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Shady Business

Manhattan's most sought-after color experts (grudgingly) reveal their secrets for getting \$800 results—from minor tone tweaks to platinum makeovers—at home

By Ning Chao

■ SWAPPING SALON VISITS for some at-home handiwork can add up to substantial savings. "I have a handful of clients who see me twice a year and spend \$800 to get their color amazing. The rest of the time, they do it themselves," admits Clairol Color Director Jason Backe, head colorist at Ted Gibson Salon in New York City. However, self-help color is only worth the savings if it looks expensive. Here, the hair homework you should try—and the tricky transformations you should leave to the pros.



HOME FRONT: Clairol Nice 'n Easy Born Blonde, \$9.99; L'Oréal Paris Excellence To-Go, \$9.49; SoftSheen Carson Dark and Lovely Color Confidence, \$6.99.

Paint by Numbers: New at-home kits mimic the salon experience by including professional tools like the detailing brush in the U Color by Umberto kit, \$12. And single process (one coat of color with no highlights, lowlights, or other frills) is simple to do yourself, as long as you're not going for a dramatic transformation. "My rule of thumb is only go two shades lighter or darker than your natural hair," says Brad Johns, national color director for Elizabeth Arden Red Door Spas. "To choose the right box at the store, check the chart on the side of the package. If you don't see your natural tone on the chart, the formula's probably not right for you." Protect your investment with gentle products like Nexxus Dualiste Color Protection + Anti-Breakage Shampoo, \$11.99.

Shiny Happy People: Glossing is the easiest service to do on your own. "Clear glazes are safe because they just add shine," says Nexxus Color Director Sharon Dorrain-Krause. If you need a subtle tone adjustment, a semi-permanent lasts 12 shampoos and will give your hue a boost (try a brass-fighting product or a cool-toned, ashy shade to neutralize orange). The trick is to apply the solution to wet hair for a sheer application of pigment—dry strands absorb more dye, reveals Backe. "This is what we do in the salon: Leave it on for three minutes, rinse a section, then check the color. If it's not deep enough, you can always leave it on longer." Shine on.



MAINTENANCE CREW: Bumble and Bumble Color Support Shampoo for Cool Brunettes, \$22; John Frieda Collection Sheer Blonde Color Renew Tone-Restoring Shampoo, \$8.99; Ted Gibson Individual Color Captivating Copper Shampoo, \$36.