

# An AFFAIR to REMEMBER

Kenneth Battelle's Manhattan salon was the place to get ready for Truman Capote's 1966 Black and White Ball. One of the team of hairstylists that day, PETER LAMAS, takes us back to the historic event.

THE DAY BEFORE THE PARTY, THE SALON STAFF ARRIVED around 8 a.m. to set up early because there was an avalanche of people coming. In those days, women came to have their hair done, and it lasted the whole week. That was the way of life because of the teasing and the backcombing—the wash and wear look hadn't taken off just yet. I heard that some of the ladies who had had their hair done the day before the ball slept sitting up in a chair.

Babe Paley, Bunny Mellon, the Kennedys—the divas, I call them—came in on the day of the event. Jackie Kennedy turned down the party invitation but her sister, Lee Radziwill, attended. There were at least 42 stylists in the building, and we were all collaborating and focusing on taking care of the clients who were very nervous and uptight about time. Kenneth brought extra assistants in from other salons to help with manicures and facials. The place was wall-to-wall people.

The salon was very formal. You didn't just walk around in a shirt and tie—you had to wear a jacket. All the clients wore pale green or light pink smocks. There was a grand staircase, and Kenneth's room was decorated in yellow and red paisley. He chose those colours because they were Marilyn Monroe's favourites. Clients loved it because of the ambience, and they were treated with respect. It became a place for social gatherings, where you could have lunch while sitting under a dryer. One day, I looked into the hall and there were several ladies sitting on a long bench: Gloria Vanderbilt, Jackie Kennedy, Mrs. Rockefeller and [automotive heiresses] the Ford sisters. I said to myself, "If that bench only knew how much wealth it's holding up!"

The day of the ball, I worked on Mrs. [Richard] Avedon. She always wore her hair down, so I put it up. It was a very beautiful coif with a lot of loops and curls to it, but not overly done because she was a very quiet and conservative woman—I couldn't get carried away even though she was married to one of the greatest photographers in the world.

Most of the women wanted some type of updo. It was all about the hair. Makeup was incidental because they were wearing masks. If the client was wearing a very extravagant mask to the ball, in many cases they brought it along to show the stylist. We looked at it and discussed what we were going to do and talked about the dress. This happened weeks ahead of time.

Several of them wanted to look like Marie Antoinette, with a very



LEE RADZIWILL AT TRUMAN CAPOTE'S BLACK AND WHITE BALL, NOVEMBER 1966. FROM BALS: LEGENDARY COSTUME BALLS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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fluffy, high updo. We needed a lot of hairpieces and extensions to create that look, and it took weeks to dye the extensions to match the shade of their dress or make them white and light grey to imitate that period. We had to pile the hair in a way that it would hold. There was a lot of structure; you had to do it by creating pin curls to anchor the pieces and then you teased and lacquered the hair—it took hours for some of these hairdos to be created. We were still cranking them out until 10 p.m., at which point ladies were leaving the place, with their limos waiting outside to take them to the Plaza Hotel, where the ball was held. The sidewalk out front was jam-packed with photographers. We didn't leave until almost one in the morning.

After the event, when my clients came back to the salon, I asked them, "How did your hair hold up? Tell me about the party!" They had a great time; they loved the music from Peter Duchin, who was the bandleader—everybody was dancing. One client told me it reminded her of what the Louis XIV court must have been like. She said, "When we walked in, we all paraded our outfits, our gowns, our hair." Usually at the events you sit down and talk and smoke and drink. At this event, it was all about showing off. —as told to Sarah Daniel