

Tricoci University of Beauty Culture Michigan Avenue February 2012

MICHIGAN AVENUE

Mario Tricoci Continues to Turn Heads

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON PERRY FOR FACTOR PHOTO



Mario with the staff at the Michigan Avenue salon.

Mario Tricoci starts his days in a cashmere robe that makes him look like Chi Wan Ken obi, according to his grandsons. He sips a bowl of fruit, sips a double espresso, and swims soaps in the pool. Very civilized. Very European.

But there is one area of his life with no sense of order whatsoever: his hair. For a man who built an impeccable styling, his own coiffure is chaotic. Naturally Mario uses his own hair products. His mane. He can choose his shade of white hair, and then it let it be, he says.

He claims to have five—Prada, Hermès, Elie—but more often he dyes himself with one of his two between go on.

So of them, surely he's undemocratic.

Big Man on Campus

Like his army of hairstylists, Mario often wears black. But he rarely does hair anymore, unless it charity. Once he charmed his personal clientele with magic scissors and his Italian accent. No more, "a beauty ambassador."

"I love this haircut on you," he tells a client at the Woodward Park campus of Tricoci University. "When he visits his school, Mario is regarded with something more than awe, but a sort of veneration. He is a celebrity, the organic smoke and neon hairline up to get their photos taken with him. The halls are lined with locked model heads trying to escape through the cracks.

Mario greets everyone he sees, thanking customers, and dispensing advice to his students. "Lo says, 'Tell them, 'I love to cut hair. Send me your friend. I'll take good care of them.'"

Mario likes to pop in to his salons again and again, too. His stylists get air-kisses; his customers thanks. At the Michigan Avenue location, one woman, mid-pedicure, has to scurry for a wave—John McDemott, a stylist who's been with Mario for years, still works at the Schumberg and everyone here, he says. "We're very lucky."

This is an industry in which 90 percent of new salons fail within two years, but Mario's have been his Adlon Heights location, the first day in the Midwest, just celebrated 25 years.

The Foundation of Tricoci's Empire

Mario says he would like to be who he is today with out his wife, Cheryl, by his side. And Cheryl would for Tom Jones. In 1990, Mario asked out the young model manager who was in town to entertain—until she was one of Tom's concert.

A few months later Mario and Cheryl were married, launching a formidable team that would bring first taste of European glamour. "He had all this creativity, but she was the one who got things done for him."

It was 25 years ago that the name Mario Tricoci became synonymous with one-stop chic. With Cheryl's business acumen and passion, they built an empire that today includes a total of 60 Mario and Elizabeth Andren Red Door Spa locations. And the Tricoci haven't finished yet. They have class product lines, and a Tricoci University flagship opening this summer on State Street. But Mario's opinion seems to be that the Tricoci University, which is filled with career models and hairstylists who like to cook and begin a career, Cheryl, with her beautiful modeling, usually finishes them, for the



After much pestering, the mall management relented—a sort of. They gave the Tricoci a small spot in a dead-end corner of the mall. "We really turn a lot of corners in to corners," says Cheryl. "We did this for your convenience, so you don't have to walk all the way through the mall. We're right by the parking lot!"

"He took a big risk," says Glenda, "and he opened a salon right inside Woodfield Mall when that was unheard of. "When the mall executives saw how many people Mario Tricoci could bring in, they moved the salon to a high-profile, high-traffic spot. "We started with 900 square feet and a lot of debt," says Cheryl.

At the time, salon owners depended on their engagement vendors for décor. But Mario had a vision and they ended up spending a scandalous amount on the salon's interior. Cheryl remembers, "Everybody was telling us how unitty we were, and we just kept backing each other, saying, 'This is brilliant. Why doesn't anybody else think so?'"

Not only did the Tricoci salon rock the industry by hiring an interior designer, but they hired the best: Richard Nimmo, who was an over-the-top designer in residence for Muhammad Ali and Dr. Rapin et. At first, Nimmo's assistant refused to even put the circular through. But Cheryl was persistent and begged the legend's interest. "He thought it was a hypothetical, he wanted to meet the two people. We met him for a half-hour on his way to Milan, and he said, 'You know what, you've got me so crazy and so passionate, I'm in.'"

Mario knew what if you want to feel good, you had to look good and applied that philosophy to his salon. The late designer taught the Tricoci an important lesson. "He wanted to use pale colors for the walls, but I said, 'You're crazy,'" says Cheryl. With all the wear and tear, the a matter of time would be vinyl in dark colors. Nimmo was appalled. "He looked at me and said, 'You intend to be busy? Just let me tell you something, young lady,' remembers Cheryl. "This material won't last even five or three years, but if you don't do this while the salon is open in five or three years, you deserve to be out of business." He said, "If you're in this fashion glamour business, you replace the seats!"

The Hair Force Academy

Since then, the Tricoci salons have been in a constant state of renewal. They've been set apart, too, by the way their employees are treated. Training at a Tricoci salon isn't unlike that of a chef's famous finishing school. Stylists are taught how to look, how to relate to one another, how to be business and work, and how to keep their circles of friends. But most important, they are taught that the way they treat their customers is as important as the way they treat their customers' hair.

"There's not a salon like it," says Anne Murphy, who started working in the Woodfield location in 1999. "The buzz was just so high-energy. You'd feed off each other. We had camaraderie. "Murphy still does hair color for a loyal clientele in the Adlon Heights salon. "As a rule, you're not going to find people who have been with a beauty company for 30-plus years," she Tricoci were your own dad family."



Cheryl and Mario Tricoci today



The methods and ideals may change, but Mario's motivations never have. "I just love to create something beautiful," he says. "I get to make people feel good about themselves. And I get paid on top of it all!"