993 and has already hit several homeruns, including the introduction of color-enhancing shampoos in 1990 and its Textureline brand of styling products in 1996.

It is in the salon, where one needs to be part salesman, part artist and part chemist, that all of these various elements of Leland's personality come together.

For the past 26 years, Hirsch and renowned stylist Mazzei have owned Nubest & Co., *Continued on page 57*

Leland Hirsch

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a 20,000-foot salon in Manhasset, Long Island, N.Y., that is consistently rated one of the top destinations for style and color by magazine beauty editors.

Richard Calcasola, the owner of Maximus Salon and Day Spa, which has two locations in Long Island, puts aside business competition for a minute to talk about Hirsch's accomplishments as a salon owner.

"In Nubest, there is a joining of Leland's color expertise and vision and Michael's ability to turn it into salon excitement. They have one of the largest color departments and have probably put as much focus on haircolor as they have on styling. They are perfect partners."

It was in another salon owned by Mazzei—Ultissima in Queens, N.Y.—that Hirsch got his start at the age of 14, working as an assistant to colorist Lenny Schertzer.

Anita Schertzer, Lenny's widow, remembers fondly the teenager who ate many dinners with her family and who was also hungry for the knowledge her husband had to give.

"He would be at my home until three in the morning eating up all the knowledge he could from my husband," she says. "His whole life he wanted to be a top colorist. He believed in it—that's why he started Haircolor USA. Then he wanted products to back up the education."

Hirsch, who flunked out of beauty school when he was 16, says he learned a lot from Schertzer.

"Lenny was a great colorist. I used to follow him around with a tape recorder and ask him why he was mixing this with that. I was like a sponge, but he was very patient with me. When I left there, though, I became a different colorist—working with more natural colors."

Young people wanting to be haircolorists today don't face the same lack of information or even the stigma that was once associated with color, says Hirsch. "Back in the Sixties, most people going into color couldn't do hair well. You were an assistant to a stylist who didn't have time to do color. Today, it is easier and more exciting to do color."

It is, in part, Hirsch's accomplishments over the years and the passion he has brought to haircoloring that has made this evolution possible. ●

Quick Fix

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Executives at Rusk and Schwarzkof say no middle step is necessary before applying new color.

For the stylist's part, color correction requires listening carefully to a client in order to understand just what he or she is disastisfied with.

"Our biggest problem as colorists is that we don't listen and find out what the client likes and what she dislikes about her hair color," says Sharyn Anthony, a colorist and former owner of Grand Rapids, Mich.-based Philip Anthony/Design 1.

Anthony notes that approximately 70 percent of her first-time clients are color-correction clients and that they generally experience one of four types of error. "The hair is either too light, too dark, too cool or too warm. Once you realize that, it's easy to follow through.

"I will not begin a color correction until I have a clear picture of what the client wants," she continues. To help her achieve this, Anthony has put together portfolios with pictures from magazines so that clients can clarify their vision. "If you can get her color to where she wants to be, you've got a client for life."

Offering color-correction is a good way to get the word out about your salon, she continues. "The only way people found out that we offered the service was through word of mouth. But, it became so big, that we became known for the service."

To ensure color-correction success, Minardi has his clients commit to three visits, which could cost up to $250, and sign a form promising that they will not do any chemical services outside of the salon and that they will use the products he recommends.

"It is impossible to guarantee complete correction in one visit. So instead, I tell my clients that they can expect 80 percent correction with the first visit, 95 percent with the second and optimal results after the third."

"There is a psychology behind it," he states. "Most color can be fixed on the first visit, but if you raise the expectation too high, and you don't succeed, you may lose that client. I may fix the color on the first try, but perhaps it will still be dry and brittle. If you tell them it is going to take three appointments, you become the hero, when it looks great after the first or second treatment." ●

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