

Sherri Renée Romm

Your Perfect Look

Sherri Renée Romm has always had a passion for art. To this day, she spends four mornings a week in her studio, paintbrush in hand as she careens over the canvas set up on her easel, her most meaningful and treasured possession. She painted and sculpted through school, and even took classes at night for nine years to complete a degree at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

Studying art at night kept her sane as she spent her days doing computer engineering consulting work. But learning how to use her gifts professionally was a journey—one that slowly pushed Sherri Renée in a direction she never anticipated.

In the early 1990s, Sherri Renée received the bad news that a close friend had been diagnosed with cancer. In many ways, Sherri Renée felt powerless, but when her friend began experiencing severe hair loss from her medical treatment, Sherri Renée saw a way she could help. “My friend went to the local wig shop and bought an auburn wig,” Sherri remembers.

“It was hideous, and she never left the house.”

Coincidentally, Sherri Renée’s then-husband was working on putting together a men’s hair restoration procedure at the time. Self-conscious about his own receding hairline and determined to put better options on the market, he already had a palette of hair-replacement materials and color swatches on hand, which proved perfect resources for Sherri Renée’s vision. “I didn’t know exactly what I was doing,” she admits today. “But I set my mind to trying to make a wig my friend would be happy to wear.”

Sherri Renée started by taking a cast mold of her friend’s head, and though it was her first try, she made a perfect fit. She designed a wig based on selected materials and hair colors and texture. Six weeks later, the finished product arrived. Sherri hired a stylist to cut the wig, and when the process was finished, her friend looked

spectacular. “It was her perfect look, and that was a pivotal moment for me,” Sherri affirms. “Her whole spirit lifted up when she put it on. For the first time since her diagnosis, she seemed herself again. She started going out again, free from the self-consciousness and worry she had felt before. In a way, it was the stepping stone that allowed her to move forward. And it was the pivotal moment that inspired me to move forward too, applying my background in sculpture, painting, and engineering to empower others through beauty and image recovery.”

With that, Sherri Renée and her then-husband co-founded a hair replacement manufacturing and design business, Versacchi USA. Sherri Renée handled the hair design and application, while her husband became the “face” of the company and oversaw the manufacturing of the business. She continued to work at her day job as the breadwinner of the family as the business grew, but by 1996, Sherri Renée was able to leave her consulting work to become a hair loss designer and architect.

Over the next few years, Sherri’s situation evolved. She and her husband ended their marriage and sold the manufacturing arm of Versacchi USA. Sherri Renée formed her own hair specialty salon, Versacchi Studios, to pursue her love and passion for personal transformation. “I never doubted myself or thought that I couldn’t do something,” she says. “At the time, I didn’t think too much about it. When something interested me, I’d express that interest, and I’d just do it.”

As the business grew and her offerings expanded, Sherri decided she needed one more tool in her arsenal. “I felt inept because I didn’t know how to cut the hair myself,” she says. “It was like carrying a child for nine months and not seeing the whole thing come to fruition. So I apprenticed in my own shop for two years under



another stylist and got my license in cosmetology. Then I got my senior cosmetologist license so I could train others."

Since that time, Sherri Renée's talent and confidence have paid off in spades, and Versacchi Studios has helped countless men, women, and children get their confidence back via custom hair enhancements. She also founded Sherri Renée & Co., a line of Parisian hair enhancement products that are now available at salons internationally. Launched in 2014, Sherri Renee & Co. is taking some of the technological advancements and artistic achievements from her experience at Versacchi Studios, and mass marketing them through partner salons. "About eight years ago, I took a trip to Paris with my mom and was inspired by the beautiful Lingerie Parisian silk, lace, and cotton lace fabrics," she recounts. "I was inspired by their aesthetic beauty, touch and 'lightness' and started incorporating them in almost all of my designs. My Parisian Hair Enhancement Collection was born. Their light bases, coupled with a scalp replica and chiaroscuro color rendering, were so unique and realistic, that they were incredibly well-received by my clients—better than anything I had ever done before. It was at that time that I had decided to patent by designs in order to help protect what took so much hard work, innovation, and infinite experience to achieve."

It didn't take long for word to spread about Sherri Renée's popular Parisian Hair Enhancement Collection. Soon, salons were knocking on her door, asking about the products. "I didn't really have anything to show them, so that's what spurred me to develop the branding, packaging, literature, and catalogues," she says. "Obviously, I don't sleep much!"

Relying only on word of mouth, the business continued to expand. Sherri Renée & Co. is now international, with 21 salons stretching from East to West Coast, and with new studios opening up in Barbados and Canada. "I have high hopes for what the line can accomplish in a mostly-stagnant industry," she affirms. "Part of that success comes from the fresh fine art approach we're taking, even down to the vocabulary we use. There's a lot of stigma and negative connotation attached to wigs and hair pieces and toupees, so we focus on the concept of accessorizing to get a 'better me.' I want to take away the stigma and make it something convenient and fun. Steve Jobs had the vision that 'there's going to be a computer

in every home', and I have a vision that every woman will have at least one of these Parisian enhancements in her beauty arsenal."

Sherri Renée is on the cutting edge of hair enhancement design, fusing aspects of hair restoration with the modern freshness and innovation of fine art and fashion. "My goal is to incorporate the top 150 salons in the country," she avows. "We're a partnership with salons that are interested in providing a highly specialized service, since 26 million women have issues with hair loss. We provide solutions for everyone struggling with this issue, regardless of what they're looking for."

Sherri Renée also provides trainings to the salons that carry her line, ensuring that the stylists are able to properly design, color and cut in the hair enhancements. "When a salon purchases our hair enhancements, they receive marketing, social media, and specialized training to start them the next day," she says. "From there, we offer a portfolio of workshops to assist from business building, marketing, design and artistic couture."

Sherri Renée's focus on bringing her vision to life comes in part from the example of her father, who loves to draw and possesses a unique gift with people. "I have never met a person that has met my dad and has not fallen in love with him," she affirms. "He has a way of making you feel like you are the only one in the room." Artistic talent also stems from her mother, who flourished when she finally found her way to a career in interior designing. "My mom is such an out-of-the-box thinker," Sherri says. "She's incredibly creative, with no age and no limitations. She's not an artist in the drawing and painting sense, but she's great with color and texture and fabric and putting things together in an intuitive and inventive way."

Sherri's mother also deserves credit for Sherri's early fascination with hair and transformation. Growing up in Baltimore County, Maryland, Sherri often snuck into her mother's closet to examine her stock of falls and hairpieces, and was blown away by her ability to change her whole look with some make-up and hair enhancers. "She had really short fine hair," Sherri recalls, "but on nights when she went out with my dad, she would come down in a gown and beautiful make-up, with a long blonde fall on, just like a fashion model. I remember being so impressed by that transformation."

Sherri Renée didn't have any sisters, and her two older brothers had no interest in playing dress-up in their mother's closet. Fortunately for Sherri, her younger brother was malleable and agreeable enough to play guinea pig in Sherri's first makeover experiments. "I pretty much watched him all the time, so when I was about 8 and he was 5, I would bring him into my mother's closet to dress him up and put these beautiful long falls on him," she laughs. "Wigs and falls were really in the 60s, and my mother was no exception. She had an entire walk-in closet of falls and hairpieces, so I had a lot to work with. That was so much fun for me, and my brother was so sweet to be so tolerant."

All through her childhood, Sherri Renée's father worked for Romm Press, the family publishing and newspaper printing business. Publishing had been in the family for some time, and back in Ukraine, the Romms had had the first printing press that was permitted to print Jewish publications. "I used to go with him to the printing press," remembers Sherri. "Back then, the machinery was massive. There were guys there missing a finger or two, and the smell of glue and ink is imprinted in my mind."

Sherri was 8 when her parents divorced, and her mother began working 14-hour shifts to help make ends meet. "A lot happened to my mom by the time she was 26," Sherri recalls. "She had 4 young kids, and her mother had died. She had a hard time after the divorce, and I made a mental note that I never wanted to struggle like that. I decided I'd never depend on anyone else for my livelihood, because if they walked out, then what?"

Although the relationship between her mother and father had become contentious, her father stayed very involved and was always present at Sherri's sports events. Sherri played soccer and tennis, for which she had a particular affinity. "My father was a total gentleman through the separation and was always there for me," she says. "There were some negative feelings on my mom's side because he went on with his life, while she was still trying to find her way. But they're friends today, which is wonderful. Somewhere along the way, they made up, and we all got along."

In elementary school, Sherri made scenery for all the school plays and began to cultivate her artistic talent more seriously. "In middle school, I

had two great art teachers, Mr. Simon and Mr. Smith, who both told me I needed to do something artistic in my life," she says. "That stuck with me."

During high school, Sherri didn't go through the typical rebellious teen phase because she'd had a lot of independence from her parents at an early age. She did, however, establish some independence from her peers as she navigated adolescence. "I became an independent thinker," she says. "Drugs were incredibly rampant, and when I was in tenth grade, I just decided that I wasn't going to participate. That's important when you're at that age and you're easily influenced. I focused on other things, including my art."

Sherri's dream at the time was to attend art school and eventually make her way as a professional painter. "I thought I'd become a famous painter and be commissioned by the wealthiest people in the world," she laughs. "I dreamed that they'd pay my way to travel around Europe as I painted their portraits, so I pursued a Fine Arts degree at Towson University upon graduating from high school."

Without money from her parents, Sherri qualified for a Pell Grant to help her get through her first semester, but after that, she had to work nights to pay her way. Her boyfriend at the time convinced her to be pragmatic and enroll in a data processing class at the local community college over the summer—a defining decision that changed the course of the next twelve years of her life. The school offered her a job working in their Operations Center, and Sherri recognized she had some talent in the field. She decided to transfer to the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), and switched her major to Information Systems and Computer Science. In 1984, she graduated with an Information Systems degree and a mathematics minor.

After graduation, Sherri got a job with Computer Task Group (CTG) as a consultant. In that capacity, she spent the next decade consulting with various companies and working on everything from project management, to coding, to business processes, to computer systems. "I was all over town, working with different people and different personalities," she recounts.

By day, Sherri excelled at CTG, but she was happiest at night, when she went to her classes at the Maryland Institute College of Art. She enrolled immediately after leaving UMBC, determined to continue pursuing art. She was only

able to take a class or two each semester, and it took her nine years to finally complete her Bachelor of Fine Arts, but having an artistic outlet helped her get through her days as a consultant.

Eight years into her time at CTG, Sherri's then-husband began looking into hair replacement technologies, and the rest is history. By 1994, Sherri was involved with the business and incorporated Versacchi Studios. By 1996, the money had begun to come in, and she quit consulting altogether. "My husband at the time was an entrepreneurial spirit," she says. "He introduced me to that philosophy of risk taking, where you know you'll regret it if you don't go for it."

When Sherri gave birth to her two wonderful children, her relationship with her business took on a new dimension. For the first time in her life, she experienced some hair loss of her own, allowing her to relate to her clients' struggles on a whole new level. "They don't tell you before you get pregnant!" she exclaims. "Your hair is really nice when you're pregnant, but about three months later, you start shedding. I began working on smaller pieces for people that are going through hormonal changes, or people who have surgery and lose a little bit of hair. This also drew on my fine arts background, because in drawing and painting, you have to study the underlying anatomy. I'm addressing where something sits on the head, what's surrounding it, the coloring, the tone, the shading, all of that stuff. I developed these methods over the course of years, observing what makes something look real and applying techniques to take my products to that level."

Her post-partum shedding wasn't the only time her personal experiences shaped the direction of her businesses. A few years later, Sherri was diagnosed with a thyroid tumor, and again experienced hair thinning. It was right around this time that she took her trip to Paris and began working on the line of enhancements that would become the Parisian Hair Enhancement Collection.

Kids are often the most heart-wrenching—and the most rewarding—cases. "A boy named Dylan had a particularly strong impact on me," she says. "He had a tumor surgically removed from his head, which left a visible scar. In elementary school, it was no problem, but when his parents brought him in, he was 11, going into

middle school and concerned about teasing. So I designed something for him, a puzzle piece that matched his hair color, texture, and density. He went from being an introverted, self-conscious kid to a normal, outgoing kid, even after just one session. It really meant a lot to be able to help him like that."

In advising young people entering the working world today, Sherri offers the same career advice she gave her own sons. "Follow your heart," she says. "Do what you're passionate about, and you'll find that gusto for life—your purpose and why you're here. If you just go after the money, you're going to feel something's missing. But if you go after your passion, take some chances, and try some things, you'll find your path. If you feel like you're one with whatever it is you're doing, then that's exactly what you should be doing. Prosperity and abundance will ultimately follow."

Beyond that, as a leader, Sherri seeks to empower people to use their own skill, talent, and intuition to just do it, whatever "it" is for them. "I've seen so many people put off their dreams because they don't think it's the right time," she says. "But I tell them not to wait, because you may not have the 25 years you think you have to make your dreams come true. Just do it! You just might look in the mirror one day and find that, somehow, you've found your perfect look."

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