

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. OFF DUTY

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STYLE & FASHION

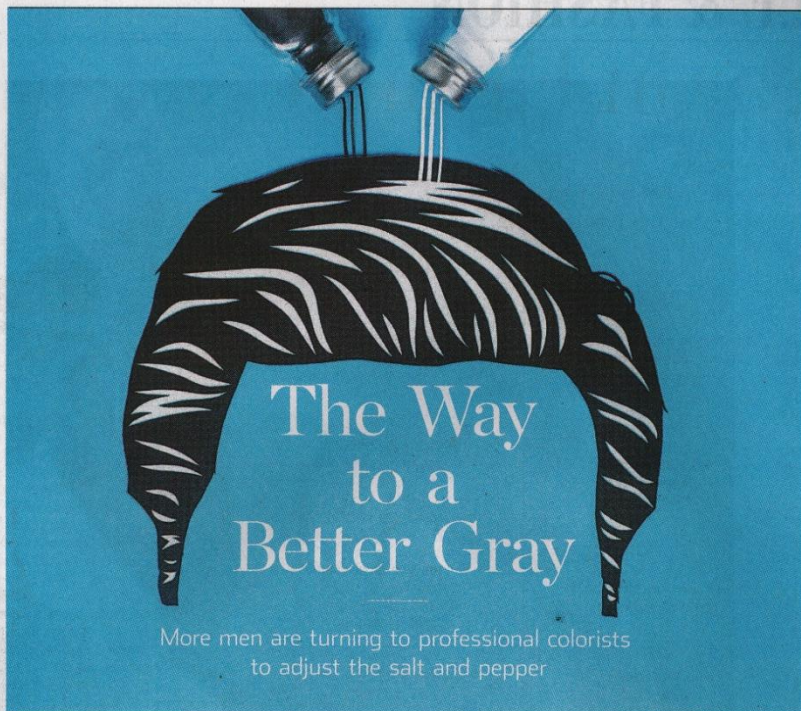


Illustration by David Schwen for The Wall Street Journal

BY JEFFREY PODOLSKY

MY HAIR EPIPHANY occurred during a recent visit to the dentist. As he was peering at my molars, he casually said, “Y’know, you’re not a bad-looking guy. But if you got rid of some that gray, you’d look a whole lot better.”

My mouth—and psyche—opened wider at that remark. His observation stoked an internal debate that had been plaguing me since I had turned 50. I’ve never been very adept at camouflaging my vanity. What man doesn’t base his pride, at least in part, on his physical attributes? My mostly gray hair seemed the unmistakable visual metaphor of my insecurity. Every time a salesperson or waiter addressed me as “Sir,” I winced—and blamed it on my head of lead.

I am not alone in my follicle fetish. Kimberly Cannon, a colorist at Marie Robinson salon in New York, estimates that 40% of her male clientele dyes its hair. “Men are more prone now to do something about their gray,” said Frédéric Fekkai, founder of the eponymous hair empire. “But instead of entirely hiding the gray, it’s a whole new attitude of finding ways to style and play with it.”

Experts today favor balayage, the coloring technique whereby a stylist painstakingly paints lowlights onto some individual gray hairs, leaving others their natural hue. The salt-and-pepper look, noted Mr. Fekkai, is more acceptable than ever. Actors in their 40s—Eric Dane, Gerard Butler, Ben Affleck, Mark Ruffalo and Matt Damon—all play up a dash of salt in their

hair. Star quarterback Brett Favre sported silver threads while still throwing touchdown passes. Other silver foxes appear in advertisements for brands such as Dolce & Gabbana and Banana Republic.

Perhaps no one has revolutionized the way men now embrace their grays more than George Clooney, prompting one friend of mine to call the phenomenon the “Clooney-ing” of men’s heads. “Gray hair now is absolutely a sign of character and masculinity,” said stylist Mary Alice Stephenson. “Salt and pepper has a level of sophistication that can be mouthwatering.” Unfortunately, not all shades of gray are created equal. My thinning hair doesn’t possess Mr. Clooney’s texture, which can appear either tousled or sleek.

While there’s nothing too shameful about a woman visiting a colorist, I

was reminded that Ms. Stephenson, a friend as well as a style sage, once told me how women practically turn gray when they learn a fellow dyes his hair. As Mr. Fekkai pointed out, “Men can get terribly embarrassed about

When people called me ‘Sir,’ I blamed it on my head of lead.

talking about dyeing their hair—and when people find out.”

I sought treatment at a place where I’d never be noticed: my 90-year-old mother’s hairdresser in suburban Detroit. After having my head enveloped in a humiliating ex-

pllosion of tin foil, my hair returned to its pubescent all-black. I emerged resembling a Semitic Eddie Munster more than a teenager.

Evidently other men have also discovered that dressing down their gray isn’t so easy. “I found it to be a complete disaster,” said Louis Angelo, senior stylist at Garren New York salon, of his off-and-on attempt with both balayage and foiling to allay his gray.

Undeterred, I confided in a female friend, still hoping to tame my top—to a more subtle effect than was achieved at my mother’s salon. She pointed me to the Vidov Salon in New York’s West Village, where my hairstylist, Bradley Moreland, explained how painting certain individual hairs would mute the overall gray. I said I was game. The result: a natural-looking blending of black and gray on the top, a sharper-than-before silvering along the temples and approximately 20% less of the dreaded hue that had overtaken almost three-quarters of my head.

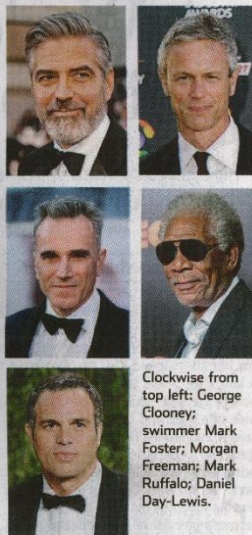
“It’s a more artistic method,” said Mr. Moreland, who has a large clientele of hair-coloring males. With my new mane, I felt confident that I could shave five years off my age on any dating website (if I so desired).

Paul Woods, host of luxury-oriented “Paul Woods Presents” on the Home Shopping Network, hopes never to be mistaken for a card-carrying member of AARP. The blond 53-year-old has been having his hair dyed at Vidov for years, and has no intention of stopping. “For me, it’s to be more competitive,” he said. “I’m not ready to be gray-haired.” For those who aren’t as dye-hard as Mr. Woods, Ms. Cannon, the stylist, suggests that men opt for a test run of sorts: a five-minute toner that takes the edge off the gray, gradually fades back to natural and requires no maintenance such as color-treatment shampoos or avoidance of chlorine or harsh sunlight.

While there is a range of gray-fighting options, coiffeurs all seem to be in agreement on one thing: Don’t do it out of a box. “Go to a professional,” said Gina Gilbert, a colorist at Serge Normant at John Frieda salon. “We mix shades to get a natural hair color.”

Of course, some stalwarts allow themselves to revel in the salt-and-

Silver Medalists



Clockwise from top left: George Clooney; swimmer Mark Foster; Morgan Freeman; Mark Ruffalo; Daniel Day-Lewis.

pepper spirit of their age. Calvin Klein designer Francisco Costa doesn’t just embrace the gray on the side of his head and his temples. “I wish I had more,” he said. “It’s taken me 48 years to get it. I take great pride in it. Salt and pepper is not a connotation of age today.” The boyish-looking men’s designer Michael Bastian started going gray at 35. After dabbling in dye, he has let the gray have its way. “I never thought that going gray was going to be my thing,” said Mr. Bastian. “It sets me apart from everyone else. Now it’s one of the first things people think of me.”

Admittedly, I now find myself on a bit of a follicle treadmill. The dye has been cast: My new mane requires a salon visit every six weeks. Dyeing my hair is by no means a magic cure-all. But I embrace the current wisdom that as men get grayer, they get better. I just want the best gray possible.

Do Try This At Home

While dyeing should be left to experts, these non-dye products can help perfect and preserve the aging man’s ‘do outside of a salon



The versatile Surf Spray can add body to thinning hair. \$25, bumbleandbumble.com



This shampoo-and-conditioner duo brightens dull grays. Davines Alchemic Silver Shampoo, \$25, and Conditioner, \$29, [Takamichi Hair, 212-420-7979](http://TakamichiHair.com)



Fill in scalp-baring spots with keratin fibers that cling to strands. Toppik Hair Building Fibers in Gray, \$25, toppik.com



A light oil that can moisturize dry grays without a lot of weight. Rejuvenating Oil, \$30, philipb.com

F. Martin Ramirez/The Wall Street Journal

