

57th & MADISON

EAST IS EAST

The high-energy East Village is the Mecca of fashion's eclectic mixes and maverick salon owners. Painted on a wall: "Character rules."



Astor Place Haircutters

Step east of Broadway, below 14th Street, and you'll discover that Village-wise, east is east and west is west. Easterly, prices drop, nonconformity is compulsory and she who adapts the most survives the longest. Saint Mark's Place and Astor Place are the twin heartbeats of this neighborhood and the pulse is definitely irregular.

Astor Place Haircutters (2 Astor Pl.) still charges \$10 for a cut — sans shampoo and style. Window Polaroids prove that Martin Sheen, John Kennedy Jr., Matt Dillon and DMC were clients, but a less inviting sign notes: "Anyone claiming that

they were formerly employed by Astor Hair was fired by us for incompetence." Owner Enrico Vezza, who we found perched atop a five-step soapbox amid a cutting whirlwind, says stylists were falsely claiming they worked for him.

"To make it in this neighborhood, you can't just offer a price value; the work has to be good," he contends. Looking at the hundreds of fades and precision-barbered styles around you, you have to agree.



Royal Barber Shop doesn't look like much from the outside, but who cares @ \$10 a cut?

Two blocks east on St. Mark's is a true intrigue. There, among the street hawkers, ultra hip shops and youthful hangers-out is **Royal Barber Shop** (16 St. Mark's Pl.), which clearly hasn't renovated in its 26 years. The barbers, who are easily part of the 50-plus age wave, always



Hair Power, where Carlo's been cutting hair since 1969.

have a customer waiting. Owner Stanislaw Piegza says he hasn't ever raised his prices (\$10 to \$18, depending on length) and that nothing changes. Are shorter cuts in demand now?

"I only do short hair; I can't make it longer."

His strangest style request?

"What are you, the KGB? The FBI? Whatever they want, I do. It's all the same."

Here, time stands still.

From Alice Cooper to Madonna, they've all lived on the East Side at one time or another and chances are, they saw Carlo at **Hair Power** (124 Second Ave.) on their way up. Anchored since 1969, Carlo charges \$50 a cut.

"I'm midtown quality, even better," he notes. "There, you're paying for real estate."

In rapid-fire, he invites you in to chat about

fabulous styles, who he's done (Madonna, Alice Cooper, Sid Vicious, Lisa Sliwa, doctors, lawyers, bankers) and how in 1971 he put the shag to sleep and started doing Push Backs, Valentinos and DAs.

"I retrieve and recover looks," he says. "It takes overdrive to make it here. Four wheel. Be ready for rough terrain."

The going rate is \$26, but if that's too hefty, Carlo sends you to Uri around the corner for a \$7 cut or to the Third Ave. Atlas Barber School for \$5. He knows what it takes to make it.

Our next stop is the **Christopher Banner Salon** (217 E. 5th St.).

A former Jingles instructor, Christopher designed his salon with warm wood and scads of plants that leave you guessing what type of business it is until you peer through the leaves. Agreeing the neighborhood demands perseverance, he says he's been there since '87.

"We see professionals, not the trendy types," he adds.

Cuts are \$50, highlights start at \$100 and little of his business is walk in. The salon is an amazingly peaceful oasis in a fashion storm. But reminding you just where you are, there's the salon dog, contentedly napping under a styling station.



East Village, home the Village Voice an extraordinary!



Christopher Banner where they trim hair foliage.