

## GROOMING

WRITTEN BY EUGENE YIGA



# CLASSIC CUTS

Every day after school, Govan, born and raised in Cape Town, would walk down from St Paul's Primary in Bo-Kaap and spend the afternoon at his father's barber's shop. And even though it was a constant battle for the youngster to stay awake until it was time to go home, what he saw inspired him.

"I used to watch my dad cut hair and was fascinated by how he used the cut-throat razor and did his scissor cuts," he recalls. "I used to hear him chatting to people. I think it grew from that. I loved what my dad did, because he knew so many people. And barbering was a classic people's person career."

The same thing happened on Saturdays. As the youngest of nine kids ("my mother had enough to worry about!"), Govan would tag along with his dad and mess around in the barber's

*As a fourth-generation barber, Yogesh "Yogi" Govan knows a thing or two about the industry*

shop. He'd even practise cutting hair on crates in the backyard.

Sadly, Govan's father passed away in 1989, without them ever having worked together. A few years later, he joined his brother at the shop and has been a barber ever since.

"It was one huge shop, incorporating both hairdressing and barbering services, back in those days," he says. "But, over the years, after my dad died, the barber's shop fell away and the hairdresser became more prominent."

Govan's great-grandfather had travelled

from India to Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape to open a barber's shop in 1905, before returning to his homeland a few years later. His grandfather also made the journey to SA from the sub-continent to barber in Cape Town in 1929.

In 2004, Govan decided to install drywall partitioning and establish an "old-school" barber's shop. Initially a one-man operation, the place got busier over time, making expansion necessary. One chair became three. Three chairs became five. Five became six.

"It's a busy, buzzy barber's shop," he says. "You get your crazy month-end rush, doing 90 haircuts a day. And we're filling up our quieter days in the middle of the month because a walk-in becomes a regular."

Having such a thriving business, with locals and the odd celebrity as clients, presents challenges. One of these is

catering for businessmen, who walk in expecting to find a reception desk where they can make appointments.

"Our barber's shop is old-fashioned: you have to sit down and wait your turn," says Govan. "But a corporate guy wants to know exactly how long you're going to be, because he either has to go to meetings or be somewhere else. I've got to work it out. Six barbers running, guys sitting down, some wanting a quick buzz-cut, others opting for beard-styling. I've just gotten used to it recently."

Clients who don't know what style they want pose another problem, but the proliferation of related websites means many now have an idea of what they want a barber to do.

"But then you get a guy who has the wrong type of texture for the hairstyle," says Govan. "If the guy has short, fuzzy hair and wants a long, combed-back, slick style, it's a big challenge. The result could be a bit disappointing, as hard as we try to give him what he wants. But we do our best to perform miracles. My barbers are all experienced hands and nine times out of 10, the client leaves satisfied."

The idea of opening up another



## YOGI'S 3 TIPS FOR SUCCESS

**BE GOOD AT WHAT YOU DO.** If you have a skill, master it and pass it on to somebody else.

**KEEP QUALITY CONSTANT.** Your reputation is the most powerful form of advertising there is. Your haircuts are walking billboards.

**DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE QUEUES BEHIND YOU.** Worry about the gentleman in your chair and you'll never have empty seats.



PHOTOGRAPHER: FRANKELUS

barber's shop isn't top of mind for him right now. Still, he'd like to expand by launching a range of his own products. This will help him get his name out there and offer "little extras". He's also keen to open a barbering college.

"That would be brilliant, because there aren't any colleges in SA," he says. "And if I could one day get an opportunity to study or a sponsorship, I'd gladly grab it with both hands and make something great of it. I don't have any kids yet, but if I have a son one day, I'll give him clippers to play with, rather than a rattle!"

In the meantime, Govan will continue to do what he does best. Although management duties keep him away from the barber's chair quite often now, he loves meeting and chatting to clients from near and far.


"I don't have a lot of friends, but my barber's shop is my social spot," Govan says. "I've got a cool, easy-going relationship with most of my clients. They become friends. And I love my barbers. We're all willing to listen. If a guy wants to chat in the chair and he's in it for half an hour, we're going to chat. After all, we've got nowhere else to go!"

Govan also loves being able to give

## BARBER'S SHOP STATS

 Haircuts per day: 60-70

 Regular customers: 1 600 per month

 Famous faces: David Isaacs, David Kramer, HHP, Jaleel White (Steve Urkel from *Family Matters*), the Mi Casa guys, Oscar Petersen and Trevor Noah

advice. If he can't, he'll at least try to make the guy feel better when he gets off the chair. Apart from giving a client a great haircut or styling his beard, he considers that another job well done.

"We play an important role in defining a gentleman's image," he explains. "It's great to see a guy getting off the chair, looking sharp, with a smile on his face. Some clients say: 'I can face the world now. I look good. I'm more confident.' That's the barber's job." **DM**

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