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WORDCAKE COMMUNICATIONS • SELECTED WRITING SAMPLES

*"Tall Tales" created for Under the Table business cards and promotional materials
combine a pithy mash-up of classic literature and food storytelling.*

Jen was fed up with him bricking her into the wine cellar alive whenever she drank his good Bordeaux. On the morrow, she would bake his precious one-trick raven into a pie. Revenge in an all-butter crust.

+

Jen never met a bottle of 1995 Krug Clos du Mesnil she didn't like. It's owner wasn't half bad either. She threw him a wink and clutched her Riedel champagne flute expectantly.

+

The King nodded and the crowd roared. Behind one door was Chef Tom Colicchio, two Riedels and a chilled bottle of La Grande Dame, behind the other—a hungry, savage, relentless rutabaga. Jen rubbed her lucky jawbreaker and stepped forward.

+

The kitchen door swung open and Jen gasped as an ancient ham and gruyere omelette hissed menacingly and darted behind the refrigerator. She surveyed the carnage. It was never pretty when the leftovers went on a rampage.

+

Jen woke up screaming. She'd had that dream again. The one about the deserted soda fountain. She wiped the sweat from her brow and went downstairs to mix a brown cow.

Jen surveyed her work. A 25-foot portrait of M.F.K. Fisher done entirely in petits fours. She shook out her fondant-specked frock, sighing when she heard the sirens. If only the world appreciated her genius.

+

"Give me chocolate or give me death," Jen cried. They could make her kneel on cocoa nibs for hours, but she'd never renounce her beloved Amedei Chuao bar.

+

The Christmas tree lights twinkled merrily as he took off his dusty roller skates and gave Jen a long kiss and a bottle of 100-year-old balsamic. If only she hadn't sold her taste buds to buy him a chrome kit for his '87 Vespa.

+

Jaguars, Cape buffalo, Cossacks...whatever he was out hunting today, he was late for dinner and Jen was sick of his excuses. Not to mention she had found his snuffbox in the limo again. They were through.

+

One deranged cabbie, one brush with the federales, one proposal by a misogynistic Mexican poet, two mysteriously murdered marlins, and three jellyfish stings later, Jen'd had her fill of tacos.

Review and round-up of new Portland area restaurants for
January/February 2010 issue of Northwest Palate Magazine.

Portland Dining Scene Heats Up the Winter



COURTESY CASTAGNA

Chef Matt Lightner
of Castagna



JOHN WALLS PHOTO

Chef David Anderson
of Genoa and Accanto

Baby, it's cold—make that *freezing*—outside in Portland this winter, but the Rose City's restaurant scene has never been hotter, as culinary entrepreneurs both new and known are boldly opening restaurants with a fervor that belies recession-era belt-tightening.

Meat lovers eagerly anticipated the December opening of **Olympic Provisions** restaurant, wine store, and salumeria, home to Oregon's first USDA-certified meat-curing facility. Clyde Common's chef Jason Barwikowski oversees the kitchen, turning out simple European and North African-influenced small plates like crispy pork terrine with escarole and Moroccan-style fried eggs with couscous, while Elias Cairo helms the on-premises meat department.

Just down the street on SE Water Avenue, Tommy Habetz and Nick Wood of the ever-popular Bunk Sandwiches are opening **Bunk Bar**, a gastropub and catering operation.

Portland isn't lacking for Northern European fare—**Prost!** bierhaus brings hearty pub grub and a long lineup of German beers like Spaten Bock and Köstritzer Schwarzbier to North Mississippi Avenue. At **Spints Alehouse** on East 28th Avenue's restaurant row, former Teardrop Lounge chef Alyssa Gregg melds German and Pacific Northwest cuisine to create contemporary dishes like duck egg nudels with chicory and Gouda. At sleekly elegant downtown restaurant **Grüner**, Saucebox veteran Chris Israel prepares "Alpine-inspired" cuisine, serving sophisticated takes on classics like schnitzel, goulash, roast meats, and savory dumplings.

The competition for Portland's best burger has always been

fierce, and newcomer **Foster Burger** will up the ante. Co-owned by Andy Ricker (Pok Pok, Whiskey Soda Lounge, Ping), Sel Gris chef Daniel Mondok, and Kurt Huffman of restaurant development company ChefStable, the 48-seat burger bar will emphasize signature hand-ground meats, hand-cut fries, and milkshakes.

North Portland favorite Lovely Hula Hands closed on New Year's Eve, but the owners are opening **Lovely's Fifty-Fifty** next door, featuring wood-fired pizza, seasonal salads, and six flavors of homemade ice cream. Nearby, Toro Bravo's John Gorham ventures into brunch territory with **Tasty & Sons**, which will replace the Wonder Ballroom's café.

Relocations: Andy Ricker has moved his **Whiskey Soda Lounge** across SE Division Street into a freshly remodeled space and expanded it into a 49-seat restaurant and neighborhood bar, complete with signature cocktail list and drinking snack menu that includes a few Pok Pok standbys like Ike's Vietnamese Fish Sauce chicken wings.

Reopenings: Portland's prix-fixe grande dame, **Genoa**, reopened on SE Belmont Avenue in early December with an extreme makeover, new chef David Anderson (formerly of Vindalho), and an adjoining café and enoteca, **Accanto**. Downtown's **Brasserie Montmartre** is back after a three-year hiatus with a classy new look and refined French bistro menu.

Rotating Toques: Chef Benjamin Parks has departed posh **Ten 01** in the Pearl District; he's replaced by Per Se/Bouchon alum Michael Hanaghan.

Matt Lightner returns from stages at two of Spain's temples of molecular gastronomy, Mugaritz and Ferran Adrià's El Bulli, to become the new executive chef at **Castagna**, following Elias Cairo's departure to run Olympic Provisions' meat-curing operation.

—Jen Stevenson

Press Release for Garnish Apparel.

MEDIA ADVISORY: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 22, 2009

CONTACT: Erica Lurie • Garnish Apparel • 503.522.6587 • info@garnishapparel.com

Have Your Art And Wear It Too

Local fashion designer and W+K Studio artist team up to create an exclusive collection of wearable art

PORTLAND, OR—April 13, 2009—Fashion designer Erica Lurie of Garnish Apparel and Portland painter/illustrator Sam Tudyk are combining their artistic talents to transform original artwork into a stunning collection of limited edition garments, which will debut at a First Friday reception at Tilde in Sellwood on May 1, from 6-9 pm.

Longtime fans of each other's work, Tudyk and Lurie are elated to launch their unique line of dresses and skirts, after collaborating for over a year on the planning and development of this bold marriage of illustration and fine fabrics.

"We love each other's designs and wanted to explore a way to bridge our two mediums," Tudyk said, "So we put our heads together and came up with this fresh concept of creating beautiful clothing based on real art pieces."

Tudyk, whose work is influenced by all types of communication--signs, symbols, characters and typography—and particularly by the hand-crafted quality of traditional correspondence, designed two exclusive patterns for this project. One pattern depicts elegant rows of old-fashioned letter envelopes and fountain pens, and the other is a collection of lines and triangles inspired by the decorative insides of intricately-detailed security envelopes.

"A few sketches of how this pattern might be incorporated into clothing led me to play with the triangle shapes that make up the folding back of an envelope, and envision them as panels of clothing—imagining how those shapes could wrap around a person just like in an envelope," Tudyk said.

Tudyk had her illustrations printed onto soft cotton fabrics, which Lurie then incorporated into her fashion designs to create uniquely chic wearable art. Tudyk's illustrations are reborn as patch pockets on A-line skirts, and as entire pattern pieces for Lurie's figure-skimming wrap dresses, which are sewn from organic cotton and hemp fabric.

"I find much of my inspiration from my fabrics," Lurie said. "Working with Sam's beautiful illustrations fills my head with ideas."

At the reception, guests can enjoy wine and light appetizers while browsing Tudyk and Lurie's collection of synergetic skirts and dresses, which will be for sale in two colors and a full range of sizes, and accompanied by a display of Tudyk's paintings of the same theme. Following the reception, Tudyk and Lurie's collection will be available at Tilde through Sunday, May 31. A selection of garments will also be for sale at Lurie's boutique, Garnish, which is located at 1524 NE

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Alberta St. Clothing production is limited—Lurie will create only two of each size in both designs.

The reception will be hosted by Tilde, a modern women's lifestyle accessories shop featuring an impeccably-edited selection of jewelry, handbags, and home decorative items, all of which are created hands-on by individual artists and design groups and are displayed along with the written story behind each item. Tilde is located at 7919 SE 13th Ave in Sellwood.

For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact Erica Lurie at 503.522.6587, or via email at info@garnishapparel.com.

Artists' Bios

Sam Tudyk, a graduate of Savannah College of Art and Design, moved to Portland in 2004. She works as a studio artist at advertising agency Wieden + Kennedy by day, and feverishly on her own artwork by night. Her work has shown and sold in galleries and stores nationwide for the past seven years. Pieces are available for viewing on www.tudyk.com, and available for purchase online at tudykdotcom.etsy.com.

Erica Lurie, a graduate of Montana State University, left her position as an apparel developer for Adidas to start Garnish Apparel over four years ago. Her designs are simultaneously classic and contemporary, emphasizing simple beauty and clean lines in fine fabrics, and her specialty is customizing the details of each garment for each individual customer. All her pieces are designed and produced on-site at her Portland boutique, located at 1524 NE Alberta St. Her work has been featured in Portland Picks, Nicolle Shops, and The New York Times.

Meet Your Farmer Profile: Ancient Heritage Dairy

Written for the May 2009 Portland Farmers Market newsletter and abridged for publication in MIX Magazine

Ancient Heritage Dairy

It's a sheep's, sheep's, sheep's world at Ancient Heritage Dairy, where flocks of freshly shorn Friesian and Lacaune ewes, spindle-legged newborn lambs in tow, graze the fertile organic grass and wild-herb covered pastures to which Paul and Kathy Obringer—Oregon's first and only sheep's-milk cheesemakers—attribute the deep, rich flavors of their artisan sheep's milk cheeses.

•

"The good grass, the good water," said Kathy, "That's what makes the cheese taste so good."

Tucked into the lush green foothills of the Cascade Mountains, southeast of Salem and just outside of Scio, family-owned Ancient Heritage Dairy is 80 idyllic acres of gently rolling hills, complete with a lagoon, big green barn, old-fashioned farmhouse, milking pen, and creamery, where the Obringers and two of their four children—Hank, 16, and 20-year-old Elle, an Animal Science major at Oregon State University, combine age-old techniques with modern methods to create their exceptional cheeses.

With the assistance of their woolly crew, the Obringers are currently producing light and buttery Valentine—a bloomy, soft-ripened sheep's milk cheese named after their favorite ewe, and Adelle, made from the same recipe but with a blend of sheep's milk and Ayrshire cow's milk from the farm's small herd of cows. Scio Heritage is the dairy's signature raw sheep's milk cheese, with a roasted, nutty flavor that's slightly sharper than its smoother creamier sister cheese, Hannah Bridge, a blend of sheep's milk and cow's milk. The Obringers also make a crumbly, tantalizingly salty Scio Feta, Rosa—a young, raw Pecorino Romano, the popular Opal Creek hard washed-rind cheese, and their new Black Pearl, a creamy cow's milk cheese coated in ash.



With backgrounds in the East Coast restaurant industry, marketing, publishing, and art (Kathy painted the watercolor hills printed on each Ancient Heritage label), Paul, 58, and Kathy, 60, never imagined they'd wind up artisan cheesemakers in Oregon. But their love for the "round, creamy, sweet, delicious" taste of sheep's milk, coupled with the discovery that two of their young sons were allergic to cow's milk, ultimately led them to pursue an organic, sustainably-run sheep dairy. With a typical workday lasting from 6 am to 10 pm, year-round, with only a small break in January before the intense mid-February lambing, it's not an industry for the faint of heart. But for the Obringers, the cheese makes it all worthwhile.

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“When we’ve been working all day and want a quick, healthy dinner,” Kathy said, “We make pasta with sautéed vegetables—whatever’s in the garden or the refrigerator—and shallots, onions, and Freddy Guys hazelnuts. Then we grate in some Hannah Bridge and throw in some chunks of Scio Feta, with olive oil and salt and pepper. Eating that, we think, ‘this whole day was worth it.’”

The Obringers began selling their unique cheeses in 2006 at the PSU Saturday Portland Farmers Market, where they still have a booth. They can also be found at the Hillsdale Market and PFM’s new King Farmers Market on Sundays.

“They can’t get rid of us,” joked Paul, who recently accepted a Portland Farmers Market Board of Directors position, as one of two market vendors on the 11-member volunteer board.

Ancient Heritage Dairy cheeses can also be found on the menus of notable local restaurants such as Nostrana, Bluehour and Paley’s Place, and at New Seasons Markets, Whole Foods, Food Front Co-op, Steve’s Cheese, Little Green Grocer, Foster & Dobbs and Provvista.

“We’re grateful that people like our cheese, and that they buy our cheese,” said Paul. “You have so many people who support the cheesemaker. We’re fortunate to be here, because Portland is such a unique market to start up in.”

PHOTO CREDIT

Sarah Henderson - www.sirenapictures.com

AVAILABLE ONLINE AT:

http://www.portlandfarmersmarket.org/sec_Experience/profiles/AncientHeritageDairy.php

Featured Produce Profile

Written for the May 2009 Portland Farmers Market newsletter

ASPARAGUS

Celebrated by the ancient Greeks as a post-winter invigorative and widely regarded as an epicurean delight worldwide due to the fresh, crisp flavors imparted by its succulent young shoots, asparagus—a member of the lily family— is so much more than your ordinary herbaceous perennial plant.

Rooted in the ancient Greek word for sprout, asparagus heralds the arrival of spring as early as February in some climates but more commonly makes an entrance in gardens and markets in April or May. Typically a resplendent shade of green, if covered with soil, asparagus can be harvested albino, and some Italian varieties are a regal purple color.

Asparagus' tender stalks are delicious chopped and stir-fried, grilled with olive oil and sea salt, roasted and tossed with a light lemon vinaigrette, and steamed or boiled and served with butter, hollandaise, or mayonnaise. It can also be pureed into pestos, made into soup, pickled, pancetta-wrapped, or added to savory dinner puddings, pasta dishes, omelettes, quiches, and risottos. It's also safe to consume raw.

Teeming with Vitamin K, folate, tryptophan, and Vitamins A, B, and C, asparagus is high in fiber and has strong cleansing and detoxifying effects, perhaps overly enthusiastically so if eaten in vast quantities. It is a natural aphrodisiac and helps treat urinary tract infections and warts, a compelling combination.

WORDCAKE COMMUNICATIONS • SELECTED WRITING SAMPLES

Application for Wieden+Kennedy Seeking, March 2008. I was one of 38 chosen from nearly 1600 international applicants to participate in a very curious recruitment and networking event at W+K's Portland headquarters.

Dear Jelly, Luker, and Robin:

Thanks for telling me I sound interesting and inviting me to participate in your Seeking process. I'm sure you say that to all the girls, but I felt special.

Regarding my qualifications to work in your creative department, well, I fall into the "people who've never created an ad in their life" category mentioned in your email.

I haven't any clips of fantastic ad copy I've written, but your parameters for this application were loose, so I decided to create a mock interview to tell you my story. I tried to remember all the questions I've been asked on prior interviews, both relevant and inane, to use as my template.

WK: Jen, tell us about your professional background. Have you experience as an ad writer, or at least as a Playboy Bunny?

JS: No, sorry, I've never worked in advertising or as a Bunny. Following my college graduation I was a journalist for a few years at The New Times, an alternative weekly in San Luis Obispo, California, where I wrote news and feature pieces on every topic from fashion to politics, the word count varying from a few hundred to 10,000 words. Then, for some reason still largely unbeknownst to me, I went back to school and became a teacher. I believe this was during my "want to make the world a better place" phase. When every pair of Banana Republic slacks I owned was ruined by tempura paint, paste, and tiny Cheetos-stained fingertips, I entered the corporate world as an admin for a large energy company. When I tired of churlish, lecherous and condescending executives requesting coffee, personal application of Band-Aids, and "a turkey pesto sandwich, exactly the same as I had last week, haven't any idea where it came from, it was in a black box is all I can remember," I left the corporate world and went traveling. I returned from my cliché soul-searching European journey a month ago, and decided it was time to devote myself to a career that truly matched who I was and what I was about. Something that would make use of my passion for writing, my multi-dimensional viewpoint of the world, and my odd sense of humor. Advertising seemed perfect. Then I saw your ad on craigslist. Coincidence? Perhaps.

WK: Do you know anything about Wieden+Kennedy or did you just think our ad was neat-o?

JS: I actually did know exactly who W+K was, thanks to my friend Brian. He works for PICA, as a Tireless Advocate. Sometimes he's so tireless we don't answer his calls and hide when we see him coming down the street. He works in the W+K building, and occasionally I visit him there. This past Halloween, he invited me over to the office to pet his pony. Shocked and disgusted, I declined, but then he revealed that there was in fact, a real pony in the building. I



came over and admired it. It appeared placid enough, but I did not pet it. I don't like horses. Everyone thinks it will be robots or maybe ferrets that take over the world someday, but I suspect it will in fact be horses. They are much smarter than they let on, and have wicked-sharp hooves and nasty senses of humor. After we viewed the Seemingly Innocent Lobby Pony, we took the elevator upstairs to investigate a rumor that W+K was distributing free cupcakes and milk. This was true, so we ate two each and pocketed some Sweet Tarts we found lying abandoned on a table, then just for fun and memories, took pictures of ourselves sitting in The Nest. An authoritative-looking fellow saw us doing this and strode purposefully in our direction, so we left. It was a lovely party though, thank you.

WK: Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten? Forty-seven?

JS: My five and 10-year plans are relatively similar: to be working in creative communications, love what I do and be respected for it. Wherever that places me on the professional ladder is where I'll be. In 47 years, I'd like to be writing novels from my cottage in The Cotswolds.

WK: Do you water your houseplants in a timely manner?

JS: No.

WK: What is Your Worse Work Habit?

JS: Sending bawdy emails.

WK: What is your Best Work Habit?

JS: Sending bawdy emails. They are very popular. I was informally voted "Number One Morale Booster" at my last job, largely based on my emails and my tireless work in founding and promoting "Pacific Power Happy Hour," which was a huge hit with the Scots who were still left at the company after its morale-depleting change in ownership.

WK: What do you do in your spare time? Are you a Well-Rounded Individual?

JS: I would like to think so. I have many hobbies. I try to spend a couple hours per day writing. Short stories, blog entries, novels, emails to friends. I take pictures of pocket ninjas and frame them along with pithy and imaginative quotes. I absolutely love traveling. I speak Spanish already, but after my recent trip to Europe I decided to take French language classes and I can now tell people my name in French and ask directions to the nearest boulangerie. I am passionate about food and love to eat out and cook in. My roast chicken is superb and my greatest weakness is champagne. I am a champion aimless meanderer, I find a lot of my inspiration comes to me on long walks through the city, or predictably, in the shower. I volunteer for the Portland Farmer's Market and Planned Parenthood, and am a member of Willamette Writers and the Slow Food Movement.



WK: Our company is highly respected and all-around super cool. What would you bring to the table?

JS: I may have no formal advertising copy writing training, but I'm very creative, flexible, and malleable (in a good way). I have diverse writing styles and can and will write anything. I believe in knowing nothing about something at first so that I can eventually know everything, if that makes sense. I love words more than anything, even chocolate and Chef Tom Colicchio. Taped to my computer screen at home is an old fortune cookie fortune that reads, "Words are the only things that last forever." I live my life by this sentiment. I'm also fun to have around the office, which I've always considered important in a new hire.

WK: Did you make New Years resolutions for 2008?

JS: Of course, although naturally I have no intention of keeping most of them. They are as follows: Develop meaningful career in creative communications. Write more in spare time. Faff around less. Truly read up the goings-on in Darfur, instead of just pretending to know what people are talking about at parties. Actually follow the washing instructions on my delicates. Cease and desist spending Saturday nights in the M bar on NW 21st, at least until smoking ban goes into effect. Be more mysterious.

WK: What are your philosophical views on advertising?

JS: That it should both manipulate and motivate, for good or evil, hopefully good.

WK: Do you have any references who will actually cop to knowing you?

JS: A few, which are available upon request.

I suppose I could go on for 20 pages, but I will cease and desist now. Thank you for the opportunity to apply for a creative position at Wieden+Kennedy. Should you wish to contact me, I can be reached at 503.961.2526 or I can be found at the M Bar on NW 21st on Saturday nights.

Sincerely,
Jen Stevenson

*Investigative story for
New Times Magazine in San Luis Obispo, CA.*

Pointing Fingers

*The Heated Debate Over a Nail-Bonding Chemical
Touches on Issues of Health, Money, and Race*

As she has done nearly every day for 22 years, manicurist Karen Ann Sheridan opens the front door of her small downtown San Luis Obispo nail salon, the Nail Buff, at 10 a.m.—barely beating her first client of the day, who arrives with two steaming cups of fragrant tea from a nearby coffee shop.

Not merely a nail salon, Sheridan's cozy little room, with its softly painted walls and tiled floors, is a showcase for local art and wares, a friendly stop for the building's resident cat, and a haven of familiarity for her clients, some of whom have patronized her salon since she first opened.

As Sheridan meticulously files, buffs, bonds, and paints her client's acrylic nails, the two women chat nonstop, catching up on two weeks worth of personal news. Fresh air filters in through the open front windows along with the noise of light morning traffic on Marsh Street, diluting the caustic smell of chemicals.

Sheridan's nail salon is one of more than 7,166 in California, and she is but one of 88,758 licensed purveyors of this prolific industry built on vanity—an industry that is positively flourishing, especially here in the state of California.

But beneath the facade of shiny polish and flawless tips rumbles a growing undercurrent of concern regarding this profession, surrounding an issue that many call a matter of safety and legality and others refer to as a race war.

At the heart of the controversy is methyl methacrylate, referred to in the trade as MMA, a chemical substance commonly used decades ago by manicurists in acrylic nail procedures but now prohibited in California and 29 other states.

When acrylic nails emerged in the early 1970s, MMA—used in Plexiglas, Lucite, joint replacements, and numerous dental products—seemed well-suited for acrylic nails because of its bonding properties.

The process of applying acrylic nails involves mixing powdered acrylic and a liquid bonding chemical into a paste that's brushed over the natural nail or an artificial form or tip. When the paste hardens, the surface can be reshaped and painted. As the acrylic grows naturally with the nail, a "fill" is necessary, which involves filling the gap between the acrylic and the cuticle.

It didn't take long after the advent of acrylic nails for complaints to start pouring in about MMA. The substance was blamed for a slew of unpleasant afflictions, ranging from skin allergies to permanent loss of the nail plate, respiratory system damage, and permanent loss of sensation in the fingertips.

Acrylic nails formed with MMA were often referred to as "dental acrylics" or "porcelain nails," and sometimes women who jammed a finger too hard or caught one on something had the entire nail cracked off or ripped from the finger.

In 1974, after being deluged by complaints about the side effects of MMA, the Food and Drug Administration banned it from nail products, calling it a "poisonous and deleterious substance."

When the FDA took legal action against one manufacturer of MMA, obtaining a preliminary



injunction in 1974, others quickly switched to a legal chemical called ethyl methacrylate, or EMA, and manicurists rapidly followed suit.

That action put a halt to MMA use in salons across the country, but it also rather effectively put a stop to further consideration or research on the substance, leading to questions about the true danger of MMA that linger today.

While MMA was prohibited in nail products, its uses in the dental industry are still quite legitimate, and so it is legally produced today. And according to many in the nail industry, MMA is continuing to find its way into California nail salons illegally, to the detriment of unsuspecting clients who are unknowingly exposed to it.

And the salons can use the banned chemical with little chance of getting caught or paying too high a price if they do.

Statewide, California boasts more than 36,000 establishments licensed under the state Bureau of Barbering and Cosmetology that offer barbering, manicurist, cosmetology, electrology, and esthetician services.

A mere 15 Bureau of Barbering and Cosmetology inspectors are charged with keeping an eye on these facilities, which many within the nail industry say indicates a staggering lack of oversight.

“I don’t know that there’s a shortage [of inspectors],” said board representative Tracy Weatherby. “That’s just how many we have.”

In California, a nail salon caught possessing or using MMA receives a first-offense fine of \$25. A second offense garners a \$50 penalty; a third brings a mere \$100 fine. Beyond a third offense, or if a business refuses to pay a fine, more serious regulatory action is taken, Weatherby said, such as revoking a license.

Weatherby insists that the state’s policing job is adequate.

“The inspectors do daily inspections on a regional basis, and we also do targeted inspections in response to complaints we receive. So we do both random and targeted inspections,” she said.

* * *

In the midst of this contentious issue are the discount nail salons. Crammed into crowded strip malls, hawking their services in busy shopping centers, these salons—predominantly run by immigrants and minorities—offer acrylics and other nail services for practically half the price of more upscale salons and usually with no appointment necessary.

While most upscale salons, like Sheridan’s, charge around \$50 for a set of acrylic nails and \$30 for a fill, discount salons start at \$25 and \$15, respectively.

As a result, they are not only attracting scores of new customers, but are also drawing valuable customers away from more expensive salons—luring them in with the promise of low prices and the convenience of walk-in service.

But many in the nails industry regard discount salons with distaste, saying that clients who frequent these salons are getting what they pay for. They accuse discount salons of cutting corners to reach the bottom line—by illegally using MMA, ignoring proper sanitation standards, and failing to undergo adequate training.

Discount salons are charged with acquiring MMA off the black market, and there are rumors of MMA being put into legitimately marked containers to fool inspectors or clients’ queries.

Critics say that the use of MMA weakens nails and damages the nail plate, making nails susceptible to intrusive fungi and infections.

“The main thing is that they’re working with illegal, contaminated products and not sanitizing tools—sanitizing tools properly is not inexpensive,” said Sheridan, who uses an established product line called OPI Products Inc., based in North Hollywood.



Sheridan said her clients have come in with maladies they believe were contracted at discount nails salons, which she attributes to MMA use as well as improper hygiene.

"I've had to send clients to the dermatologists with infected cuticles and fungus conditions. I've had to send them before I could even work on them," she said.

Yvonne Johnson, owner of Nail Perfection in Arroyo Grande and a manicurist of 31 years, tells a similar story. She knows the effects of MMA, she said, because for several years before the substance was regulated she used it herself, with less than desirable results.

"Years ago I used MMA because it was the only thing available; I got it through dental suppliers," she said. "We very badly damaged nails back then, cracking the nail plate, deteriorating the nails."

Critics allege that discount salons obtain MMA illegally off the black market for a fraction of the cost of legitimate nail products. The substance is also brought in from overseas countries like China and Japan, as well as from Mexico, and sold underground.

"The reason for the low cost of discount salons is because they are using MMA," Johnson said emphatically. "For a gallon of product that we buy from the supplier it's \$200 or more; they get their product from their own suppliers and they pay anywhere from \$15 to \$20 a gallon, and they won't tell anyone where they're getting it from."

* * *

Across town from Sheridan's salon, Nancy Mai quietly confers with an employee of her salon as the two consult an appointment book lying on the front counter of her nail salon, Marigold Nails in SLO's Marigold Center.

For the time being, all three of her stylists are between clients, and they chat softly between their stations, which line the walls of the clean, well-lit salon.

Mai, who's mother owns both the store she manages and Fresher Nails on North Chorro Street, charges \$25 to

\$30 for a full set of acrylic nails and \$18 for a fill. Her salon services about 50 to 60 regular clients, plus walk-in customers.

When the subject of the nail salon wars arises, the pretty Cal Poly student's face darkens slightly.

"There is nothing we are doing differently from the more expensive salons," she said firmly. "We use good products; we use OPI products, the same quality that other salons use."

As she speaks, Mai's story reveals an ugly side of this issue with a local edge.

In the two months that the Mai women have owned this salon, Nancy said, she has already received a harassing phone call from an unidentified female. Her mother's store has received four in a year and a half.

"We've been harassed; they call us up and threaten us. They tell us, 'We know you're using MMA. That's illegal. It's against the law. That's why your services are so cheap. We're going to get people to come down and close your business,'" she said, her voice rising slightly with indignation.

"It happens to other salons, too. There's nothing we can do about it. We try star-69ing them, but the numbers are blocked," she said, referring to the phone service that redials the number of the last incoming call.

Mai attributes the fact that her prices are half of more expensive salons to a willingness to make less profit, not to cutting costs by using inferior products.

"These are standard prices," she said. "The prices those salons are charging are ridiculous. One reason our prices are low is to accommodate students. Students can't afford to come in and pay \$50 for a set of nails."

Mai doesn't see the nail salon wars as a race issue, simply a matter of economic sparring.

"Because discount salons are cheaper, places that charge a higher amount don't get as many clients, so they're



always coming up with reasons to justify their prices—they say, “They use inferior products; we use better, more expensive products,” she said.

Her voice softens when she speaks about the allure of the nail industry as a competitive economic outlet for such immigrant minorities as the Vietnamese.

“It’s hard to find a job these days,” she said. “Coming from another country, it’s really hard to find a job. And to be a manicurist, you just have a certain amount of training, a certain amount of beauty school, and you can start working, making a living.”

She shrugs a little when considering what the Mais plan to do about the harassment.

“My mom said we’re not doing anything wrong. So if they want to keep calling, they can,” she said.

* * *

And while those amounts seem small, the industry is awash in money. In 1998, American women—and men—spent \$6.5 billion on nail services, including acrylics, manicures, and pedicures. Acrylics are by far the biggest moneymaker, according to industry statistics compiled by Nails magazine.

Jennifer Hajali, vice president of Anaheim-based CA Chemicals, which manufactures both MMA and EMA, dismisses the claims that MMA is harmful to nail technicians and clients.

She believes that the nail salon wars are fueled not by concern for the health and safety issues in the industry, but by economic interests of brand-name marketing companies and upscale nail salons who are angry about losing business to discount salons.

“Marketing companies are really putting out a lot of information, trying to manipulate the market into thinking they need to spend a lot to get a good product or a safe product,” she said.

Hajali said that CA Chemicals sells MMA and its acceptable alternative, EMA, for approximately the same price—\$149 for a gallon of MMA liquid versus \$152 for a gallon of EMA.

“Recently it’s been reported that there’s a humongous difference between the two, but the \$15-to-\$200 ratio is straight out of an OPI brochure,” she said.

“I believe this has a lot to do with politics,” Hajali said. “People are using the MMA issue as a way to try and scare people out of going into the competition’s stores.”

“This has become a huge issue in the last five years,” she said. “You’ve seen a huge explosion, especially in the Vietnamese community, of discount nail salons, and now salons that are charging \$50 to \$60 are competing with salons charging \$25 for the same service.”

The most prominent ethnic presence in the discount nail salon industry are the Vietnamese. Cyndy Drummey, editor in chief of Torrance-based Nails magazine, estimates that nationally, about 40 percent of nail technicians are Vietnamese. That figure in California is considerable higher, she said, upwards of 70 percent. And it’s projected that almost 90 percent of new nail industry growth is by Vietnamese and other minority proprietors.

Hajali argues that the nail industry is expansive enough to handle the new growth, and that discount nail salons are actually doing the industry a favor by introducing scores of new customers who would otherwise be repelled by the high prices of more upscale salons.

“There’s room for everybody in this industry,” she said. “This is the United States and you can charge whatever you want for your services. So for these companies and salons to be accusing discount salons of charging so little because they aren’t spending enough money on products isn’t fair. Most of the people working in these discount salons are working on a very small percentage, and if they’re willing to, that’s their right.”



Sheridan disagrees.

"I can't believe that they would buy the same products I buy and pay the same price I pay and be able to offer the price they do without using inferior products—it's impossible," she said.

* * *

For more than two decades now, the United States nail industry has attracted scores of assimilating immigrants and minorities.

Like the throngs of Europeans who entered the United States' textiles industry en masse in the early 20th century, over the past few decades immigrants have been drawn to the nail industry because of the sparse amount of training and time required to start up a business—and because a mastery of the English language is not required.

Morris Goatley, president and chief executive officer of Gold Coast Education Inc. and owner of San Luis Obispo Beauty College, estimates that about 10 percent of the students that go through his manicurist license program are Asian American, a low amount due to the fairly homogenous ethnic makeup of this area.

Goatley has watched the discount salon controversy flare for decades from his vantage point in the industry. He has run SLO Beauty College since 1972, and he served on the state board of barbering and cosmetology from 1973 to 1977, after being appointed by then-Gov. Ronald Reagan.

He remembers well the stir MMA created 25 years ago when the government banned the substance while he was serving on the state board, and he's watched it continue to this day.

One problem with many immigrant-run discount nail salons, he said, is that there are complicated culture gaps and an ignorance of American regulation, which leads to a slew of problems.

"Their culture doesn't blend in with American culture as far as the regulation we have in the United States is concerned, compared to in their country, and they don't understand why they have to get a license and follow certain regulations," he said.

Acquiring a license, while requiring considerably less training than earning, say, a college degree, is not necessarily a simple process.

The state of California requires that those desiring to become licensed as a manicurist be at least 17 years old and obtain 400 hours of training in a state-approved program before taking a written and practical state exam to earn their licenses.

These programs are not inexpensive either. Typically, a student can expect to pay more than \$800 for 400 hours of instruction. At San Luis Obispo Beauty College, the 11-week program costs \$2,000 plus the cost of tools. Fortunately, the school has worked out an agreement with Allan Hancock College, which pays students' tuition costs so that they only have to pay for tools.

When aspiring manicurists don't get licenses, opening a salon bereft of going through the legal procedure, Goatley said, they bypass valuable training that helps them provide a safe, hygienic service.

"I'm not picking on anybody, but I know there are a lot of diseases and funguses coming out of those salons," he said, acknowledging that the problem is more prevalent in the Bay Area and Los Angeles, which house thousands of discount salons run by immigrants.

Drummeley believes that the issue is tinged with racism, especially targeted toward the Vietnamese because they are joining the ranks of the nail industry in droves.

"I think there is a racial component," she said, "I think that's not an uncommon business trend, what you see happening in the nail industry. There are plenty of other businesses you can look at where an immigrant wave has



come in, bringing drastically different business practices into the market, and it changes things.

“In discount salons the strategies are high volume, low prices; it’s a strategy that is difficult to compete with. It’s like McDonald’s vs. the mom-and-pop store. I don’t think it’s fair to say they’re all bad or dirty; there are bad salons in every category.”

Hajali agrees that the battle between established upscale salons and minority-run discount salons has created what she calls a racism-tinged “witch hunt.”

“I absolutely think it has become a race issue,” she said. “Marketing companies have turned this into a race issue. I’ve been in trade shows where company sales representatives were out there telling people what they can do to compete with the ‘Asian’ salons.”

“They were saying things like, ‘Let’s go out there and get those Asian salons!’ It was like a witch hunt.”

* * *

In 1978, when Sheridan entered the nail business, she was a local pioneer—opening the first nails-only salon in the county. “The nail salon industry was nonexistent at the time,” she said. “Which is one of the reasons I decided to go into the business.”

Today it’s a different story. In this county alone there are nearly 100 nails-only salons and hundreds of beauty salons, many of which offer nail services.

That, according to Sheridan and Johnson, has led to a lack of oversight.

“There aren’t enough inspectors for the whole state,” said Sheridan emphatically. “I feel that they should inspect us yearly, and it’s always a surprise inspection as it should be, like an audit.”

“I welcome it because if you operate your business correctly you should have no fear of a state board

inspector,” said Sheridan, whose last inspection occurred two years ago.

“I get inspected probably every third year; it’s more frequently now than before,” she said. “They’re tightening up on rules and regulations, especially since the Vietnamese came into the business; in that way it’s been a benefit for us.”

But opinion on the effectiveness of inspections also seems to be divided over racial lines.

Mai says her salon has already been inspected by the state board twice in a matter of months, and Fresher Nails has had three visits from state inspectors in a year and a half—a curious contrast to the one visit every three years experienced by Sheridan.

“The inspector came by right before we took over, and then he came last month,” she said. “He says he makes it to all the salons.”

Mai laughs when asked if there is a shortage of regulation in the nail industry.

“No, definitely not,” she said emphatically.

Jen Stevenson typed this story with real, unpainted nails.

Written for the Portland State University School of Business's Graduate Business Program brochure.

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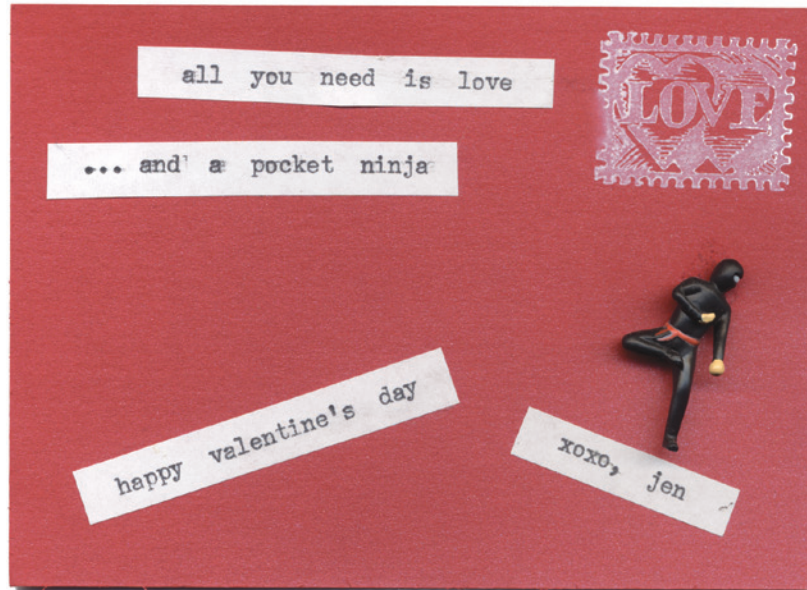
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