

Hair care is joining the eco-friendly ranks, writes **Kavita Daswani**

Manely green

The trend towards organic and green products may have swept the skin-care industry, but hair care has been slower off the mark. Still, a local hair salon is taking an eco-friendly stance.

Emanuel Faipoux, owner of the four-year-old Emanuel F salon on Pottinger Street, says his initiative began when he was looking for natural colour alternatives for his clients. There was nothing to be found from the big professional product chains, but he eventually came across British brand Organic Colour Systems. Its products are about 95 per cent natural, with just a fraction of their ingredients chemically derived – in inverse proportion to traditional colour lines. The range includes shampoos, conditioners and plastic-free styling products that allow the hair to breathe while maintaining a natural look and feel (plastic-based products create bonds that tend to be brittle and breakable, causing styles to lose shape during the day).

Faipoux says his clients have begun to catch on to the idea. "I anticipated the demand," he says. "I knew that some of my clients would appreciate it because they were feeling bad about doing a colour every four to five weeks. I wanted to give them something that would be both efficient and natural."

His salon is now almost entirely chemical-free, and Faipoux says he will continue finding ways to be green. Even the walls of his shop are painted with a toxin-free paint. He has tried to eliminate the use of foils in his highlight processes (the material reportedly takes hundreds of years to disintegrate), instead opting for brush and comb highlights. The solutions he uses for permanent waves and straightening processes are ammonia-free.

"I don't want to be a salon that pollutes," he says. "I'm trying to bring this idea into the consciousness of using the most natural thing for my client's health, my own health and the environment."

But he says the eco-factor may

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Nelson Chan, hairdresser (below right)

not be the most compelling reason for clients to visit his salon. "In the end, it's about the result. Most people don't care if it's natural or chemical, as long as the end look is good. I want to be as natural as possible, but still offer them the best result I can."

In Los Angeles, Hong Kong-born hairdresser and colour specialist Nelson Chan is also going green. Chan opened his Nelson J Salon in Beverly Hills seven months ago, having coloured the locks of Heather Graham, Alicia Silverstone and Paula Abdul for the past decade.

Chan is one of a small but growing number of hair, beauty and well-being businesses across the US that are taking a more ecologically responsible stance. "I've been colouring hair for 15 years and I got sick of smelling the chemicals all day," says Chan. "I decided I wanted to use a much more natural approach. I had a Korean customer yesterday who wanted her naturally black hair to be completely blonde. We used a 97 per cent natural product on her and she was in and out in three hours, including cut, colour and condition. The colour will hold well, her scalp didn't burn, and those are the things that make a difference," he says.

His 2,500 square foot salon is a standout in Los Angeles because of its emphasis on all things green. Cabinets and stations are made from recycled wood, and strategically placed mirrors help enhance lighting and cut electricity usage. Counters are made of recycled glass and metal and the couches are in faux leather. Pots of bamboo add to the eco-friendly feel. The Aveda products he uses are 97-

99 per cent natural, and the colour products are from EcoColors, a line that contains no parabens, sulfites or chemical additives. His approach is in keeping with other LA salons such as Blue Velvet, which offers cuts, perms and weaves using largely soy-based and silicone-free products, and Blush, where clients are treated to dye jobs using vegetable proteins.

By the end of last year US sales of organic personal care products were worth US\$9 billion and accounted for about 15 per cent of the personal care market. Yet as fast as that idea is catching on in North America, it has yet to gain traction in Hong Kong.

"Going natural is definitely a trend, and organic is another new fad," says Kim Robinson, owner of the eponymous luxury hair studio in Central. "I just don't believe that it's really understood here yet."

Robinson is nevertheless trying to do his bit. At his newly opened hair spa, he offers non-medical treatments for promoting a healthier scalp and hair, occasionally recommending organic potions from a source in Australia. "We don't claim to be a totally organic salon and spa, because I don't feel that that would be best for every client. But I do think it's important to offer the choice," he says.

The private suites in his salon each boast a machine to improve the quality of the air in the room, and he says he tries to take a holistic approach, looking at ways to help clients detox and make lifestyle changes instead of plying them with chemical solutions.

"Hong Kong has always been a customer-driven city, and the quest for effective and fast results is paramount," says Robinson. "In some cases, going natural doesn't achieve that. Organic products are gentle, but sometimes not powerful enough to fight the visual effects of ageing – even if it's to do with the hair. I'd love to finger-dry a client's hair, to not put any chemicals near her and only use natural products. But it just wouldn't be practical."

Cost is another factor, he says; using recycled products in a salon environment can be surprisingly costly. "I've just put recycled wood in my house and it cost me 10 times more than something chemically done," he says.

In the US it's less of a barrier, thanks to the proliferation of everything from fast-drying, chemical-free bamboo towels to soy-based candles and lip glosses that only contain things you would

Chan's salon stocks natural products and makes use of recycled materials



find in a botany class. If there's any product a salon or spa wants a green version of, there's somebody out there making it.

Chan says: "People are talking about it all the time, not just with regard to a salon they go to, but their whole environment, their whole lifestyle. It's really not that difficult to be more green. You just have to pay attention."

Yet some say terms such as "organic" are bandied about rather too freely.

"Ninety per cent of what's on the market isn't truly organic," says Douglas Lillico, a hairstylist who works in Hong Kong, London and the US. "I've been into organically based holistic hair and beauty for years, way before it was popular, and a lot of hair lines are aromatherapy-based but not organic."

The preservatives in most hair care products give them their shelf life. At the "natural" end of the market, that shelf life is drastically reduced, Lillico says.

Beyond that, most people in Hong Kong are accustomed to walking into a salon and "smelling all the chemicals", he says, even if they insist that they are using natural products.

"If you're presenting yourself as an organically holistic environment, then it has to lend itself to that medium," Lillico says. "I appreciate anyone making an effort, but nine times out of 10 it's much more about marketing than actual heart. In Hong Kong, there isn't anyone who stands out in that area. You just won't find the same level of effort as you would in the US."

Chan is hoping eco-friendly ways of treating hair will become more popular in Hong Kong. "It's just the culture," he says. "People in Hong Kong are not as open-minded as they are in the US, and most of the time they're really into whatever works for them without thinking about the consequences. But the younger generation will think differently. It will take a while, but it's going to change."