

FEET FIRST

EXPECT MORE THAN A PAINT JOB WHEN YOU PAMPER YOUR TOOTSIES AT ONE OF THE NEW NAIL SPAS

I didn't have my first pedicure until a couple of years ago, and I hated it.

A friend took me to Los Feliz to one of those ubiquitous mini-mall "chop shops." I was not at all comfortable there, sitting in a plastic chair like some kind of tacky suburban memsahib while young women whose names I didn't know knelt before me, servicing my feet with questionable implements, while an acrylic-taloned Kathie Lee Gifford cackled loudly on an overhead TV. This was not a minor luxury, as my friend had promised. No, for me, this was more like going to the dentist.

So for years I stuck to painting my own toes, counting on the fact that only very rarely are my feet close enough to anyone's nose that they notice what a crummy job I've done. But I had a new pair of white sandals, and a yen to emulate that Lilly Pulitzer-Palm Beach Story thing, with the toes a bright Floridian coral and as glassy-smooth as Chinese lacquer.

I was very curious when I heard about the new trend in nail "spas," places where you could get your toes twinkled for less money and time than it takes to visit a full-service day spa but with all the chic atmosphere and economy of a Parisian cafe, places neither obscenely luxurious nor mini-mall grotesque, and that emphasized natural nail care with healthy products.

This is how I walked into Paint Shop, a new Zen-style salon on Robertson Boulevard in Beverly Hills. "A few years ago, nail color went crazy," says owner Julie Serquinia, "but the salons didn't. They were all the same. We wanted to create an alternative." Her husband, Domingo, a hairstylist, designed the great polished pine chairs, a step up from those clinical swivel chairs, where clients—both men and women—can read books from the "spiritual library" or plug into head-

sets and listen to New Age CDS while they sit for treatments.

Cheryl Scruggs, the Paint Shop manager, has been doing nails for 20 years, and she turns your foot in her hand like a sculptor checking out a flawed chunk of wood. She describes the first time she got a set of acrylic nails, in the early '70s. "I looked at this little 20-year-old technician holding a brush, and it went right through me right then, that this was what I wanted to do with my life."

I felt the tension in my shoulders melt, and knew that I had but to surrender to the hands of this master craftswoman—no mere technician or operator, she.

"You can't do this properly yourself," Scruggs said between snips with surgical-looking sterilized instruments. "You can't get them from the right angle. And it's important to shape them correctly to avoid foot problems like ingrown nails." I submitted to her professionalism, and while she massaged my feet and wrapped them in a tingly green masque, Mary, who is from Vietnam, soaked my hands in an aromatherapy bath. The three of us talked intermittently about shoes, work, our children, the availability of quality dry goods in Saigon—the friendly banter with near strangers you get in only the best little owner-proud joints. And I never once felt like a tacky memsahib.

Paint Shop isn't the only start-up in this particular niche. Just up the street in West Hollywood is L.A. Vie L'Orange, which calls itself a "hand and foot spa," where the scent of orange-vanilla candles fills the air. You can sit in your own tent-like cabana and soak your feet in aromatic water laced with orange slices while nibbling on cookies and sipping tea. As for treatments, their Hot Rock Massage for toes and Acupressure Therapy elevate the manicure to a new level of foot indulgence. And at Hands On in Beverly Hills, Michael Wolper has created a Malibu

Hillary Johnson last wrote for the magazine about hair color.



beach theme in what he likes to call "the Starbucks of nail salons," where you're presented with your own set of sanitized tools after being seated for a Heal to Toe treatment on a cushioned wooden deck chair. He has plans for an eventual Starbucks-style empire with a clean, classy salon on every corner of every city.

My toes now look like 10 little coral Corvettes parked in a row, and, according to Cheryl, they'll stay that way for a month at least, at which point I'm going back, both for the camaraderie and for a few coats of that robin's egg blue polish that matches my summer bikini.

HOW TO GET THE SEASON'S LATEST IN TROPICAL TOES:

- ◇ Nars nail polish in "Capri."
- ◇ M.A.C nail polish in "Polyaster."
- ◇ Lancôme Vernis Absolu Nail Lacquer in "Orange."
- ◇ Chanel nail color in "Jazz."
- ◇ Lippmann Collection nail color in "It's Delovely."
- ◇ Paint Job nail color in "Isuzu Coral Reef."
- ◇ Urban Decay nail enamel in "Agent."

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