



MEET THE HEAD GIRL

If you thought becoming a hairdresser was a dead end job, you've not met Rochdale's Melissa Timperley. She's a cut above





Above: The cutting edge interior
 Left: Melissa, a winner at the British Hairdressing Awards
 Below: The striking exterior of her Tib Street salon



WHAT do you say when your bright-as-a-button teenage daughter tells you she wants to quit school and become a hairdresser?

Of course, there's no shame in joining the trade but you could be forgiven for thinking it's not a natural home for a 16-year-old who has shown every sign of being a real over-achiever.

That was the dilemma facing Joanne and John Timperley when their eldest daughter Melissa, head girl at Wardle Academy near Rochdale, announced she was not taking A levels and would instead begin a career cutting hair.

'Melissa was a great student with ten GCSE A grades,' says Joanne. 'So yes, we did everything we could to convince her to take her A-Levels and so did her teachers.'

Mothers know best most of the time but, in this case and with the benefit of hindsight, Joanne admits: 'I stand corrected. It's not a dead end job and I now realise that British hairdressing is considered to be the best in the world.'

Not only is Melissa, now 24, one of the rising stars of the UK industry but she also has her own flourishing business in one of the coolest parts of Manchester.

She opened the Melissa Timperley Salon in an architecturally striking new building in the Northern Quarter's Tib Street just before Christmas and word about her talent spread like wildfire across social media. At the time of writing, the salon was just about fully booked for more than a month ahead. Melissa is noted for her precision cutting skills as well as becoming a Wella Master

Colourist with a near perfect score of 96pc.

But the path to her success had a few rocks. She started with Sassoon in Manchester, gaining 'distinctions' in the notoriously difficult Sassoon Classic and Creative tests. It was a steep learning curve with an initiation which included cleaning out the toilets.

'I did worry about her in the early years,' says Joanne, who has gone from full-time mum to part-time helper running her daughter's admin at the salon. 'Starting as an apprentice meant cleaning and scrubbing; you don't get mollycoddled. But she stuck with it and we are extremely proud of her.'

The hard graft brought its rewards. While her younger sisters, Hannah and Jessica, pursued academic paths, Melissa was selected as a member of the four-strong Fellowship

for British Hairdressing FAME Team, which delivers hair styling presentations at major shows in the UK and around the world, including one trip to South Africa.

She was also a finalist in the internationally recognised IT Girl Awards

run by Creative Head and a finalist in the British Hairdressing Awards 'Newcomer of the Year' run by Hairdressers' Journal. Awards have included being the prized Umberto Giannini Student of the Year.

Melissa, whose boyfriend is now a maths teacher at the school where they were students together, says: 'I'm a bit of a geek – I was really academic, a goody two shoes. But I wanted to be a hairdresser from the age of three and never anything else. Whenever there was a sleepover I was the one who plaited everyone's hair!'

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Melissa preparing a model for a fashion shoot

When she was looking to set up her own salon, she struck lucky with a landlord who was prepared to take a chance on her despite receiving 'better' offers for the building. He is obviously very astute as Melissa already has clients from Europe, the Middle East and Canada as well as fashion conscious Mancunians.

But it was a big step for one so young, even with a dad who runs a business consultancy group. 'I honestly didn't appreciate just how much was involved in terms of company registration, leases, tax, employment and building regulations, health and safety rules, dealing with the utilities...and a hundred other things simply to get up and running,' she admits. 'There were times when I thought it was all too much. But with every problem that gets solved I get stronger and more confident.'

While the paperwork is important, Melissa is very customer focused. 'The experience starts with the look and feel of both the exterior and the interior of the building,' says Melissa. 'We wanted it to have a very open, warm and welcoming feel from the outset.

'That meant paying a great deal of

that shows clients off to their best, the German salon chairs which have been ergonomically designed to curve around the client and the specially designed backwash supports that allow guests to recline in the best position when having treatment.' The interior of the salon is being featured in international hair industry magazines over the coming months.

The other aspect of the 'client journey' Melissa promotes is the individual attention, where each customer is seen by one hair designer for the full length of their visit, from the initial consultation right through to the completion of the work.

'What we do here is design beautiful hair – hairdressing is a very creative career, you can make of it what you want so long as you are prepared to keep learning. It's never given enough credit as a career but hair always needs doing and it's one thing you can't buy online.

'I sometimes think we do more good than doctors. We make people feel good, we improve their lives. They come in miserable and go out skipping!'

And has her mum come to terms with his chosen path? 'Oh yes, and, of

