



# It's hair today

Mustaches and beards of all shapes and sizes have come in and out of vogue as fashions changed over the centuries, but they are popular again today, and not just among men considered too lazy to shave

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PHOTOGRAPHY  
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have the flickable ash trays in the arm rest, suggesting another time.

Miller, 32, knows a thing or two about barbering. He grew up in a barber shop in Mansfield, northern England, where his dad still runs the same shop he's had for 40 years. His grandfather and great uncle were also barbers.

"There'd be a little spy hole in my dad's shop and when I was a little kid I'd jump on a chair and see who was in the shop and if there was nobody there I'd go and sit with him until a customer came in," Miller says.

"All the customers knew who I was. I'm sure most of them go in now and say, 'how's your lad going in Australia?'"

So what advice does he have on looking after a beard?

"Don't let it get feral. A lot of guys trying to grow a beard just let it grow and that's when it looks rough. You can still have a generally tidy look or do a bit of maintenance to get it where you want it to go."

Beards have fallen in and out of favour for various reasons over the centuries. In ancient times it was a sign of strength and bravery. Spartans used to partially shave cowards as a mark of dishonour. Alexander the Great made shaving popular, requiring it of his soldiers. For

philosophers, beards were a mark of their profession.

One person who knows all about the history of facial hair is Joanna Gilmour, curator of Jo's Mo Show at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra. Although she may not be mustachioed herself, she is a great appreciator of facial hair.

Gilmour was inspired to put together her exhibition after becoming curious about the trends she observed in male portraiture. Styles in facial hair reflected not just current fashions but prevailing cultural conditions.

"Different styles of facial hair fashion are a way of telling about attitudes about masculinity that prevailed at a particular time," she says.

"And it's almost as if as those ideas evolve or change, so too does the fashion that goes with it."

In the 1700s, when men wore wigs regardless of class or profession, clean-shaven was the way to go, as modelled by the likes of Captain Cook and Joseph Banks.

"That was the age of enlightenment and reason," Gilmour says. "Being clean-shaven was seen as a sign of being a civilised gentleman, and beards at that time were associated with madness or political radicalism."

The early 1800s became the age of the sideburn, when men slowly allowed their hair to creep down from their ears to their chin. Then in the 1850s, there was "an explosion of bushy beards".

Several historians have devoted time to studying this phenomenon, says Gilmour.

"A lot of those theorists pinned the emergence of the beard to different ideas about masculinity that came into play in Victorian times, when women were supposed to be very demure and pure," she says. "The flipside of that was that men were supposed to be strong and independent and forceful and protective."

That look was particularly embraced by a young Australian. "In that period with the Gold Rush and bushranging and that sort of thing, it's almost as if Australian men thought they were more masculine and independent than their English counterparts."

In the early 20th century, fashions influenced by the prevalence of men in World War I uniforms, and later Hollywood heroes such as Errol Flynn and Clark Gable, saw the diminishing of beards in favour of neater looks or fancy mustaches. By the 1950s, being clean-shaven was again the norm, symbolising a new social conservatism of the clean-cut modern family.

Then in the 1960s, everything changed. "By the 1960s, more revolutionary ideas come into play again with the counter-culture and hippies and all of that kind of stuff," Gilmour says.

In this era, having a beard didn't mean you were an aggressive barbarian; rather it indicated you were a sensitive guy in touch with nature.

"It's as if men are deliberately disassociating themselves from conservative values by sprouting facial hair," Gilmour says. "You see the classic example of throwing off all the ideas about what made a man and returning to nature – a powerful symbol of that rejection of clean-cut suburban life."

It's a variant on this theme that seems to have inspired the present generation, with beards favoured by artistic and alternative types.

The anchor, the chin strap, the chin puff, the soul patch, the toothbrush, the Fu Manchu, the French fork. There's a lot more to beards and moustaches than a few bushy bristles.

Men have been grooming, growing, trimming, waxing and shaving their facial hair ever since they figured out how.

It's a rite of passage – learning to shave or later, gingerly, growing your first beard, sometimes to discover that it's actually ginger.

But the approach one takes to taming the mane is a matter of individuality. A rugged menace that has to be dealt with daily? Or a canvas with which to create all manner of art?

In recent times, the beard has been making a comeback with guys sporting facial hair at a rate not seen since the 1970s. In the 1990s, anything more than a three-day growth was a sign you had slipped off the social radar and were just days away from tracksuit-pants and daytime TV.

But now hipsters, new folkies, and even celebrities and corporate types are embracing their bristles, leaving the razor on the shelf and opting for trimming scissors instead.

Beard appreciation blogs, websites and Facebook groups are popping up faster than De Niro's five o'clock shadow, offering grooming and growing tips with slogans such as "all you need is beard". Or "He who shaves is telling God, you made a mistake but I will fix it".

Once an endangered species, seen only on dads and certain 1980s actors, the moustache is also regaining popularity, thanks largely to Movember. What started as a charitable cause by a brave few in Melbourne has grown to become an international phenomenon with more than 1.9 million "Mo Bros" taking part.

Generation Y, with their appreciation for all things retro and a good dash of irony, are especially embracing the trend.

And with demand comes supply. A number of stores catering to male grooming have sprouted in recent years.

Jon Miller opened HQ Male Grooming in West End, in inner Brisbane, just on a year ago. As well as gentlemen's haircuts, the salon offers services for facial hair including reshaping, trimming and colouring.

He's definitely noticed more guys sporting facial hair coming through his door.

"Part of the drive is it seems to be a bit more socially acceptable now," he says. "Girls obviously do their nails and hair and everything else, but guys are a bit more limited, so with the addition of a moustache or beard or both, it reflects on that person's persona, whether it's short and well-kept, or whether it's a big grizzly."

Miller, who used to work in women's hairdressing, realised the demand for a more male-friendly environment. "Guys are starting to realise they don't have to go into an expensive ladies salon," he says. "And they don't have to have all the rubbish that goes with that. They can go into a more manly salon and have a more manly conversation."

There's no excess of estrogen here. The store is decked out in cool band posters such as Led Zeppelin, The Beatles and Oasis. Classic black barber chairs, worth \$6000 each new, line up in a neat row. Miller explains he got them from a store in Melbourne that was closing down. They still



**Grows on you:** Brisbane's Jon Miller, who runs HQ Male Grooming in West End, is a third-generation barber.

## MOs OF THE MOMENT

Female fashions might get more attention, but while women have only the hair on their head to play with, men have a whole face-full of follicles. Here are a few styles to experiment with.



### THE SOUL PATCH

Favoured by Beatniks and jazz musicians in the 1960s, the soul patch apparently made playing the trumpet more comfortable.



### THE HANDLEBAR

The classic wax-tipped moustache popularised by the British military. The Handlebar Club have been meeting in England since 1947.



### THE FRENCH FORK

Characterised by an obvious split in the beard, this look was adopted by the Father of Australian Federation Sir Henry Parkes.



### THE CHIN CURTAIN

The moustacheless beard made memorable by Abraham Lincoln and garden gnomes. A shorter version, the chin strap, is popular today.



### THE LUMBERACK

This full and manly beard provides extensive yet tidy coverage and goes well with a chequered shirt.



### THE BURNSIDE

Named after US general Ambrose E. Burnside, this look incorporates thick sculpted sideburns joined by an impressive moustache.

**On message:** The Beards - Facey McStubbleington, John Beardmann jnr, Johann Beardraven and Nathaniel Beard.



"There's a trend back towards earthy ideals in certain sectors of society and on the other hand men are embracing things like fatherhood in a way they'd never done before," Gilmour says.

"Men today are finding a way of being that accommodates traditional and non-traditional ideas of masculinity. It's an interesting phase at the moment - that's why beards are back."

While there are many styles to choose from, from the tiny soul patch favoured by Beatniks to the great Gandalf, for one bunch of blokes, the only way is all the way.

No Beard, No Good, is how Adelaide band The Beards succinctly put it in one song. Or *If Your Dad Doesn't Have a Beard You've Got Two Mums*. Recent hits off their third album include *You Should Consider Having Sex with a Bearded Man* and *I'm In the Mood... For Beards*. That's right, they're on to their third album. How many songs can you sing about beards? At least 38, apparently.

The Beards started out as a bit of a joke, a support act for their own band the Dairy Brothers. But they had to take things seriously when they got booked for a second gig.

They've always been hirsute, bass player Nathaniel "Beard" says. In their seven years of playing gigs, they've seen more and more guys getting on the bandwagon.

As their beards have grown, so has their fan base.

"The other thing that's grown is society's acceptance of beards," Nathaniel, 27, says. "When we started in 2005 that was not a good time to have a beard. There was a lot of beardism back then. And I use Brad Pitt as a benchmark. He didn't have a beard in 2005, but he's got a beard now. If he's got a beard, you know that beards are back. We think he was jumping on the bandwagon."

Nathaniel has had a beard since 2005, other than one little mishap in 2007, which he prefers not to remember. "I was clean-shaven in 2007 for a film clip, but we'll never do that again. That felt wrong."

He says life with a beard is "in a word, better".

"People with beards lead more satisfying lives than people without beards. I just think because it's natural to have a beard. It's like if you eat the right foods your body rewards you, you feel healthier and more satisfied. If you're a man, you're supposed to have a beard. Shaving a beard is an unnatural act.

"I'm pretty sure God has a beard and we were made in the bearded God's image."

The Beards' aim, they say, is to "restore Australia to the great bearded nation it once was".

"We love going on tour and we love the idea that in a few weeks from now several more people might have beards than before. We've always said that if one person grows a beard because of our band, then the last seven years will be worth it."

Even girls are getting in on the action. Female gig-goers with long hair are showing support for their bearded brothers by holding their hair in front of their face to form a mock beard.

"That's called 'bearding,'" says Nathaniel. "And it's a massive movement. It's a way for females to show their solidarity to their bearded male counterparts."

Instead of shunning the bearded male, women are embracing them - literally. "It's becoming more common for females to enter into policies where they will only go out with bearded men," Nathaniel says confidently. "In 2005 that would have been unthinkable. They would have had the opposite policy."

Certainly, the boys are doing their best to encourage that trend with their latest film clip.

Once upon a time, a gentleman wouldn't have considered going out with a beardless bloke. As Beatrice says in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, "What should I do with him? Dress him in my apparel and make him my waiting-gentleman?"

So do women like beards? Let's ask one.

"That's very much a generational thing," laughs Joanna Gilmour. "My mum was young in the '60s when anyone with a beard was seen as a hippy or draft-dodger or politically radical so she's not that fussed about beards."

"And then a lot of women of my generation, because there's so many guys adopting them now, including Hollywood stars, they're a lot more open to it. I don't mind at all. My husband's got a beard and I'm always encouraging him to grow it longer. But he never does."

"It's personal taste, but it's certainly something men aren't afraid to be doing any more."

The Beards' album *Having A Beard* is the *New Not Having a Beard* is now. They perform at The Zoo, Brisbane, on March 30 and SolBar, Maroochydore, March 31. Jo's Mo Show is on at the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, until April 1 or visit it online at [portrait.gov.au](http://portrait.gov.au)