

AU NATUREL

PERSONAL AND SALON UPDATES

Including a brief commentary on how Black businesses have been undermined

The autumn season has arrived but the temperature is not reflecting the change at all. It's still pretty warm out. But, I'm certainly not complaining about that. I

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think the unusual weather is affecting the turning of the leaves in significant ways. I'm not seeing the symphony of color that I'm accustomed to and adore. I imagine the change may emerge further in the month of November. If not, environmental factors have lessened the splendor of the season. But, there's always next

year!

I attended the NC State Fair as always (as accompanied by a sizeable portion of the NC population); but, I confess that I am becoming less enamored with paying a small fortune for the deep fried treats. At some point, the prices just feel ridiculous. But, I keep coming back! The carrot that pulls me back year after year however is the pottery in the Village of Yesteryear. It's an annual tradition for me to go there to purchase plates and cups for dinner service. I always purchase from the same potter and his wife who know me as I approach. There's something very soothing to the soul about eating food on a plate that was handmade. It's likely all in my head.; but, I honestly think the food tastes better. NC potters have kept the craft alive for centuries. I feel it is my obligation to ensure that the tradition continues for future generations through consistent support. Some of the dishes may break during the year; but, I don't sweat it. I'll be replacing

A WORD ON TYLER PERRY'S NEW STUDIO

My hats off to Tyler Perry for accomplishing what no one on Earth has ever done before him. He's built the largest film production studio ever made, building structures all to code. He's built a 35,000 sq. foot replica of the White House to facilitate current and future productions and has done so without asking for help from traditional sources. I was absolutely floored and inspired to hear of the magnitude of his creation and the limitless expanse of his mind. I wish him many years of continued success. I am praying that Black directors, producers, writers and actors knock on his door first before going to Hollywood. We must recognize that his project won't prove successful without regular and consistent patronage. His vision must be ours as well, and we must nourish it daily! Godspeed dear brother Tyler!

them soon enough. This year, I moved from deep rich blue to a greenish-grey olive color. Very nice! I also just added to my collection some plates that I purchased in a recent trip to New Mexico. I was attending a conference to present on behalf of a friend undergoing chemotherapy. The trip was so whirlwind that I failed to pick up a local souvenir, and strangely, the souvenirs on sale in the airport were made in India?! I think someone missed the point of souvenirs. When I found pottery that was locally made, it was way over-priced and looked a lot like the Native American pottery sold by Turn n' Burn Pottery in Seagrove, NC. So, I decided to pass. And then I happened upon a set made by a master potter from Minnesota. I was sold. It didn't even matter that it wasn't from New Mexico. I'll always remember that I bought it there so that's enough for me. :-)

Within the salon, life is good. I've met some wonderful new people but have mostly maintained with my "ride or die" clientele. This year marks 13 years that we've been serving the Raleigh community. I've seen the natural hair virtually saturated with new salon options. It's a far cry from where things were when I started. I don't visit other salons so I don't try to compare or compete. I strive only to be true to myself and my standard of what quality should look and feel like.

During the summer, we had a mini-drama when the property owners' association decided that they wanted to prohibit salon and spa uses along with other "strip mall like" services. At that moment, I realized how we consistently find ourselves within the Black community behind the 8-ball. I chose this salon space because it WASN'T a strip-mall and felt like home. But, a new Black-owned salon arrived with studios. Their model is bring in as many contractors as possible and get paid. They have subsequently ruffled the ire of the association because on a Saturday, you can see as many as 20 cars parked around their business. The restrictive covenants say we each have 6.7 parking spaces. So, I sadly had to empathize with the board's perspective. The density of this operation is way too high for the space in which they are operating. But, the place is

drop-dead gorgeous. I have mixed feelings. Bring the people uptown; but, please recognize that uptown has rules. And when those rules are breached, we all suffer; because the system is designed to note when we have found a loophole and to close it back up with all due haste. Thanks to developments like this one, I believe that all office condos in Raleigh are preparing to change their covenants because many of them are managed by the same property manager. And voila!! Future Black businesses owners are effectively blocked out of owning their space. Strip malls don't allow for property ownership. You're renting for as long as you're in business. Old time Mom and Pop shops had the businesses on the ground floor while the family lived upstairs. In my view, that business design has intentionally been suppressed and replaced by the North Hills Mall model: Door-to-door businesses and condos or apartments upstairs. There is no real connection between the businesses and the residents except the hope that the residents will patronize the businesses. But, the businesses owners DO NOT live upstairs. The tragedy of this change in business model is that the property owner could pay one mortgage for two uses (business and residential). I would surmise that the change away from this urban design model has accelerated the demise of Black businesses. It's not just Black businesses that have suffered however; all small businesses have and are suffering in favor of the franchise model which requires huge investment and deep pockets. As a small business owner if you're paying two mortgages (home and business) or are renting your business location, there is very little cushion to ride a recession or decrease in the flow of business. As business is by definition unpredictable and subject to market fluctuations, families do not have the flexibility to take the risk that comes from uncertainty. Of course, this is all conjecture and could be way off the market. But, I doubt it. If I had come to this concept when I was working on my Master's thesis, I would have written the following: How urban design strategies have undermined the stability of the Black business class. But, please feel free to share the concept with whomever you might know studying Urban and

Environmental Planning. I know I won't write the book; but, I'd like to see it written.

This issue of *Au Naturel* is rather short and sweet. Outside of travels to New Mexico, I started working at UNC this month. I'm back in "catch up"

BAD HAIR DAYS DON'T MEAN YOU HAVE "BAD HAIR"

A commentary on why Black women are so enamored with wigs and weaves

In the last issue of *Au Naturel*, I spoke a bit about the phenomenon of missing edges, how it occurs and what to do to reverse the trend. At that time, I advised that this month, I would expound a bit on how we have gotten to the place of seeing lost edges as a norm. It is tied integrally to our obsession with weaves, extensions and wigs. We emphasize the style and fashion that fake hair affords us but it cuts much deeper than that. When people used to make fun of my natural twists only to pay Asians to purchase fake hair that gave them the exact same look as my hair, I was confused to say the least. It absolutely made no sense to me! My sister and I would discuss the matter perplexed. It's something I've contemplated for some time (often without even being aware that I am). Why will Black women pay someone to sell them hair that looks like their own? I'm speaking collectively of course as motivations differ based on the individual; but, en masse it's what we do. In fact, Asians have perfected techniques to match the look of Black hair in all of its varying textures. So fundamentally, it's not necessarily the texture of hair that we hate, now is it?

Through years of observation and consideration, I've concluded that our obsession comes from our absolute and complete disdain for a "bad hair day". Black women simply don't want one because it is seen as an indictment on the quality and value of our hair. When Black women see a mixed race child whose mother is being challenged by the Black hair care regimen, we are quick to criticize thinking, "How dare she make us look bad. We know how to care for our hair. She better recognize and learn. If not, take the child to the stylist." But God forbid do NOT allow the child to have wild and free hair. A bad hair day is any day that your hair is not on point, to perfection. With natural hair, as with

mode. There's no pressure; but, I always put it on myself anyway. It's a habit. So, I have been rather focused on other pursuits. I hope there is some information herein that you will find edifying. Until next time, embrace the beauty of you.

relaxed hair, these days are bound to occur. So, enter the wig or the weave, and voila! The hair is molded and shaped perfectly so that we can face the world.

Women of other cultures, particularly European culture, have accepted the fact that bad hair days are a reality of life. That's what a chic ponytail is for. I've worn MANY!!! You simply find a quick solution, accept that today is a hair challenge day and keep it moving. There's no judgment of the hair's inherent "good"ness, its quality or its beauty. There's simply acceptance. But, we have a ways to go to get to this place. Many women embracing locks and natural hair styles are coming to accept this reality. But strangely, the more things change, the more they stay the same. When we can boast (like Beyoncé and Rihanna) that our hair is natural but it's natural texture is hidden under mounds of wigs and weaves, WHAT'S THE POINT?! Many brag about keeping their natural hair; but, when the world can't see the truth of that natural hair, you have simply jumped onto a bandwagon without even knowing why you're on it or where it's going. It's a rather sad state of affairs.

This past week-end, I was in the salon with the twins whose hair I've been styling since they were young children. One of the stylists was playing a video of a woman installing a crochet weave on her hair without a cornrowed foundation. The stylist wanted to see how it was done. Well, the video was quite informative; but, what it told me was not the intent of the video. After approximately two hours of detailed explanation of how to install "Jamaica Bounce" crochet weave hair into her own hair, I looked at the girls and said: "Imagine. She spent two whole hours coaxing, caressing and singing the praises of fake hair to get a natural curly look that you girls get with a mere twist out hairstyle. Imagine if

she spent as much time caring for her own hair as she spent on the “Jamaica bounce” hair, her hair would probably be quite beautiful.” The stylist then advised that the woman in the video has should length, relaxed hair. That means that she could have a killer head full of natural hair with time and attention.

After shaking my head over this video, it was followed up by a YouTube video with a woman wearing a long ponytail that extended all the way down past her waist. At the start of the video, she is dancing, twirling her head and bouncing with her hair as if she has been kissed by the gods and has the most beautiful hair in the world. The look was very cute and natural. Then, the video showed the process of straightening the client’s full head of hair to a “fair thee well” and then gingerly installing the three foot long ponytail. When the ponytail was installed, the client’s personality seemed to change. The twins observed the transformation as one exclaimed, “OMG, she just stuck out her tongue!” And indeed, she stuck out her tongue, started sipping through a straw in her mouth and starting bouncing her upper bound in a gesture of sheer delight. It reminded me of when I would get my hair straighten in the salon back in the 80s and 90s. When the stylist finished my hair, it’s like the salon would get silent out of reverence to this thing that was a divine gift. You could imagine the heavens opening up and the angels singing “[Ahhhh](#)”. It’s part of the reason that I stopped straightening my hair. I didn’t like the process OR the homage paid to the illusion (as my hair is not naturally straight and straight hair was synonymous with “good hair”). A co-worker once told me, your hair would be so pretty if it were straightened out. I told her, “My hair IS pretty as it is.”

My clients bounce like the girl in the video when looking at their own hair in its natural state! She bounced at an illusion. I wondered if she bounced so joyfully when the ponytail is removed because it’s time is done and it’s time to go back to the hair store for a re-install. The girls looked at me with some measure of confusion. I sighed and said, “As you consider the professions that you will pursue in the future, please

know that psychology and psychiatry are very viable options as services needed within the black community.”

As a natural hair stylist, I know that a large part of my job is to help my clients have as few bad hair days as possible. And I believe we are succeeding. At that same time, Black women like style and fashion. And yes, the right to change your hair style is a woman’s prerogative. But, I caution the reader to consider: If you are wearing your own natural hair covered up more than wearing it out, what does being natural mean to you? Do you even like natural hair, and if not, why be natural? I recently talked a potential client out of coming into our salon for services because I could tell from the way that she spoke that she is much happier with her self-installed crochet weaves than she would be with anything I did to her hair. I conceded: “I can make an appointment, give you a style and take your money. But you won’t be happy with it or me, because I’m not sure you’re ready to wear your natural hair. The style will be pretty; but, it won’t last very long based on the texture and length of your hair. When you consider what you paid for it, you will be dissatisfied as you are accustomed to paying nothing (excluding the cost of the weave hair which is minimal.) I don’t want to take your money. I want you to introspect and decide what you really want from your hair.” Maybe she only wants it to serve as a strong foundation for her crochet weaves. It’s hard to know for sure. So, I gave her tips for styling and wearing her natural hair between crochet weaves services so that she can start to adjust her eye to the truth that is her hair. And I assured her that when she’s truly ready to wear her natural hair, I’ll be delighted to assist her along the journey.

In short, we must realize that “bad hair days” do NOT mean that you have “bad hair”. It simply means that the hair is exercising its autonomous right to do other than what you want it to do at the moment. Typically, a good shampoo and style will fix all bad hair days. But if you don’t have the time to do so, find “stop-gap” styles that allow you to coast through the day effortlessly. A Mexican friend in high school once told me (paraphrasing): “My mother always says, when your hair is not behaving, put on make-up and keep it moving.”

Other women have learned the secret of managing “bad hair days”, it’s time that we as Black women stop throwing out the baby with the bath water and embrace

our hair with all of its personalities. And the next time you see me sporting a ponytail without athletic gear, smile and nod. I’ll understand. Happy styling! 😊

EMBRACE THE BEAUTY OF YOU.

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