

RAISING EYEBROWS

Bleached, drawn-on, shaved or bejewelled, subversive BROWS with retro roots can be relied upon to make a STATEMENT.

JANCEE DUNN investigates the season's most eye-opening looks

hroughout the tweeze-happy '90s, I enthusiastically pruned away at my eyebrows. Inspired by Kate Moss's delicate arches, I obliterated my own – chestnut coloured, with a totally acceptable, softly angled natural shape – until they were as slight as my slip dresses. It took years for some semblance of regrowth to materialise, thus closing a traumatic chapter in the beauty history of an entire generation. That is, until it was pried open again by TikTok, where a popular thin-eyebrow filter that renders full-to-feral shapes into reedy wisps sent a shiver across my forehead when I first came upon it.

"How did we get here?" I brooded to myself, as I flipped through images from a/w'22 shows where brows weren't so much streamlined as completely decimated. At Burberry and Versace, the make-up artist Pat McGrath broke out her bleach pots to create what she describes as a "strong, daring, powerful and otherworldly"look. The make-up artist Diane Kendal called the bare foreheads she sculpted underneath sharp-edged mullets at Marc Jacobs "gothic and futuristic" – adjectives not typically associated with supermodel Bella Hadid, who blended in with the rest of Jacobs's dystopian-couture cast.

Hadid herself is certainly part of the minimised-brow comeback, regularly romanticising all things '90s – a decade in which she spent just four living years. But the retro revival is as much a homage to the original supermodels as a reflection of our collective emotional state, suggests make-up artist Marcelo Gutierrez. Using brows as a creative canvas – slimming them down, bleaching, shaving or dyeing them, or affixing them with jewels or glitter – provides a welcome shot of fantasy in our triggered times, says Gutierrez, who has worked with Troye Sivan, Dua Lipa and Euphoria's Alexa Demie. Existentialism begets escapism. "If I know my client wants to step into another world, I offer to bleach their brows."

Gutierrez draws parallels with the exuberance of the Roaring Twenties, after the First World War, "when people were excited to live in a fantasy, because they didn't know when the world would end again". In uncertain times, he suggests, a skinny brow is decisive. "It's a very – how do I put this – bitchy-in-the-best-way eyebrow."This checks out, according to London-based beauty historian Lucy Jane Santos. Clara Bow was the original brow influencer, says Santos, describing the razor-thin brows that extended dramatically past Bow's natural brow line, which fellow 1920s-era film star Anna May Wong and performer Josephine Baker all sported a century ago.

Ideas in beauty are now moving even faster. "If you look at the really young make-up artists on Instagram who are doing different things, they either don't have brows or they're drawing them on really thin," says Rihanna-approved make-up artist Raisa Flowers. When I ask Flowers for her favourite '90s brow looks, she happily pulls them up on her phone. "Lil' Kim. Ooh, Mary J Blige. Missy Elliott, definitely. Their brows were pencil, pencil thin, and they would put concealer around them so they would look even more perfect."

"We're approaching brows with an attitude of playfulness and experimentation," adds New York-based make-up artist Sam Visser, who at 22 is Dior's youngest-ever US make-up ambassador. "People are doing their brows now not from the angle of Tlook better this way', but 'This is a cool way to look."

One place you may not see them, however, is in Paris. "The majority of my customers are not touching their eyebrows," says Sabrina Eleonore, founder of the chic brow-shaping salon Un Jour Un Regard with locations in the 4th and 16th arrondissements, where natural shapes and light grooming are the only things on the menu. "A fine eyebrow can be very pretty if the line is well worked, but it does not suit everyone and can make the face appear tired," continues Eleonore; it can also cause trauma to the hair follicles "that can result in scarring and can affect regrowth", says New York City dermatologist Doris Day, MD, who notes that prolonged pruning can lead to permanently barren real estate between brow and eye.

But there's nothing that can't be undone: just ask Kendall Jenner, who memorably showed up to this year's Met Gala virtually browless, only to enjoy the after-parties with her dark arches fully intact, a bit of trickery from make-up artist Mary Phillips. There's hope for the over-tweezed, too, with the wealth of innovation in the brow growth serum and conditioner category. The most important thing, Gutierrez emphasises, is to just have fun. "It's a look," he says. "Not the look."

THE BROW GROOMING TOOLKIT





From far left: AUGUSTINUS
BADER The Eyebrow and
Lash Enhancing Serum,
£115. CLE DE PEAU
BEAUTE Eyebrow Gel, £32.
NEZ HASAN The Brow
Mask, £56 BENEFIT
COSMETICS Gimme Brow+
Volumizing Pencil, £23.50.
BLINK BROW BAR
Brow Boest Serum, £49