

The Clinton Coiffure

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Isabelle Goetz

Photo By Kyle Samperton

WASHINGTON — As Democratic darlings and Hollywood celebrities primp, preen and puff in anticipation of Chelsea Clinton's wedding to Marc Mezvinsky on Saturday, one guest knows exactly what's expected of her. For Isabelle Goetz, the 39-year-old French hairstylist who just bought Georgetown salon Okyo, the two-day celebration is all about making sure MOTB Hillary Rodham Clinton looks great.

"I have an idea in my mind," Goetz says of Clinton's hairdo for the day, adding there's no way she will divulge the details just yet — not even to the Secretary of State herself. "No, no, no. It's too soon now. We live day by day. Whatever it is, it will be at the spur of the moment."

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 Goetz, Washington's leading celebrity stylist who also tends the tresses of the likes of Sen. John Kerry and Queen Rania of Jordan when she's in town, moved into her new salon June 1 and commutes from suburban Virginia on a navy blue Vespa LX. First thing most mornings, it's parked outside Clinton's house since one of her main claims to fame has been taking Hillary's hair out of the headlines.

"Somehow with Isabelle, Hillary's hair is a nonissue. She found a look that works with her where you don't focus on the hair," says Claire Shipman, senior national correspondent for ABC's "Good Morning America," who is also a client.

But the hairstylist hasn't always been so lucky. In 2004, Kerry's presidential campaign committee dodged questions about the campaign paying \$1,000 to fly Goetz to Pittsburgh, where Kerry was appearing on "Meet The Press." Two years later, the New York Post reported Hillary Clinton had spent \$2,500 over two months during her Senate campaign for Goetz to tend her locks. (Goetz's rate starts at \$250 for a cut.)

All Goetz will say of her peripatetic clientele is that "I have to be able to work anywhere, standing in halls and sometimes with no time at all." She's wearing a white cotton dress she bought in Saint-Tropez, where her husband of three years owns real estate, while a bisque-colored, leather holster slung cowgirl-style over one hip carries all her favorite tools — scissors, combs and brushes.

The cowgirl image suits her, for in many ways Goetz is a pioneer in the Washington salon gold rush that started in the early Nineties. She was working at a salon in her hometown of Belfort, France, where she had been cutting hair since she was 15 and a half. When she was 21, she decided to go to the Paris Hair Show, where she filled out an application from an enterprising Washington salon owner looking for new talent to satisfy his growing client list. Goetz was one of eight French nationals recruited in 1993 by Sylvain Melloul, the then-owner of Visage Express, who brought them all to the U.S. under the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act.

That same year, Bill Clinton bounced the whole concept of celebrity haircuts into the mainstream media. On an official trip to Los Angeles, traveling on Air Force One, Clinton delayed traffic at LAX airport for a \$200 tarmac haircut by Beverly Hills celebrity stylist Christophe. Bolstered by the international publicity, Christophe opened a branch here. Five years later, Christophe hired Goetz, who first met Hillary Clinton when the then-First Lady turned to Visage Express' Melloul for help after a \$275 haircut from Frédéric Fekkai sparked renewed rounds of bad press.

Through all the Sturm und Drang, Goetz has never lost her faith in the value of a good haircut. "A lot of women, when they watch the news, they get inspired by the hair and the fashion," she says.

ABC's Shipman agrees. "I always feel bad for the men when they get slammed for their hair," she says. "In television, male anchors have to think if their hair makes them look too stiff, too anchor-y. For women, there's been such a long history of being willing to look too big and too plastic, it's a little more accepted."

For many of her clients, the key to Goetz' success is her high-octane energy.

"Isabelle has this tomboy appeal. She hops off her motorcycle when she comes to my house to cut my hair, and she has a great presence. I don't feel like I'm going to a celebrity hairstylist. Her look is always feminine, never screaming," says Shipman, who met Goetz through her friend Evan Ryan, a former White House aide to Hillary Clinton, and current assistant to Vice President Joe Biden.

Ryan, who has been going to Goetz since 1998, cites her own wedding experience sporting an Isabelle cut. "At my sister's wedding, the person blow-drying hair stopped halfway through to ask where I got my hair done," she recalls. "That happens to me all the time."

Last year, as Goetz began to think about leaving Cristophe and opening her own shop, she turned to Hillary Clinton for advice. "She thinks it's important for the country that small businesses succeed," says Goetz. "She told me questions to ask about my lease and gave me advice on everything."

As for Chelsea Clinton's wedding in Rhinebeck, N.Y., Goetz says she she'll probably be so busy looking after the MOTB that she won't be able to tend to any of the other guests who are clients — unless they're in the wedding party.

"Like all weddings, it's a very intense day," she says. "The day of the wedding, you have to be out of your comfort zone."