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## THE ONE WHO DARED      No. 1

Photo of Raphael, caption – Raphael ... "Life for me is a challenge."

## of MIGHT and MANE      by Anne Batt

*In a whirl of a week, Raphael and his partner, Leonard, have just pulled off a hairdressing coup by doing the hairstyles for London's four most talked-about fashion shows: the Fashion House Group show, the first Jean Patou read-to-wear collection, the Guy Laroche couture collection and the first Associated Fashion Designers' show.*

Only one thing stops him as he rip-roars through life with all the lights at green – the chance to dare.

**He Dared** - to run away from home at 14 to join the French Foreign Legion.

**He Dared** – to become a bullfighter at 15.

**He Dared** – to be a frogman at 19.

And six years ago, when he was 24, he dared to come to London, a nobody and roar like a lion in the peacock pastures of coiffure.

Now with partner Leonard, RALPHAEL SANTA ROSSA, is king of a gilded castle in Mayfair – the House of Beauty in Upper Grosvenor Street – and his dynamism is having a depth-charge effect on British hairdressing.

What is he like – this slim-hipped Svengali of the scissors who launched the short cut in London three months ahead of Paris? This mercurial maestro, half-French, half-Italian.

Well, I'll tell you:

He's the most impossible man I've met – which is possibly why most women adore him. "Mama mia, your hair," he says by way of introduction, and before I can say: "Raphael, I presume" he has commandeered my comb, snapped it, produced another and is combing order into my Yorkshire terrier tangle.

And we're off. Ink-blue E-type gobbling up the night air as he accelerates into a full-throttle explanation of the restless energy that is driving him to the top.

"Don't know how to relax," he says, speedometer flicking past 90.

"Life for me is a challenge. An endless search for perfection in everything I do. "At first, it was enough to be a dare-devil. That's why I ran off to Spain to be a bullfighter. I was 15 – a wild one. Couldn't have cared

less about girls – I was in love with danger. If the police hadn't dragged me home to my parents in Italy, I'd be a bullfighter today. I NEVER WOULD HAVE BECOME A HAIRDRESSER."

But he has – and how:

- Judy Garland smiled sweet serenity as he became the first hairdresser to shear off those famous locks ...
- Elizabeth Taylor called him to the Dorchester during her illness ...
- And sitting in the luxury lap of a private cubicle at his beauty emporium monied matrons pay him eight guineas for a cut and set.

### **Challenge**

But the five-story House of Beauty – one time home of Schiaparelli – is only the melting pot for ideas that have rippled out of the length and breadth of hairdressing since he decided eight years ago "that to make a woman look more of a woman was the most challenging thing of all" and followed his father's footsteps.

Crazy, they called him when he bluffed his way into his first salon in Switzerland. "I'd no references because I had no proper training, apart from watching my father ...said they'd arrive in two weeks. By that time, I'd so many clients they were begging me to stay."

He hated the frizz and fuss of razor-cut hair set with clips. Used instead scissors and rollers, just invented, and completed the set with a brush. "I wanted hair to move to be soft, to look like REAL hair. Looking and learning I took my new technique to 20 salons throughout Switzerland, staying two weeks, then moving on."

Six months cutting capers in Germany – "Still being called crazy; still getting more clients than I could cope with." He became a stylist for (crossed out)... "By now, I was utterly convinced my convictions were right. Someone was needed to sweep the artificiality out of hairdressing."

Armed with five languages, driven by ambition, he arrived in the West End – for a day's work. "The salon closed the day I arrived so they put me out to grass in Romford. But it wasn't long before I was doing 250 sets a week – driving myself into the ground with work. Six months later they gave me my own salon in Wanstead, started advertising me in the Underground.

Then he joined Vidal Sassoon "and for the first time, I'd found a kindred spirit. "We became fanatics and started criticizing each other if there was a single hair out of place. We were cutting life into hair – making it move, swing, be free."

Then, 2 ½ years ago, I went into partnership, opening a tiny salon (five stations, one cubicle) in Duke Street. But the smallness of the salon caged him. Clients like Princess Lee Razziwill had to wait their turn standing.

### **Dare devil**

And when, after working until 11 pm one day, I heard that the house on Upper Grosvenor Street was for sale, the old dare devil asserted itself again. "I wanted to be the first person to offer women top-to-toe beauty under one roof. Leonard, my partner, was keen. And like everything else, I rushed into it like a bull at a gate."

Now, eleven months later, with a staff of 42, over 8,000 square feet of floor space and a resident beautician, Gerard McCann boutique, sauna bath imported from Finland and a gilded salon, Raphael and Leonard are soft-selling beauty.

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For rest of his bio and what happened after, check [www.helenoppenheim.com](http://www.helenoppenheim.com) – go to About, Raphael and <http://www.helenoppenheim.com/hairthen-2/raphael-portfolio-page/>

