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Dust off your razors – baby-soft skin is back

Some devoted beard wearers have already had their close shaves. So if grooming has moved on, should you?

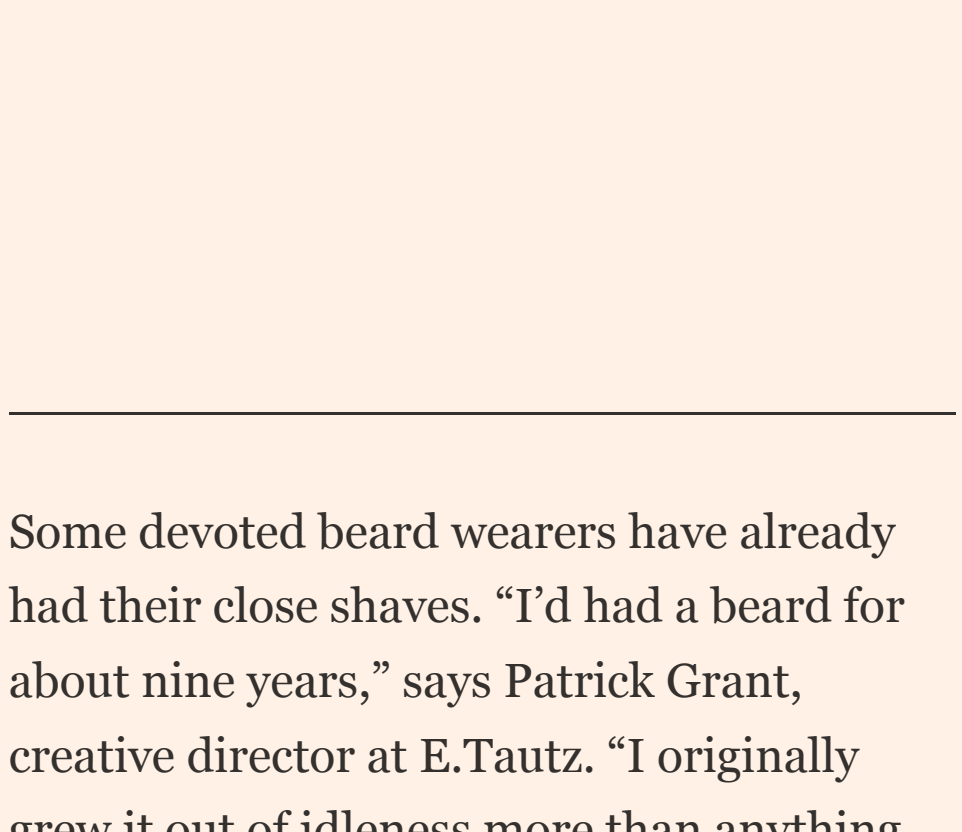


David Hayes OCTOBER 10 2014

The barbers started sharpening their blades last spring. According to Robert Brooks, a researcher at the University of New South Wales in Australia, that was when we reached “Peak Beard”. Beards had been thriving for several seasons, reaching ever more biblical – and comical – proportions, but with Brooks’ suggestion that something so ubiquitous must inevitably lose its appeal, the trend’s days were numbered.

Its fate was sealed at the autumn/winter menswear shows in June. Baby-soft skin was everywhere: skins were so smooth at Louis Vuitton, Saint Laurent and Prada that the models appeared almost waxen; there wasn’t a whisker of stubble in sight.

Ironically, the beard’s demise has also been ascribed to its surprisingly time-consuming maintenance. “Men are definitely starting to shave again,” says Mark Tranter, beauty buyer at Selfridges. “They are moving away from the upkeep that comes with a beard and going for a clean shave, which is surprisingly low maintenance. I had a beard but ended up getting rid of it because of the upkeep.”



From left: Saint Laurent, Louis Vuitton and Prada – all spring/summer 2015

For fashionable men about town, “upkeep” can mean a regular salon trim and reshape as well as various products to keep facial hair in tip-top condition – from beard moisturisers (£24, [murdocklondon.com](#)) to beard shampoo and conditioner (£14.95 each, by Beardsley from [shavelounge.co.uk](#)). And let’s not get started on beard combs and brushes.

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Some devoted beard wearers have already had their close shaves. “I’d had a beard for about nine years,” says Patrick Grant, creative director at E.Tautz. “I originally grew it out of idleness more than anything else. I shaved it off because I fancied a change, in the same way that one changes one’s haircut from time to time.”

Nevertheless, it’s a decision that requires planning. Simply charging up your old electric razor will no longer cut it: shaving has moved on. “We have lots of men coming in who have always shaved with an electric razor but now realise that they’ll have a closer shave that’s better for their skin if they use a cut-throat blade,” says Brendan Murdock, founder and owner of barbers Murdock London. “Moving to a traditional razor goes hand-in-hand with wanting quality clothes and being interested in design.”

Even if you find yourself sticking to the somewhat less daunting charms of a disposable razor – Gillette’s now come with five “thinner, finer” blades – you’ll find that skincare technology has moved on too.

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Men are moving away from the time-consuming upkeep of having a beard, and going for a clean shave

“One of the most significant changes to men’s skincare has been the introduction of exfoliating fruit acids [AHAs], which help remove the dead skin cells that can lead to ingrowing hairs,” says Janette Ryan of Vichy, which has a range devoted to male skin. “Reducing ingrown hairs and infections makes shaving much easier and eliminates the commonest causes of shaving cuts. Moisturisers containing allantoin and calcium are also real improvements.”

But not everyone is ready to go to such extreme measures: the reality is a little more, err, fuzzy. “I still have a beard. Well more of a grown-out scruff,” says hairstylist Eugene Souleiman. “It’s hard to give up.”

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Sam Kershaw, a buyer at Mr Porter, agrees: “While the man in the street may take a steer on the clothing from the catwalk, he will not be influenced by how a model looks. I think the luxury sportswear trend looks better on clean-shaven men, whereas a beard can make more traditional suiting look more contemporary.”

Certainly, the grooming industry is anxious for men to dust off their razors. Market researcher Mintel found that the 28 per cent of men in the UK who were bearded had a marked effect on spending habits. “Sales of shaving preparations have suffered as men take a more relaxed approach to grooming,” says Charlotte Libby, Mintel’s senior beauty sector analyst.



Patrick Grant of E Tautz, post-beard

Indeed, total UK sales of shaving preparations have fallen in line with the fashion for beards – 70 per cent of men were using shaving preparations in 2013, down from 74 per cent in 2012.

We might at least see an end to those great pioneer-style beards. “We’ve seen more men looking for a shorter, cleaner beard shape, moving away from the bigger ‘urban woodsman’ style beards of recent times,” says Murdock. “We have plenty of customers coming in with very full beards who have our extensive 45-minute full beard reshape, with hot towels and cut-throat razors.”

So if grooming has moved on, should you? “I don’t feel like beards are over,” argues Grant. “It’s just hair. On your face. If you look daft with a beard, it won’t lend gravitas; if you feel more yourself with one, then it probably will. Be your own man.”

Photographs: Catwalking; Getty Images

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