

I spotted Gwyneth Paltrow several years ago on a shoot.

She is one of those gorgeously groomed women who has a casualness that makes you believe she just rolled out of bed that way. My self-esteem plummeted and within moments I felt short, overweight and hated my hair. There's a power that truly groomed women wield that can render other women frumpy and daggy in seconds. This particular day, Paltrow used her powers for good, asking members of the crew, "Can you see my pimple?" Of course, there was no pimple but this remark made everyone feel more at ease with her luminousness and a little bit better about, well, their own pimples.

Ever since then, I have been on a quest to become more groomed, more of the time. And while we all know that celebrities inhabit that rarefied space where trainers, chefs, hairdressers and make-up artists are on speed dial, there is a grooming leaf we can take out of their beauty book. Apparently, the secret to being truly "maintained" is multiple experts. "It's no longer about one-salon shopping," says a beauty editor friend. "The secret is multi-appointments - visiting specialists for specifics. Every woman needs a waxer, a colourist, stylist, facialist, manicurist and a dermatologist."

Another make-up artist mate, with ridiculously high standards when it comes to her own look, agrees: "The only way to be truly polished is to get all the big things done regularly - neat nails, no split ends, bikini line waxed - foundation will only do so much." Groomed to within an ounce of her life, she's responsible for the faces of some of the most beautiful women in the world and has collected their experts like swap cards over the years. She'll trade illicit numbers with a chosen few or when she's had too many wines and feels like dropping names. "Models spend more time at the salon or the hairdresser than they do in the make-up chair. They might have 10 different people they see for different parts of their regimen. It's being beauty smart to invest in a little salon time. It saves you hours at the mirror."

When I broke down her advice, I realised there was truth to the theory and that having multiple appointments doesn't mean spending more money. It just means spending less in one place. And equally, every woman doesn't need all of the above. You need what's important for you. For me, it's hair, skin and nails. I can take or leave the rest.

That is, I could until last week when I added another expert - The Eyebrow Whisperer (truly his name) - to my calendar. Specialising in eyebrows only, Nathan turned the humble eyebrow wax/pluck into a beauty experience. Suddenly, after years of having very average, almost invisible blonde brows I had smoky brown arches. My whole face looked different. I was transformed.

Leaving the salon, I noticed glances from other women. Were they marvelling at my immaculate brows? Had I captured a little groomed woman magic? Skipping down the street, flush with my own beauty confidence, I caught sight of myself in a shop window and realised that they had perhaps not been looking at my brows but rather the Cinderella stickers my three-year-old had stuck all over the back of my top.

If only there was a wardrobe whisperer, too.

Probe a politician

What would you ask John Howard, Kim Beazley, Bob Brown and Lyn Allison if you had the opportunity? We're holding our very own question time and want you to be involved. Send your question to **madison** at PO Box 4088, Sydney, NSW 2000, or email madison@acp.com.au and look out for the answers in an upcoming issue.

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