



Scrubbing up well

Feel a little blue? Do you keep catching colds and are generally rundown? Don't hibernate and wait for spring; treat yourself to a wash, brush and scrub up. Nick Hammond does just that and discovers fine gentlemen's grooming may just be the answer to what ails you...



I think I suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder. At this time of year, when the skies are leaden and my skin is depressingly white, I pine for the long, languorous afternoons of summer. Or even those dewdrop-laden, promise-filled mornings of spring. Just no more rain. Or wind. Or snow.

In a recent attempt to snap myself out of this seasonal malady, I think I may have stumbled upon a remedy, which, although it may cost a few pennies, appears to be money considerably well spent.

Firstly, I book myself into the barber of all barbers; Truefitt & Hill on St James's Street. I feel better the moment I walk through the door. Decorum wafts through the place along with the cologne and the delightful home-brewed pre-shave oil.

With quiet expertise, a team of three barbers snip and shave away solicitously. Ola, a charming girl originally from Lebanon, takes me under her wing and transforms both my appearance and my mood.

I can't remember the last time someone washed my hair – probably when I was a kid. It is instantly relaxing. A first-rate haircut later, then it's time for a traditional straight razor shave. Providing it's performed by an experienced practitioner, this bastion of male grooming is guaranteed to raise your spirits and self-esteem.

Complete with hot towels and unctions of every hue, this is the finest wet shave I've ever had by a country mile; it is closer than a baby's backside, with no rash, rawness or the slightest nick to go with it.

I find it intriguing that perhaps little more than 50 years ago virtually every man in Western civilisation would have shaved in this fashion, yet now it is regarded with trepidation by the uninitiated.

The ritual of traditional wet shaving with a straight razor demands thought, time and patience. And it is infinitely better for your skin – not to mention the environment – in comparison to the more favoured safety razor.

Truefitt & Hill offers one-to-one tuition for

the would-be straight razor shaver, with all the accoutrements, oils, badger hairbrushes and ointments your heart could desire. And they'll even polish your shoes at the same time.

I strode out onto the street a new man, full of vim and purpose. A short distance down the road to Jermyn Street was my next destination.

Floris is a perfumer of worldwide renown. But perhaps what is not quite so well known is, as well as the catalogue of classy scents it offers from its vaults, it also boasts a bespoke perfumery service. That means ladies – or indeed gentlemen – are able to create their very own scent, from scratch if necessary.

I've never been a big fan of aftershave, finding the overpowering, off-the-shelf colognes far too sickly, so I considered myself a tough proposition for any would-be perfumer to impress.

Shelagh Foyle took it all in her stride. After a warm greeting, she led me through a series of smelling exercises, using trademark scents from a delightful variety of antique medicine bottles.

Because the sense of smell is so little understood past the basics, concocting favourite perfumes is more an art than a science. Foyle probes to find out a little of her client's personality and preferences. What associations do you have with certain smells? Which do you tend to gravitate towards? Which are going →





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—to lift and invigorate your day?

I discover, for example, that I am one of a surprisingly large slice of humanity that can't smell sandalwood; and that my instinctive preferences are to opt for light, citrus-focused scents, as opposed to those drowning in spice and musk.

Once a series of 'base' or binding essences had been decided upon, Foyle guides me across another range of these building-block scents. And then it's time for her to do her stuff.

With the judicious use of a pipette and some scribbling and pondering, she finally offers her interpretation of my personal favourite.

Spreading a drop of scent on the back of my hand, she advises me to let it warm up. When I take a sniff, it is a revelation.

To my nose, the finished cologne is an elegant combination of citrus, ozone and sunshine. It reminds me of the purity of a Hebridean morning and the eager promise of a day's foreign holiday. It's called Havana Loch and it is now recorded, for antiquity, in the Floris ledgers. I can reorder it at my discretion. So, for that matter, can you. As I leave, my personalised bottle is packed and handed to me, complete with a printed list of its ingredients.

By now, in contrast to my shuffling form of

this morning, I can saunter through Mayfair with a cheerful whistle, despite the howling wind that snatches at my scarf. I have hit upon the antidote to the winter blues.

When I get back to my desk, there is a press release on it that claims gentlemen now spend more time every day grooming than women. I can jolly well see why!

For the first time this winter, I've got some energy and vitality back and while that is largely a case of mind over matter, who cares? For the sake of a little extra spending and a little extra effort, I've transformed my seasonal slump. What's more, I've transformed my regular grooming routine, too. Not a bad day's work. ☐

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