

## Putting the Art in Hair

By Melissa Hill Added: January 05, 2010



From London antiques dealer to master colorist and now salon owner, Vasken Demirjian has taken his love of hair and attention to detail to the next level with the opening of his eponymous New York salon. And with the equivalent of a Ph.D. in color from L'Oréal, a salon that takes its design cues from the art world, and a staff that was brought in from around the globe, Demirjian offers his take on where the salon industry can go.

### How did you go from an antiques dealer to master colorist?

After building my reputation in New York, I was in process of moving to London as a dealer in 1994 and I put my library in my brother's salon in White Plains, NY. While I was making the transition, my brother passed away, and I felt obliged to stay and work two extra months to take care of his affairs. Then two months became two years, and the next thing I knew, it became inevitable that I should go into the salon business. James Viera, who had been the head of the color department for L'Oréal, gave me the impetus to move on, and follow this career. So I moved to London and started the requisite training.

### Why color over cutting?

Cutting is architectural, color is knowing how the hair works, how chemistry works. Artistically, I was very drawn to hair color, and chemically as well. One thing I did was a research the history of the industry before embarking on this. I looked at which colorists I should be associated with, which products to use and why. I ended up going all the way back to the early 1900s, looking at all the colorists, all the players, the Sassoon era, why colorists are going more compartmentalized and why now. French haute couture to English avant garde—I researched it all thoroughly. My consultations are very strong because of that. Back in the 1980s, while studying ancient history, I also

studied philosophy. Which is useful now. How do you express a woman's desire, reach for and get what she wants, and then execute. Being a hairstylist is a very powerful position, some do not understand their strength. If you're endowed with vision and ideas, you can take it to such high places. I am still fascinated by this. I can not wait for tomorrow and the day after and next week. It's intellectually stimulating.



### Where do you see the industry going?

I see it getting out of mediocrity, going into more boutique operations instead of bigger salons. In America, there are a couple of powerful things. Sale of products is one, the industry heavily relies on that. Talent is becoming less and less and less. It's important to sell the best product, and do it in the most talented way possible. I don't want to have slew of chairs lined up, assembly line. I guess it can be a good business model, but imagine people were very talented on top of that? Talent is coming to the forefront of industry, as it was in 50s and 60s.

### Why did you decide to open your own salon?

My brother's salon is owned by his trust, and it became the perfect training ground for me. Before I knew it, I had a huge following. Everything, after awhile, becomes a philosophy, plans, ideas. Ten years of being involved in business—I knew exactly what I wanted to create, and the direction I wanted to go. I think, for most salon owners, if you are in the artistic endeavor business you have to make sure everything is consistent, and if you're an artist you need a great studio. I have created a great studio. As a master colorist and someone who has a salon that's so color strong, I had to have unbelievable lighting, natural lighting, that complements the hair and skin. I have natural, fluorescent and ambient lighting—all on clients at the same time. I love architecture, so the salon is very sleek and clean, with the feeling of a fresh palette. It's the perfect backdrop to showcase our work. You have to be very good, because it shows everything.



### Many on your staff have come from abroad. How did you get them to come work in your new salon?

Most of them come from one particular country: Turkey. Turkish stylists have a strong pedigree. They are trained from 9, 10, 11 years old in rigid apprenticeship programs, and they know hair better than anyone. Over there it is a craft. By the time they touch clients' hair, they've been working in the salon for 9 or 10 years. My staff is young but they've been working 20 years on average. They came to work for me because I knew a couple of people in Turkey from my antiques business. When they heard I was opening a salon, one of the top stylists from Turkey came to me and wanted to work with me. That's how it started. Every single person that has come on board is a true specialist in their field.

