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IS WHAT YOU SEE ALWAYS WHAT YOU GET?

WHEN IT COMES TO HAIR, EACH STYLE REVEALS A WORLD OF SUBSTANCE.

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bigger is better

BIG HAIR IS BACK? IN TEXAS, SAYS KENDALL MORGAN, IT NEVER WENT AWAY.

When Orlando Pita sent the models onto the catwalk at the Fall 2000 Versace show with hair teased up to there, he probably wasn't thinking about religion. But then, Pita wasn't born and bred in Texas. "The higher the hair, the closer to God." That's what those Pentecostal girls say," says Dallas-based stylist Tony Fielding. God-fearing or not, women in the Lone Star state are religious—not to mention irony-free—about their bountiful manes. In Texas, having a big, luscious head of hair means more—much more—than just being in style.

"The look is part of being in the sorority of wealthy wives," says stylist Paul Neinast, who has had his hands in the hair of everyone from President George Bush to the cast of *Dallas*. Although Texas teens are more apt to copy the flat-ironed locks of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* than the high hair of *Alexis Carrington*, in Texas society, coiled is key. Clearly, looking as if you fit in is the first step to actually joining the elite, and even a Chanel suit can't save the girl who doesn't look "done"—head-to-toe. Stylists who handle the hair of the women who appear in society columns refer to lank locks as "flat," "slick," and "greasy." "Big says, 'I care about how I look, and I want everyone to look at me,'" says Fielding. That's the winning attitude for women who want to rise in the social ranks.

Even those who prefer chaps and boots to *Blass* and *Manolos* agree. This is a state where an inch or two can mean the difference between first and second place. Seventeen-year-old Beth Murphy didn't win Miss Rodeo North Texas State Fair and Miss Stockyards Champion Rodeo thanks to long, straight locks. In fact, it took chopping 8 inches off her mane, a perm, and a weekly average of two-and-a-half cans of hair spray to achieve her fluffy, shoulder-skimming, award-winning style. "Big hair is part of the image," Murphy reveals. "The hair of rodeo queens is passed down. All the girls have curls. The big poof hair looks better underneath your cowboy hat."

Think of it this way: Texas is a little bit like a rodeo, and your hair is part of the show. "There's an awful lot of display in Texas," says Caroline Brothel, a Professor of Anthropology at Southern Methodist University. "Things are big, houses are big. People make a contrast between the East Coast, where wealth is understated, as opposed to Texas, where it's in your face." Meaning that big hair equals a big pocketbook. "When you have big hair, you go to the hairdresser at least once a week," Brothel attests. "That's a statement of social class and success and of leisure—you have the time to sit in a beauty parlor for several hours and have this done."

Big hair may come and go in fashion circles, but Texas women aren't likely to get rid of it in a few seasons when stick-straight tresses return to the runway. Like their big jewels, their immaculate clothing, and their brand-new cars, big hair is just part of who they are. "It's a power thing," says Neinast. "Texas women say, 'Don't tell me I've got to look like the people in New York, who wear stringy hair and black clothes.'" It really is a South versus North thing. "It's like *Scarlett O'Hara* pulling the drapes down and having rough hands, but by God she looked good!" he adds. "It's that idea—'As long as I look good, nothing else matters.' And there's some power to that."

Until a few months ago, I had not only never subjected my naturally curly hair to a blowdryer, but I had secretly felt superior to women who did. They were dupes, as far as I was concerned, and possibly anti-feminists. According to my nuanced theories about the curly/straight divide, naturally kinky hair was synonymous with freethinking and fun. Straight hair, for those who went out of their way to get it, meant conformity, rigidity, prudishness, loads of money, and a desire to please.

Then I had my first blowout. It was a mistake, really. At the salon, after a cut, the stylist blew my hair straight and dry, probably so I wouldn't sue if I caught a cold on the way home. I ran into my old boss on the way back to the office. "You have big girl hair!" he exclaimed approvingly, which meant a lot coming from the man who once said, "Can I tell you something about your looks honestly and you won't get mad?"

Soon, I was getting a blowout for even the most minor occasions, but it was depressing living like Cinderella at the stroke of midnight between appointments, so I gave in, bought the necessary accoutrements, and began the slow and painful process of getting it straight without outside help. More men were looking at me on the street. There were more compliments in the office, and I felt more confident in meetings. Right now, there is no end in sight to my obsession.

We are all always making choices about how we put ourselves together physically based not only on the shape of our face or the color of our hair, but on the way we want to project ourselves to the world. And we expect the world to respond in kind by passing judgements based on our collective understanding of what the traits we've chosen to accentuate signify. Style, as it turns out, has quite a bit of substance.

—Kara Jesella