



Sumit Israni is owner and chief stylist Geetanjali salons, New Delhi. He has quickly achieved a celebrity status with his creative and fast cuts, his knowledge of hair and an ambitious growth plan (not to mention his Mercedes Benz!). He tells *Salon India* about staying on the fast track, in which his vision of the future is sharp as a razor.

## Sumit Israni Celebrity beat

### *starting out*

My first hairdressing class was a L'Oréal color course in 1998, when I was still in school. I got the highest marks in this course, and my ambition was set right there. My father, who was an electrical contractor, had a four chair barber shop in Green Park which was a side business. He wanted me to study further and do an MBA, but I was a rebel and decided I would prove myself in this field. I went to study with Toni & Guy for a two and a half month course and then came back and joined Jacques Dessange in Delhi. I worked there for two years and joined Geetanjali in 2001. We had 10 people working here at that time. Now we have 75!

**Salon:** Geetanjali Salon  
**Size:** 1,400 square feet  
**Address:** A-11, Shivalik Main Road, New Delhi 110017  
**Phone:** +91 11 46081566  
**Rates:** Rs 300-Rs 1,000



Photos: Randeep Singh Pundir

### *The turning point was...*

My teacher always used to tell me, 'You are a hairdresser when you start speaking to hair.' I was puzzled by what that meant. But suddenly the hair started speaking to me. When I touch a client's hair, I can tell what the hair wants, whether it is a cut or color. Another turning point was the realization of patience...to understand and hear what a client wants, and give it to them. A lot of stylists can make funky hairstyles but they are not successful in a salon because they don't hear what the client wants. It is key to be patient, to understand the client's wishes and to make your recommendations without the selfish motive of making money.



### *Hilary Clinton's styling...*

Hilary Clinton was the least fussy client I have had. She didn't ask what I was going to do with her hair or what products I was using. I was briefed to create a formal style for her, suitable for her meeting with Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh that day. Normally she wears her hair totally swept back, I gave her some volume and a fringe after a slight trim. The cut she had really suited her. It is neither a bob nor a boy cut, but a squareish style which is modern, yet formal.

I went to cut her hair at seven in the morning, at which time she was completely ready, with her make-up on. I had a half hour to style the hair in her suite.



### *Celebrity hair*

Doing celebrity hair can be a challenge. I have styled the hair of all kinds of people Bipasha Basu, Preity Zinta, Yuvraj Singh, Roger Waters of Pink Floyd, Sheila Dixit and others. Very often celebrities don't want to change their styles or experiment with hair and you have to find ways of doing minor variations. But there are times when you get a chance to change things. In July, I advised Ekta Choudhary to get a short style. It was the first time a Miss India, who is going on for the Miss Universe was ready to break the stereotype and try a short hair style!



### *Growth plans*

I now have three salons for Geetanjali, with two new ones having opened in May and June. One is at Malviya Nagar and the other is near the American Embassy. I am looking at having 100 salons in the next 10 years, and am working hard to choose the right locations. It is also important to train my people well and make sure the growth is not driven only by my own celebrity status. People should be able to get uniformly good cuts and treatment at any of my salons. I also have Soop Hair Lounge in Greater Kailash, which opened in 2006. This is a 1,400 square foot place, purely for hair.