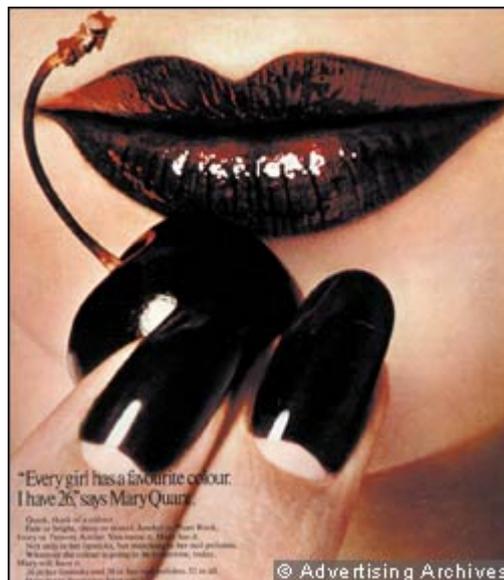


Exotic nail art

Karen Hodkinson

"I've had nails that look like Wedgwood plates and nails that look like fireworks," says Sally Singer, American Vogue's fashion news/features director. She started sporting Japanese nail art – pictures appliquéd or painted on to nails – rather than a traditional manicure, last spring. "Why not? I don't dress in a flashy manner. So my nails add a bit of voice to my relatively quiet clothes," she says.



An advert for Mary Quant makeup from the 1970s

Singer is not the only enthusiast. Manicurist Sophy Robson, who has a salon at London's Fortnum & Mason and works as a nail artist on magazine fashion shoots, has seen her nail art design business increase by 10 per cent in the past year. Clients include Katy Perry, who sported blinged-up hands for 2009's MTV Europe Music Awards; Lady Gaga, who went through several nail transformations in her "Bad Romance" video; Rihanna and the Black Eyed Peas' Fergie, whose attention-seeking nails have been noted for a few years now.

"My clients usually considered nail art a bit way out for them," says Robson. "Now they are becoming confident experimenting with different looks. A lot of women use their nails like an accessory. The style expresses their mood – it's a small detail that lets them feel good about themselves."

Cheryl Chang, an attorney based in Los Angeles, fell in love with Robson's rainbow nails. Each nail tip features a different duo of colours: light and dark pink on the little finger, green and yellow on the second finger, a single flash of fluorescent pink on the third, and so on. "Senior attorneys and clients sometimes look at them curiously," she admits. "But we can't always wear the clothes that we'd like to in a law firm. Nail art is a more subtle way to enjoy my personal tastes without being too conspicuous."

Sharmadean Reid works at London-based Wah Nails, which had a pop-up shop in Selfridges last November. She says: "Previously nail art was seen as a bit downmarket and trashy. But we tend to take inspiration from fashion collections. So we do a Marc Jacobs paisley print and various incarnations of leopard print, all by hand." Reid currently sports metallic chrome tips with embedded crystals and a little Chanel logo in her index fingernail. "It never gets boring," she notes.



Nail art by Sophy Robson

From diamanté to gold leaf, nail art is normally applied freehand, though companies such as Minx Nails provide ready-made appliqué designs. "Technology is much more advanced now", explains Robson. "You can do very intricate things on the nails and yet still have a neat finish."

The average nail art session lasts between 30 and 45 minutes, with prices starting at £70. Expensive, until you consider that they last for three to four weeks without chipping. "That's a lot of drama for not a lot of monthly overhead," says Sally Singer.

Technician Marian Newman, who established Harrods' Urban Retreat beauty salon, concurs: "Nail art is a very easy 'instant gratification' that is quick and relatively inexpensive. Plus, if you don't like it, it can be easily removed."



Rihanna and nails, 2008

Sales of plain old nail varnish also have been healthy during the economic downturn. Kate Massarella, brand director of Illamasqua, a make-up line that launched in November 2008, reports that nail varnish accounts for 15 per cent of current global sales, second only to lipstick. "Feedback from our counters is that customers are becoming more adventurous, trying more colours," she adds.

Whether you opt for flamboyant nail art or a classic varnish, "Having nails that look nice is a confidence booster," according to Newman. "You don't have to look in the mirror to see your nails; they are in front of you all day."

Fonte: Financial Times, London, Apr. 3rd 2010, Style, online.