



Alternate ENDINGS

Multicultural styles are seeing an explosion in versatility and creativity.

by Victoria Wurtinger

Much like mainstream looks, multicultural hair has gone from stiff and seriously styled to soft, touchable and healthy looking. As a result, anything that causes damage or stress to the hair is out of favor, while products that add moisture, conditioning and shine are hot. But within that parameter, specific style trends are so versatile that every store needs a strong product mix to meet the needs of diverse shoppers. Multicultural consumers as a group are embracing a variety of looks. Individuals may roller-set their hair one day, flat-iron it the next or try out a texturizer for the best of both worlds: natural curl with greater control and manageability.

VERSATILE TRENDS

“Six out of 10 professional African-American women still use relaxers, but relaxers are trending down in favor of a more natural look,” says Rozlyn Baker, a haircare expert at Dallas-based Pro-Line International. “Much of the impetus is a cultural shift away from chemicals.”

Mike McGee, an educator for Chicago-based Good 2 Gro haircare products who

works out of The Total Eclipse Salon in Chicago, agrees. “Consumers who tire of overprocessed relaxers are letting their hair grow out, then adding wave with texturizers,” says McGee. “Twists and Mohawks are popular in Chicago, particularly in the summer to combat high humidity, while younger women prefer braids. However, the younger ones with corporate jobs are choosing texturizers or naturals. But whatever the look of the moment, they all want styling versatility and healthy-looking hair.”

The natural movement is taking shape in many forms, as products with natural ingredients and natural-looking styles are on the upswing. Locs and braids are now more accepted in corporations, which are themselves more relaxed and willing to allow employee self-expression. The entertainment industry is helping to popularize the natural look, as singers like Erykah Badu and India Arie proudly showcase their much-emulated natural styles. But the must-have look doesn’t end with naturals. Multicultural consumers are wearing hair extensions in increasing numbers, thanks to a Beyoncé-driven surge in popularity.



PRO-LINE INTERNATIONAL

But whatever style is worn, it has to have many expressions to suit the mood or the moment. Professional women who relax or flat-iron their hair for a straight look during the workday are still looking for care-free style options on weekends. The plethora of trends plus frequent style changes have led to an explosion in products that are healthy lifestyle-oriented and gentle on fragile hair that can't take a lot of manipulation or heat exposure. Relaxers and hair strengtheners that inhibit damage, moisturizers and conditioners that

and more. "Unlike earlier decades through the '80s, there is no single style that's popular anymore," comments Chanda Rhodes, brand manager for new product development at Pro-Line International. "Even men are looking for a variety of products that suit different hairstyles and lifestyles." And to meet the needs of those men, Pro-Line offers

the Barber Select line. The collection features products for the variety of styles men want. Best-sellers include the Light Pomade for waved or super-short styles and Wave & Styling Gel for men who wear their hair slightly longer but also want form and invisible hold.

NATURAL SELECTION

Just as natural looks are a trend in hairstyles, products with a natural stance are gaining ground, as multicultural consumers are becoming more savvy

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maintain healthy hair, and products like thermal sprays that protect against future damage are all in high demand because they allow versatile style changes without compromising the hair's integrity.

Men who favor naturals more than ever—whether short fades or Afro styles—are also seeking healthy hair attributes in hairdressings, pomades

and selective about what they use on their hair. They also favor ingredients with cultural roots. That's why Fantasia Industries in Paramus, New Jersey, is launching Hair Polisher Olive Moisturizing Sheen Spray. The product was brought to market because of the popularity of the company's Hair Polisher Olive Moisturizing Shine Serum. "The olive has been used since ancient times for cleansing, healing and moisturizing," says Tonilee Paladino, the company's advertising director. "While about 30% of women still relax their hair, more now favor texturizing because it's safer. They're also looking for natural, safer ways to replace what they're taking out of their hair."

The new spray formulation includes proteins, vitamins and hydrolyzed silk, which seals the cuticle to minimize breakage. It's lightweight, which appeals to today's consumers who want to avoid products with a heavy or oily look and feel. Anyone can use it, including women with naturally

straight hair and men, says Paladino, underscoring the trend toward crossover products. The formula is also fragrance-free, so it won't conflict with a woman's perfume or a man's cologne. "We offer samples, posters and various promotions on new items," adds Paladino. "Our product specialists are always available. We have a complete consumer-advertising program and offer sampling because we know that once consumers try our products, they'll look for them in beauty supply stores."

Another company with natural products on its mind is J. Strickland & Co. in Olive Branch, Mississippi. There, the Blue Magic Organics line has been extended to 10 SKUs with the addition of three new products that are made with 100% natural ingredients. It now includes Super Sure Gro, Indian Hemp and Castor Oil hair and scalp conditioners, all of which contain Japanese green tea leaves, jojoba oil and aloe. The herbs are actually visible in the product, says the company's advertising coordinator Don Baldock. "We launched these products because we wanted to address the trend toward wearing natural styles," says Baldock. "However, they're also appropriate for relaxed hair, which is fragile."



J. STRICKLAND & CO.

In addition to offering shelf-talkers, this November the company is attaching two-ounce sample sizes to the tops of its three best-selling SKUs, which include Blue Magic Organics Conditioner Hair Dress, Bergamot hair and scalp conditioner, and Coconut Oil conditioner. The samples can be used as purse or travel sizes and further encourage sales, says Baldock. "Once we have complete distribution, which will be spring of 2007, we will launch a consumer-advertising program," he adds.

it's so light, it can be used before and after blow-drying, pressing or hot-combing. It can even be used to skim-coat braids. With women demanding more versatile looks, it suits every trend."

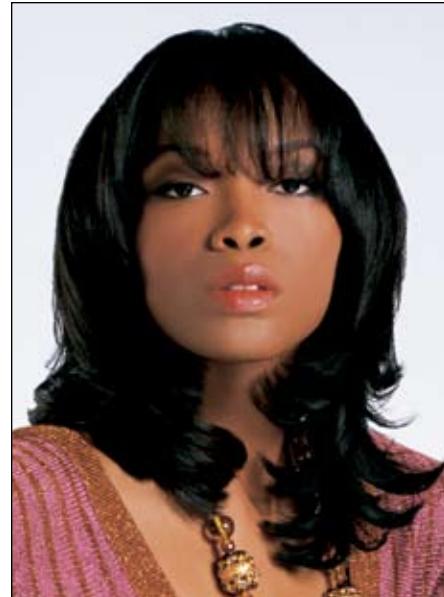
In the Chicago area, the company offers special store promotions, including T-shirt and sample-pack giveaways. Outside the area, stores can get shelf-talkers and much more. Education is provided at trade shows nationwide, like the Bronner Brothers shows in Atlanta. "We'll do whatever we can do



COLORER USA'S MULTICULTURAL GROUP



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COLOMER USA'S MULTICULTURAL GROUP

to help stores promote the product and move it off shelves," adds Grayson. "For multiple locations, we'll create a program of local radio and TV advertising. Also, beauty supply stores will soon be able to order more efficiently at our new website, www.good2gro.com."

KEEP IT HEALTHY

For those who don't entirely embrace natural curl, damage defense and scalp care are major concerns. Adding the interest in natural ingredients to the mix, African Pride, part of Colomer

Another company looking to improve on relaxing technology is Pro-Line International. The company's Soft & Beautiful relaxer system was recently restaged with brighter packaging that stands out on the shelf, and a formula upgrade that the company states leaves hair six times stronger than the old formula. The relaunched system ships January 2007.

The Soft & Beautiful Botanicals sub-brand, which has its own relaxer system that relies on plant extracts for natural conditioning, has also undergone a packaging upgrade that better

include speed-to-market systems for distributors; posters, shelf-talkers, shelf-danglers and promotional items for retailers; and styling tips and coupons for consumers. And new to the offerings list are dedicated media support for the Botanicals sub-brand and branded business items, such as "Open" or "Closed for Business" signs for retailers.

BRAIDS AND SPRAYS

Once, wearing braids, twists, locs and cornrows on the job and even in school was controversial. Not anymore. In

"WHILE **about 30% OF WOMEN** **STILL relax their hair, MORE** FAVOR TEXTURIZING."

binds it to the Soft & Beautiful portfolio. New to the popular line is Soft & Beautiful Botanicals Texturizer. "Texturizers have been traditionally viewed

metropolitan areas, even attorneys and police officers wear them as an expression of cultural pride—and because they express the diversity of what natural curl



USA's Multicultural Group, which is based in Jacksonville, Florida, has added African Pride Sensitive Scalp No-Lye Relaxer with Rosemary and Jasmine to its no-lye relaxer family. "We found that African-American women in particular are concerned with scalp irritation, but they also want a product that effectively straightens coarse hair," says Anthony Standifer, African Pride's brand manager. "Few relaxers do both. Rosemary and jasmine bring together opposing benefits. Rosemary is therapeutic and invigorating, while jasmine is soothing and calming." The kit includes the no-lye relaxer formula, an activator, a neutralizing shampoo, an invigorating rosemary shampoo and a soothing jasmine leave-in conditioner. It's appropriate for relaxing all hair types; the variable for fragile-and-fine or thick-and-coarse hair lies in the timing.

as products for short hair, and we wanted to expand the view of how to use them," explains Rhodes. "Our focus groups showed us that women want options and flexibility. Men who have very short hair are also using texturizers for wave. The entire Soft & Beautiful Botanicals sub-brand appeals to consumers who are interested in healthier lifestyles. They're looking everywhere they can to find products they perceive to be better for them."

Pro-Line International, which, according to company officials, is the market leader with 61% of the relaxer market and a near 80% share of the texturizer market, offers its tri-tier of customers (distributors, retailers and consumers) as many support options as there are styles today. These



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can do. At Ashea Hair Care in Baltimore, the OTC division of the company offers a variety of shampoos, conditioners, stylers and finishers in eight SKUs that cross cultural lines.

"Our newest product, Shea Loc, is used by African-American, Hispanic,



ethnicity. For instance, African Pride's newest and most novel launch is Hair Deodorizers, which come in six consumer-tested fragrances. "They have a unique technology that eliminates odors from sweat, cigarettes and the environment," says Standifer. "Then, they deposit a fresh, new scent. While they're great for anyone, African-American women in particular want to maintain a salon style for a week without washing, but want their hair to look and smell fresh. We discovered through consumer feedback that they were using other products for this purpose." The two-ounce pump deodorizers come in Strawberry Floral, Fresh Floral, Cucumber Melon, Coconut Rum,

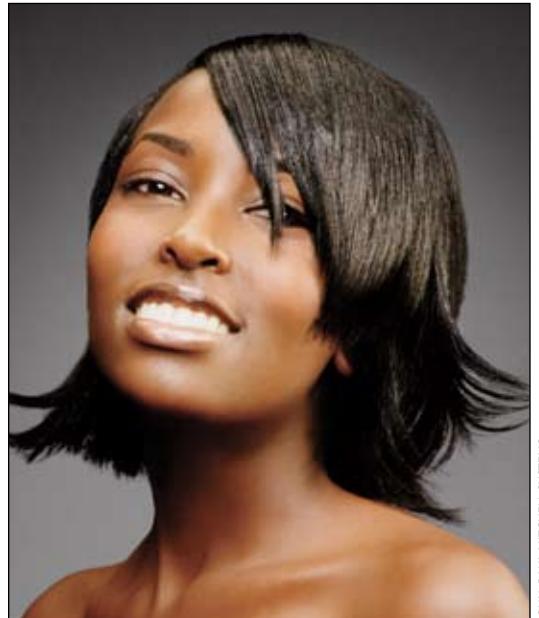
MULTICULTURAL consumers are becoming MORE SAVVY AND selective about WHAT THEY USE ON their hair.

Asian and biracial consumers who sport braids, locs and even Rasta looks," explains Corey Livingston, the company's regional sales manager. "It contains shea, mango and cocoa butters, grapeseed oil and lime, so it holds all natural styles without building up or weighing hair down. It's applied only to the new growth of these looks, and it can even be used under a cool dryer to set the style."

The company's Braiding Spray adds lightweight sheen without silicone, making it perfect for everything from braids to Caesars to weaves. In addition, it alleviates tension from tight braids and soothes the scalp. Because scalp care is an important issue to anyone with braids, locs or even relaxed hair, the company also offers Stimulating Shampoo, which doubles as a deep cleanser and a mild dandruff treatment, and Moisturizing Conditioner with peppermint for soothing the scalp.

"In addition to shelf-talkers, we offer in-store promotions with sampling," says Livingston. "Depending on the order, our distributor or a sales manager will go into a store with one or two stylists to explain the features and benefits, and to hand out consumer samples."

There are also products on the market that are primarily designed for the multicultural consumer, but may be used by customers of any



JOHN PAUL MITCHELL SYSTEMS

Sweet Amber and Citrus scents. An introductory 24-piece countertop display contains four of all six fragrances to encourage add-on sales and is supported with shelf-talkers and posters.

As style options increase, the number of both crossover and specialty products will, too. What's the best mix to carry? Only your customers can tell you for sure. Test and track what they buy, and you'll stay on your game. ■

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