

THE HUMAN TOUCH

The Shears salon group celebrates 40 years in business in 2010. Matthew Batham discovers the secret of its longevity



Go into hairdressing – machines can't take over that job," was the advice given to Ken Cooper by his father back in 1961 when he was a 15 year-old school leaver. He took on board his father's words of wisdom, and in 2010 his successful Croydon salon is celebrating 40 years in business.

Ken undertook his three year apprenticeship – at a cost of 50 guineas – at a unisex salon in South London.

He followed this with a couple of jobs in barber shops, but he soon became disillusioned with his career progression. Aged just 18, Ken decided that the way forward was to open his own business and, in 1964, with some financial help from his father, he opened Ken's Salon in Hither Green, South London.

Five and a half years later, Ken recognised that the trends in men's hairdressing were changing – it wasn't all about short-back-and-sides anymore. Young men were looking to experiment more with their hair and Ken wanted to capitalise on this.

On the advice of a friend who ran a men's outfitters in Croydon, Ken was encouraged to consider the Surrey town for his next venture, and on 13 March 1970, Ken opened Shears. His salon offered men a service normally reserved for women; appointments, a separate

backwash area and refreshments.

Says Ken: "The learning curve in these early days was fantastic. In the first six months, we didn't take enough money to cover the rent of £25 per week. A lot of the time was spent pacing around the reception area trying to make the place look busy. Fortunately, I had the energy – and the commitment – to see it through."

Gradually business improved as new members of staff brought fresh enthusiasm to the salon. Within 18 months, it wasn't just the male clients that were interested in the new salon, their wives and girlfriends were also enquiring about appointments. At this point the learning curve got steeper.

Ken set himself, and the team, the task of learning how to cut ladies' hair and after just one day at the Sassoon Academy he realised he was entering an entirely new territory.

While the training budget rocketed, so did



business as female clients were welcomed into the salon.

The business grew from six styling stations to 27 within a four-year period. At this point, Ken decided he was ready for the challenge of a second Shears salon in Bromley, Kent.

Greater focus on management training

With a second salon came the need for a greater focus on management training, as Ken recognised the importance of having business-savvy staff at both sites.

The investment paid off and, at their peak, the two salons were attracting 1,000 clients per week.

Ken's on-going commitment to training led to the opening of the Shears Academy in Eltham, South London in 1984. Says Ken: "The Shears Academy remains one of my biggest achievements. It continues to prosper and is a wonderfully inspiring

environment, which maximises the potential of our apprentices. The ability of the academy team is something I am extremely proud of. Numerous businesses have been started by former students."

Following the initial success of the Academy, a third Shears salon opened in the same area in 1987, helping to establish the Shears brand.

A fourth salon followed in 1995, but for this one Ken decided it was time for a new approach. He decided to hand over some of the responsibility to his hairdressing-trained children, Alex and Claire, and a new name was chosen, Claus & Co.

"We felt it was time for a fresh, alternative brand," says Ken.

Both brands continue to prosper and maintain a strong and loyal client base. Ken credits much of the success to recognising the qualities and potential of his team

members, inspiring and encouraging them to be the best they can be and giving them the space to develop.

The other major element of Shears' success is a genuine love, on the part of Ken and his team, of delivering excellent service to their clients. "Doing a good job isn't good enough – it's about raising the bar and doing the absolute best for our clients," says Ken. "I enjoy the client contact immensely and I'm grateful for the part they have played in the success of Shears. The clients have helped to educate me with the diversity that they bring."

Concludes Ken: "The biggest challenge for me now is to continue to maintain the focus that has been part of the Shears Group – developing the best team to take the business forward." Something else Ken wants to do is continue to cut hair – because they haven't invented a machine that can do it yet! 🇬🇧

