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BUSH WHACKED

What's a girl to do in a post-Brazilian world? Let it grow. By Lindsay Van Gelder

The Bush is back. No, not as in Republicans. As in re-pubic-ing.

After years of being about as scarce as sensible shoes on the runway, pubic hair is suddenly a growth industry in the world of fashion. This past September, W ran a portfolio of Kate Moss, with shots of Moss stark naked and fully forested. A month earlier, *The New Yorker* published a Richard Avedon photo of Chan Marshall from the band Cat Power, fly unzipped, foliage exposed.

Then there was the Gucci ad showing a woman whose pubic hair had been shaped into the logo G. Hairstylist Orlando Pita, who sculpted the model's G spot with a straight razor, says that like head hair, body type, and much else in our appearance-besotted world, pubic hair inevitably makes a style statement: "It's an area of the body you can be playful with, whether you shave it or dye it or make a design in it or let it grow."

Given the popularity of the Brazilian bikini wax (both the everything-off version and the mostly offs that leave a tiny "landing strip"—and perhaps a strategically glued jewel or two), growing one's own pubic hair is the main thing that women *haven't* done with it lately. "Shaved-with-a-rhinestone, at this point, is a little ho-hum," says Beverly Hills waxer Nance Mitchell. "People are ready for a change, just like you'd change your hairdo."

One very famous actor is so well

known for his preference for extra furriness that Mitchell's staff have nicknamed that grooming style after him. But the most popular topiary of the moment is what Mitchell calls "the three-quarters." It's got full (albeit trimmed) pubic hair on top and is bare lower down. Business, in other words, is still good, Mitchell reports: "It's a *manicured* bush. And they're still getting their thighs and fannies waxed."

The waning of waxing may also be a matter of your viewing audience. "I stepped it up to a Brazilian three summers ago," says a New York City fashionista we'll call Jo. She was single at the time. Now she has a new boyfriend who happens to be a fan of fuzziness, "and he is shocked and appalled at the tampering I've engaged in. He says, and I quote here, he likes 'the path to the honeypot to be clearly marked.'" Even when she was single, many of the Manhattan metrosexual types she dated apparently took the Brazilian for granted, rather than regarding it as a turn-on. "These guys are so aware of and involved in spa treatments that they know all about waxing," Jo says; a woman who takes it all off is, for them, "just one of the putative perks of living in the big city."

Thirty years ago, pubic hair was the sexual frontier. *Penthouse* first bared it in 1970; *Playboy* a year later. But as the years wore on, the men's magazines began to reveal more and more. By the time they were "going pink" with leg-splayed nudity, pubic hair was considered not so much daring as in the way, and lack of hair eventually became the

porno standard. That the look also evokes Lolita made it erotically complicated—not to mention really perverse. (Of course, perverse is exactly what some people dearly love.)

Then in 1994, the J Sisters from Brazil began offering full-frontal defoliation to special clients at their New York City salon. Sure, it involved having hot wax poured on your most private parts, the Big Band-Aid Pull From Hell, and then itchy regrowth. It was nonetheless a sensation. Thong underwear and high-cut bikinis meant that plenty of women were already shaving or waxing at least somewhat. Some women felt the Brazilian wax was more hygienic, or just sexier. For others, it was a cool, insiders' way to excite a husband or lover. Or whomever. "It was a very bold, porn-y announcement—kind of like carrying a condom—that you might look like a nice girl, but you were always prepared to Do It," notes Rowena, a Los Angeles law student, who has since stopped getting Brazilians.

One problem among the *coñoscenti* seems to be that what felt thrillingly wild when it was a relatively underground phenomenon began to feel merely cheesy as it mainstreamed. (When everyone looks like a porn star, does anyone?) Such, of course, is the nature of fashion. The Brazilian's notoriety probably reached its apex in 2000, when the women from *Sex and the City* took a trip to the West Coast, where things went south. (Carrie, on her waxer: "I got mugged! She took everything I got!") (continued on page 177)

No pruning: A photograph
by Wingate Paine from the
1972 book *Mirror of Venus*.



THE BEAUTY CURSE

(Continued from page 129)

the glimpse of her breasts through wet cotton). That was in 1977, but the memory of that photo still leaves her steaming. "I was so taken aback," she continues. "People would look me less in the eye. But they looked at my breasts—a lot."

Of late, Bisset has discovered that maturity has its compensations. The mother of Joan of Arc; the mother of Jesus; the wife of Abraham—these have been Bisset's film parts in recent times. "Lots of cloaks, lots of robes," as she puts it. The strange thing, Bisset adds, is that after years of finding her breasts the object of intense public scrutiny, she loves the idea of "subjugating my physicality and being completely enrobed in heavy cloth." Well, for a while, anyway.

"And when you play plainer women, you often get better reviews," Bisset concludes, with a small sigh of resignation. "It's been a perception of mine that when you get rid of your chest, when you have less *poitrine*, people tend to take you more seriously; they really do. It's a quandary, though." After all, how much *poitrine* does one really wish to conceal to be taken seriously?

• **However, Like It or Not, the Only Way to Acquire a Normal Life Is to Lose Your Looks Completely.** This is, believe it or not, not something a lot of great beauties are desperate to experience. "I'd take gorgeous any day," says 47-year-old Dickinson. "Drop-dead gorgeous." However, all looks are tamed by time. Middle age is life's second greatest equalizer.

"There is an interesting study of attractive versus unattractive women," Garcia-Lopez says. "In the youthful part of their life, happiness is high among attractive people. But then later on in life, as attractiveness fades, the researchers found unattractive people happier than attractive people."

Why? "Because the unattractive people had to develop coping skills, social skills, interpersonal abilities," Garcia-Lopez says. "These are the things that are more stable during a life span. And therefore, by the time they get older, they've honed those skills." Whereas, she points out, "The attractive people don't have the opportunities to think, Well, if I don't have my beauty, what do I do? Because they are constantly appre-

ciated for their attractiveness."

Hutton knows just what Garcia-Lopez means. Every so often a mother tugs at her sleeve, a beautiful early pubescent in tow. "Do you think my daughter could become a model?" Hutton is asked. To which she invariably replies: "Well, why don't you shoot her in the head now?"

All around her she sees younger, equally stunning women "who are constantly told, 'You're beautiful-beautiful, fantastic-fantastic,' and that's what they get addicted to," she says. "You have an invisible hall of mirrors around you, and it's a very scary thing. And suddenly you become 41, 42, and suddenly they are looking at the young girl standing next to you. For the first time in your life! And the mirrors fall down."

She sighs. "We didn't know what we were when we were young. I kept thinking, What do they mean when they say, 'Just be yourself? What is this great personality I'm supposed to develop?' Then she turned 40. "Well, I know that by now," Hutton concludes. "If you have half a brain, you know it by now." ♦

BUSH WHACKED

(Continued from page 146)

By the end of this season, Samantha tried growing hers back because her boyfriend "likes a full bush."

In the current hair-friendlier climate, rap artist Peaches is pushing the shaggy envelope. Onstage, it's not unusual for her to have sprouts peeping out of her hot pants. Her video for "Set It Off" is a jokey paean to body hair, and her website features a Crotch Gallery. "Early reactions were enough to persuade her that this was an interesting taboo to break," says the London *Observer*, which goes on to quote Peaches: "Everybody thought I had a big thing about it, so I thought I would make a big deal of it. It is bound up with sexuality."

True words, according to New York City dermatologist Patricia Wexler, particularly since no one is certain what pubic hair is really for. It may provide cushioning or fan pheromones, but what it unquestionably does is serve as a signal of sexual maturity. "From an evolution standpoint it might have been a trigger to show that you could mate," Wexler says, "and the absence

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of it meant you were too juvenile."

That's why we'll probably see cycles of both the bush and the Brazilian in the future, according to Rose Weitz, author of *Rapunzel's Daughters: What Women's Hair Tells Us About Women's Lives* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). "There's a tension in our culture between looking female and looking youthful," Weitz explains. "In the '50s, Marilyn Monroe was female with a capital F, but her appeal was not about youth. Then in the '60s you had Twiggy and Audrey Hepburn, women whose bodies were prepubescent." Whether it's breast size, clothes, or pubic hair, Weitz adds, most fashion by definition can't last—at least as long as we ping-pong between the womanly and girlish ideals.

Maybe that's a cue to do what you want, either way. Sexually experienced women "know that body hairlessness is not the key to getting laid," says Susie Bright, editor of *The Best American Erotica 2003* (Touchstone). "There's a tiny, tiny number of men who really put a premium on that," Bright adds. "Hair is just not that big a deal one way or another!"

"Except on your head. Then having a lot is good." ♦