

Smooth operator

On the hunt for a solution to frizzy hair, Shreena Patel puts the Bhave Smoothe Keratin Therapy treatment to the test



Each year, like snowdrops signalling the start of spring, my hair rises up to declare the arrival of summer. Except, unlike the snowdrops, it isn't pretty.

I have lots of long, black, fine, wavyish hair which is frizziest around the hairline. When I was younger I longed for the smooth tresses swished about by girls on shampoo adverts. Eventually I learned to embrace my hair: like my mum says, "everyone wants what they don't have".

But the humidity of a Hong Kong summer has taken my frizz to new heights, literally, and I don't want to embrace this particular look.

I've experimented with all manner of serums and mousses to no avail. I've used straightening irons, but upon leaving the apartment find my work undone in a matter of minutes. I've also tried the notorious "Brazilian blowdry", but health concerns over the ingredients often released during these treatments (namely, formaldehyde) have put me off.

Short of carrying around a dehumidifier on my back, I'm running out of ideas. So when I

heard about Bhave Smoothe Keratin Therapy (SKT), which claims to reduce frizz, I decided to give it a go. And whilst I was at it, I thought I'd add a bit of colour too for a new look.

The salon

I tried both treatments at eco salon Love Hair. Eco because it specialises in healthier, more natural products. This appeals to me because even if just one person in a salon is having a treatment that's releasing harmful chemicals into the air, many more are breathing it in. Love Hair also tries to minimise its carbon footprint by recycling, using eco flooring, reclaimed wood shelving and screens and locally filtered (as opposed to bottled) water.

Founder and head stylist Toni Sutton-Marcus was working at Hipp.Fish Hair (now closed) on Staunton Street when she was diagnosed with high levels of metals in her blood. "I wanted to take control of what I was exposing myself to on a daily basis. Since I spend most of my time at work, it made sense

to take the leap and open a salon of my own to help me detox chemicals out of my life as much as possible", she says. She opened Love Hair in 2016.

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The studio is bright and airy with a beautiful little terrace, conveniently located on Wellington Street. The team, which is comprised of stylists from England, New Zealand, Wales and Hong Kong, is friendly and there are plenty of magazines around to while away your time in the chair.

Treatment 1 - Bhave Smoothe Keratin Therapy (SKT)

Bhave is actually a collection of hair products, developed in Australia, chief amongst which is SKT. SKT is one of a number of smoothing treatments which have arisen in response to the aforementioned health and safety concerns about Brazilian blowdrys. In general, they work by filling in the porosity of your hair and smoothing the cuticle, as overly-porous hair causes tangles, frizz and breakage. Note, smoothing treatments do not claim to remove the curl pattern entirely but will help to reduce frizz. Others include Goldwell Kerasilk (also available at Love Hair, and recommended if you want a straighter effect). Both treatments are free of formaldehyde and formaldehyde-releasing ingredients. Both, I am advised, may be used while pregnant (though you should always check with your doctor first).

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SKT claims to improve hair health, and manageability. On its list of ingredients is a keratin protein, naturally derived and extracted from the wool of New Zealand sheep (the sheep are not harmed in the shearing process). Keratin is a protein found naturally in hair, nails, teeth and skin – in fact, 88 percent of your hair is keratin, but it wears out with ageing, environmental factors and styling. Many hair products claim to contain keratin to replenish hair and reduce frizz (keratin does not make your hair straight), but not all keratins are created equal. The keratin in SKT is extracted while keeping critical amino acids and proteins intact. This means it can better bind to damaged hair.

First, the hair is cleaned with a special shampoo that removes all oil, product, dirt and pollution to allow the hair to absorb better the subsequent treatment. It feels a bit knotty afterwards but it's not too bad. The hair is dried and the product is applied in sections and left for 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the hair type. The excess product is then rinsed with a couple of bowls of warm water. Finally, the hair is dried and flat ironed so that it is poker straight.

Hair cannot be washed for 48 hours after the treatment as the keratin requires time to set in - it must be kept absolutely dry during this time (a good excuse for avoiding the gym). I



Toni and a client in the salon



won't lie, it's not a good look, but – as I explain to my colleagues, who are unsure whether to congratulate me on my new style or tell me the truth – it's only for a couple of days.

After washing, my hair is softer, less frizzy and looks healthier, but it definitely isn't poker straight. This isn't a wash-and-go treatment – heat is required to activate the smoothing effect. I find a quick blast with the blow-drier is sufficient to calm the frizz and leave some wave. For the best results, I blow dry in sections with a round brush, but either way it's much quicker to style than before.

How to prolong the results

1. Only use sodium chloride and sulfate free shampoos and conditioners. bhave makes its own shampoo and conditioner which you can buy in the salon.
2. If hair gets wet prior to the first wash, blow dry immediately and go over lightly with a flat iron on a low heat setting.
3. Do not use any styling products until after the first proper shampoo. bhave makes its own "riot control oil" which smoothes flyaways and acts as a heat protectant before styling.
4. Wait between 7-10 days before colouring your hair.
5. Sea or pool water may reduce the treatment's lifespan. Before going into the sea or pool, use a leave-in product (bhave makes a leave-in crème and oil) and rinse hair with fresh water to eliminate any salt and/or chlorine build up immediately after swimming.

The treatment claims to last between two to five months (my hairdresser Kirsty says it's usually around three in Hong Kong), though some virgin hair may require an application after just four weeks.



Before



Immediately after both treatments



One month later



Treatment 2 - Balayage

Now for the colour. It's recommended to do this seven to 10 days after the SKT. If you do it earlier, the colour may lift; if you do it too soon after, the SKT won't have had time to sink in.

First, Toni and I look through photos to see what I like and what I don't. I want something noticeable and to avoid red tones. Since my hair is black, this means the colour needs to be lifted past a certain level (colour lift goes from black to red to brown).

First, Toni mixes the colour and applies to my hair in sections freehand, using gentle brushstrokes. This bespoke technique, known as "balayage", takes longer than a normal colouring treatment as it is more technical, but produces a more natural effect, grows out better and is lower maintenance. Each section is wrapped in foil until I look like a paranoid conspiracy theorist. After a thirty-minute wait, the foil is removed and the hair is rinsed. A toner is applied and left for a short time. Finally, the hair is washed and styled.

I'm really pleased with the colour. It's noticeable but natural, breaks up the black and adds texture and warmth. I was worried that colouring my hair would affect the SKT



but it hasn't. I'm particularly happy with how low maintenance it is: I don't plan to have it retouched for at least six months. As for the salon, I'll definitely be going back. **M**

The essentials

Bhava: \$2,400-\$2,600 (3 hours)

Kerasilk: \$2,000 short hair;

\$2,500 long hair (2.5 hours)

Balayage starts from \$1,700 (3 hours)

Love Hair recommends a free 15-minute consultation first.

Love Hair

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For more information on the bhava SKT treatment, visit bhavahair.com