

# Fashion Outlook

## Catch the weave

### French braid endures

By Helen Burggraf

Fergie the Duchess of York does it. So do Brooke Shields, supermodel Jerry Hall, fashion designer Carolyne Roehm and Kelly (Mrs. Calvin) Klein. Even Cher, that chameleon of coiffure, has been known to do it. Among the historic figures who have done it was the last empress of Austria, Elisabeth, who died in 1898.

"It" is braiding one's hair. Not in common flat plaits like Joan Baez might have worn to a demonstration in the 1960s, but in elegant, stylish French braids.

French braids start high on the head and gracefully move down to the nape of the neck, gently sweeping in new strands of hair from both sides along the way. Some women tuck the end under for a sleek, sophisticated look, while others add a perky bow to the end and let it flop where it may.

Although hardly new, the French braid has grown in popularity recently as more women have begun wearing their hair longer, and have found themselves in need of a clean-looking, pretty hair style for work that isn't as teeny-bopperish as a pony tail or as severe as a bun.

Beauty experts note that the French braid's popularity coincides with a wider resurgence in the popularity of all types of hair-braiding that began in 1979 with the movie "10," which starred Bo Derek and her cornrowed blond locks. Until Bo, these experts say, braiding was perceived mainly as an "ethnic" style.

Historically, hair-braiding was brought to Europe by French traders from Africa about 300 years ago, according to Dorothy Sorressi, national education director for Willfred Academy of Hair & Beauty Culture, a New York-based chain of beauty schools. The technique was quickly adopted by French peasants and, eventually, such style-conscious individuals as Marie Antoinette.

The French braid happens to be one of the best ways for women to secure particularly thick or long manes of hair in order to engage in such hair-dwrecking activities as tennis, horseback riding, dancing or aerobics.

So claims Maria Matarazzo, executive vice president and manager of George Michael of Madison Avenue, a

New York salon dedicated exclusively to caring for long hair.

What's more, "the French braid is healthier than a ponytail, which may shift, and which over time may cause the hairline to recede," Matarazzo explains. "And the rubber bands most women use to secure their ponytails

break the hair, while the scalp beneath a part can become sunburned."

George Michael, founder and president of the salon (and no relation to the pop star), adds that the French braid is ideal for hiding multiple-length hair while it grows out — typically an agonizing period for women. "The French braid gives the effect of long hair, even if the hair in the front is actually short," he notes.

But the style is also well suited to formal occasions, particularly when such accessories as a strand of faux pearls, silk flowers, a satin bow or other festive ornaments are incorporated into the weave or clipped on at the end.

Another reason French braids are becoming more popular is simply that more women are mastering the braiding technique, which is more complicated than a traditional braid because it involves adding new hair at every step along the way. Women who frequently wear French braids say they inevitably end up braiding others' hair, and some find themselves giving lessons just to buy themselves some peace and quiet.

Indeed, for the last 11 years that United Airlines flight attendant Maxine Garraway has been French-braiding her hair, she says she has invari-



MAXINE GARRAWAY, a United Airlines flight attendant, was so deluged by requests from co-workers and passengers to French-braid their hair that she put together a 12-minute how-to videotape on the subject. "French-Braiding — Fast & Easy" demonstrates how to fix your own hair or somebody else's.

ably been French-braiding that of her fellow flight attendants and sometimes even passengers as well. Finally, encouraged by friends in the video business, Garraway recently put together a 12-minute how-to videotape called "French Braiding — Fast & Easy." It is available for \$14.95 by phone from Video School House (800-345-1441); and by mail from Garraway's company, Maxi Enterprises, 1850 Union St. No. 101, San Francisco, CA 94123.

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