

Q&A

Stuart Phillips

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enquiry—but it just made me think: *‘My God, the world’s your oyster. Wow!’*”

To date it’s been mainly Russians who’ve taken advantage of the Diamond Package—billionaires who send over their wives and girlfriends for a spot of VIP pampering. A few have been back for more. *‘For what they get, it’s good value,’* says Stuart. *‘You’ve just got to be very rich to afford it. If it was just a haircut then I’d be taking the mickey—big time, a thousand times over. But they are getting so many things thrown in.’*

Stuart usually charges ladies £175 for a haircut—fairly cheap considering that the man is flying high in British hairdressing. He began his career at the age of 16, training at Vidal Sassoon. After qualifying, Stuart travelled to Australia and worked in Sydney’s top salons, before further enhancing his experience in Japan and Indonesia.

Since opening his own salon on Monmouth Street more than a decade ago, Stuart’s talents have earned him various accolades including Cosmopolitan’s ‘Outstanding Talent in British Hairdressing’ award and L’Oreal Professional. He has also been official hairdresser to the BAFTAs as well as hair stylist to the National Television Awards and the British Comedy Awards.

Stuart has styled the barnets of many big names in the world of entertainment including Jean-Christophe Novelli, Ivana Trump, Caprice, Suzanne Shaw, David Hasselhoff, Ana Ivanovic and Michelle Scott-Lee. Two years ago Stuart made sure that Serena Williams stole the show at the pre Wimbledon party hosted by Sir Richard Branson. With two security guards at his side, Stuart laced the tennis player’s hair with £1,000,000 of diamonds.

So who’s been Stuart’s favourite famous client? *‘It has to be Jean-Claude Van Damme,’* he answers. *‘I’m a martial artist myself. I don’t practise anymore, because I broke my thumb twice, so I thought: ‘I’ve got to stop doing this.’ But I reached my black belt in both jujitsu and judo, and as a kid I really looked up to Van Damme. Then one day I saw him walking past the salon—I literally legged it after him. And so I got talking to him, got him in the salon, did his hair and before you knew it I was in South Africa doing his hair for a movie.’*

TO CAP IT ALL

/Alex Torun-Shaw,
co-owner of Laird London

Laird London

23 New Row
lairdlondon.co.uk



Specialist hat shop Laird London has recently opened on New Row, run by Alex and Zofia Torun-Shaw.

CGJ: How did you get into the whole hat business?

ATS: Hats have always been a passion. I studied a millinery at the London School of Fashion, and I was inspired to set up our company because I couldn’t find my ideal hat shop anywhere—somewhere that wasn’t stuffy; good quality but well-priced; marrying the traditional with a quirky modern twist. I feel we have achieved that. We opened our first shop in Shoreditch and called it Laird of Glencairn—it’s a title that I’m entitled to use and we thought it would be a fun name for the brand. When we opened the Covent Garden store, we wanted to establish our London identity while keeping the Laird brand so we called it Laird London.

Who makes your hats? I can’t imagine their being stamped off a Chinese production line.

We stock traditional English millinery brands Olney and Failsworth, as well as the American giant, Stetson Hats. Failsworth is the last northern manufacturer based in Stockport, and Olney is about the only hat company left in Luton, where the English hat industry was traditionally based. With the new store opening we have developed our own range of Laird London hats and caps, hand finished by me in a small workshop in Shoreditch.

How traditional are your hats?

Hat styles are steeped in tradition, but slight alterations to fabrics and linings can produce modern, fashionable results which have begun to blur those traditions. Surprisingly, one of our best selling hats this season has been the bowler hat—a very traditional hat associated with the City is now being worn casually by the younger design set around Hoxton and Shoreditch. I had a QC ask me if I had any bowlers, as his daughter had asked for one! Another surprise hit has been the junior top hat, a slightly shorter version of the well know topper.

There was a time not so long ago when a man was no more likely to leave the house without a hat as he was without shoes. What happened?

There are many theories, from post-war associations, to the swinging 60s, the rise of the car as a mode of transport to JFK killing off the hat by adopting a hatless persona. I think we are seeing a hat renaissance—the formal rules of hat wearing have been eroded and let’s hope the hat is back to stay. We’ve had a great response to our shops—our customers range from 10 to 80, and despite initially offering only men’s styles, about 40 per cent of our customers are women. I think the feel of our shops has worked—the comfortable, unstuffy experience attracts a younger, more fashion-conscious clientele. We have had a variety of celebrity customers, and I think the likes of Will-i-am, Jay-Z and David Beckham wearing caps has really helped. You only have to look in any of the major fashion magazines to see that hats are back in a big way; most retailers seem to be offering a small selection of generic hats as accessories, albeit from China!