

## The New York Times SundayStyles

Section 9

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### A Shoulder to Cry On (Highlights Included)

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**B.F.** The hairstylist Ken Paves comforts Jessica Simpson, whose marriage has faltered.

magazine reports, her hair guru, Ken Paves, "has been her closest pal and confidant."

And as Ms. Aniston copes with news of the Brangelina pregnancy, *People* says, her longtime hairstylist, Chris McMillan, "is her constant companion."

As anyone who has spilled her guts to her cutter knows, it's not just about the hair. In the post-breakup blues, hairdressers can also be counted among the friends who won't switch allegiances, who offer a reliable shoulder to lean on and, unlike other friends, can make some of the pain go away by making the friend-client look fabulous.

Artists and celebrities today, Ms. McCully said, "are being photographed everywhere they go — at lunch, shopping, walking out of Starbucks — so they always want to look good. They're getting closer and closer to the hairstylist."

And in the pecking order of a celebrity's team, which may include agents, a manager, publicist, makeup artist and fashion stylist, the hairstylist enjoys a privileged place.

The strength of the hairdresser-client trust is such a given that it has spawned a national program, *Cut It Out*, that since 2003 has enlisted salon owners to encourage victims of domestic violence to report the abuse, partly because the hairdresser is often the only person the victim has told.

"The hairdresser is one of the few people besides your doctor or a family member who touches you," said Gordon Miller, the executive director of the National Cosmetology Association, a trade group that represents stylists and other salon staff. "It just creates an unusual, very personal bond."

Laura Love-Brown, who owns a salon near Birmingham, Ala., said she did not think twice about getting involved when a client confessed that her husband was verbally and physically abusing her. "I offered to pick her up and get her out of the house," she said.

The client, Melanie Caldwell, a 39-year-old banker who now helps promote *Cut It Out*, said it took her a while to decide to leave her home, and in the meantime she was too ashamed to tell her parents or close friends, and afraid they would try to intervene and get in trouble themselves.

Throughout the ordeal Ms. Love-Brown, who did her hair and nails, was the only person she told.

"During the years I was abused, that was the only place I could go that he didn't mind me going," Ms. Caldwell said of her husband. "He didn't put two and two together. He didn't know that it was a safe place for me to discuss what was happening at home. Sometimes I'd break a nail to find a reason to go."

In Hollywood the time spent with a hairstylist can stretch into a whole day for a magazine shoot, weeks for a promotional tour and even months on location for a movie. It is not difficult for casual conversation to veer into the personal.

"It's pretty inevitable you become friends because you're close to them," said Harry Josh, a New York stylist and colorist who has worked with Hilary Swank and Sarah Jessica Parker and regularly styles the supermodel Gisele Bündchen (who recently split from Leonardo DiCaprio). "It's the only time to decompress and just talk."

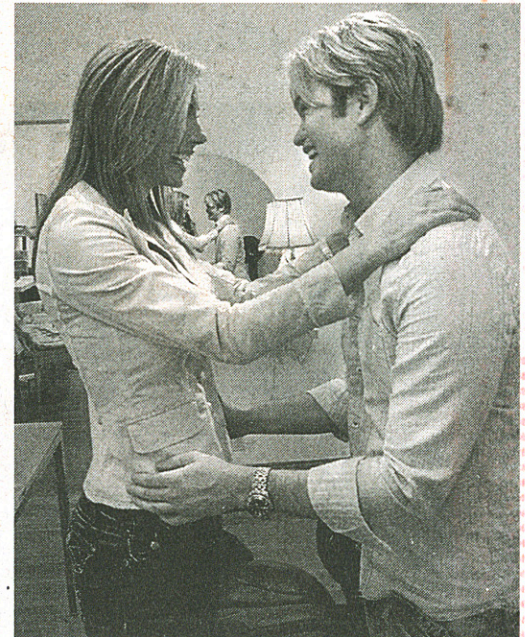
Mr. Josh, 33, who works out of the Serge Normant at John Frieda Salon in New York and Mr. McMillan's salon in Beverly Hills, said that 85 percent of his time is spent traveling with actresses and fashion models. He has befriended many of them, he said, going on holidays with some, having others join him on poker nights at his apartment in the West Village.

Once the blow-dryer is off, hair takes a back seat to going out to dinner, partying in nightclubs and sharing birthdays and weddings. Mr. Vo said he has helped redecorate the homes of some cli-



Ben Willson/INF

**HAIRSTYLIST/FRIEND** Jennifer Aniston, left, with Chris McMillan; Jennifer Flavin with Kim Vo.



Monica Almeida/The New York Times

ents who like his taste in decor.

Even when the relationship is limited mostly to hair appointments, the friendship that develops may be just as strong.

"Hairdressers don't judge you," said Jennifer Flavin, who gets her sun-kissed highlights from her friend Mr. Vo at both his salon and her home, sometimes over a glass of wine.

"They pretty much accept everything because they've heard everything," said Ms. Flavin, a former model who is married to Sylvester Stallone and sells a skin-care product line on the Home Shopping Network. "They're on your side, like a cheerleader, and there's no competition. They don't want to be you, and you don't want to be them."

At work in their bubble of privacy, colorists may be the first to know about a pregnancy, if only so they can go easy on the ammonia, and stylists may become privy to the first uttered words about less happy news, like an illness or a divorce. And unlike a therapist, the hairdresser has no problem telling it like it is.

"I'm brutal," said Tracey Cunningham, 37, who colors and styles at Neil George salon in Beverly Hills and counts among her regular clients Lindsay Lohan and Renée Zellweger (who married and then filed for annulment from the country singer Kenny Chesney last year). Although Ms. Cunningham refused to say whether any of her celebrity clients con-

fide in her, she said that in general she freely expresses her views to clients who do.

"I have this one client, and I gave her an ultimatum," she said. "You have to leave him if he's not going to marry you. You're 43, and you've got to get out. You can't accept this. You're beautiful."

In celebrity circles such confidence is partly built on the status hairstylists and other beauty professionals have gained as image makers who can charge \$600 for a haircut, have their own product lines, coffee-table books and publicists, and become celebrities themselves through television makeover shows. Mr. Vo, 35, who has appeared on "Extreme Makeover" and "Dr. 90210" and is opening Kim Vo Salon at the Mirage in Las Vegas this fall, said he marvels that people ask for his autograph.

"We went to Cancún, and people would recognize me, including celebrities," said Mr. Vo, who has been in the beauty business for 16 years. "Vince Vaughn would say, 'Hey, good show.'"

"They assume that if I'm on the show, I don't

need anything from them," Mr. Vo said of celebrities. "You're looked at as a successful business person. You're an equal rather than this subservient person following you around."

Ms. Murphy, of "The Apprentice," who plans to have her wedding at Donald Trump's National Golf Course in Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif., said she had seen Mr. Vo for barely a year but does not hesitate to "unload" on him. She acknowledged, though, that some discretion is always advisable.

"You might not know who his other clients are, and he can have a similar relationship with the other client," she said. "They probably have some code of ethics to keep it quiet."

Mr. Vo, who lists Nicky Hilton, Jenna Elfman and Jenny McCarthy among his clients, confirmed that his lips are sealed but admitted that things can get complicated when a breakup involves two clients, as was the case with Ms. McCarthy and her ex-husband, the movie director John Mallory Asher.

"I went from them having a baby to their having problems to the divorce," said Mr. Vo, who was friends with Ms. McCarthy. "Now he comes here, so now there's the awkwardness."

Mr. Paves, 34, who styles Ms. Simpson's hair and does her extensions, was similarly mum, declining to offer details about their friendship or his role in supporting her as she goes through marital woes. He said he met Ms. Simpson eight years ago when her label hired him to do her hair for the cover of her first album.

"She's a muse and a best friend," said Mr. Paves, who also does makeovers for the Oprah Winfrey show and works with Eva Longoria, Jessica Alba and other actresses.

But as Ms. McCully noted, even these friendships may have limits if one day the star ends up with "a bad-hair look."

"A celebrity wants to look gorgeous," she said. "There are different kinds of betrayals."

#### Corrections

An article last Sunday about adult siblings who live together misstated the age of one of the sisters who share a Chelsea apartment. Yael Kohen is 26, not 25.

A photo caption on the Evening Hours page, last Sunday, with a report about a fund-raiser for the American Academy in Berlin, misidentified a couple. They were David Bowker and Amanda Bowker, not John vanden Heuvel Pierce and Marie-Noëlle Pierce, who also attended the event.

An article last Sunday about Detroit nightspots misstated the history of a rock club. St. Andrew's Hall was originally a meeting hall, not a Catholic school gymnasium.

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By MIREYA NAVARRO

LOS ANGELES

**U**SHERED into one of the small rooms at B2V, a salon in West Hollywood favored by blond celebrities, Jennifer Murphy, a contestant on "The Apprentice" last season, had some exciting news to share.

"We set the wedding date today," she said with a grin as she held the frothy cappuccino that greeted her upon arrival.

"That's awesome," Kim Vo, the salon owner, replied as he clapped and hugged her.

Mr. Vo, of course, is invited to the wedding. To clients like Ms. Murphy, an aspiring television host who is marrying William M. Dorfman, a dentist from "Extreme Makeover," Mr. Vo is not only one of the best "blonders" in Los Angeles but also a best pal — a confidant, a savior. He has answered her panicked calls to lighten her hair with golden streaks — "psychological highlights,"

Mr. Vo calls them — right before a television appearance. He has heard regular updates about her relationship with Mr. Dorfman from the early dates right up to her Christmas Day engagement. And, perish the thought, if there is trouble in paradise, Mr. Vo will be there too, even between coloring appointments.

"You listen, and you're that good friend that protects them from crazy thoughts," he said. "And you reaffirm how wonderful they are."

The close personal ties forged in the hairdresser's chair have come out of the salon and into the spotlight of celebrity magazines as stars like Jennifer Aniston and Jessica Simpson weather break-ups from their husbands, Brad Pitt and Nick Lachey, with another man at their side: their hairstylist.

"The hairstylist is the new B.F.," said Martha McCully, executive editor of *In Style* magazine, who said she herself is best friends with her stylist and colorist.

Since Ms. Simpson's split, *In Touch*

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