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the **BIG** tease

Jen O'Brien joins the mile-high hair club to test the modern bouffant.

PHOTOS BY JENNIFER O'TOOLE

TO SAY MY HAIR LACKS VOLUME would be an understatement. In spite of all my best efforts – experimenting with everything from mousses and sprays to dry shampoos and diffusers – most of the time, my fine, limp, shoulder-length locks lie lifelessly plastered to my scalp. Needless to say, news from the fall/winter 2010 runways that voluminous hair is back left me feeling deflated. With bouffants ranging from wispy and playful at Vera Wang to slicked-back and cone-shaped at Prada, I was determined to find out for myself: Is bigger really better?

THE BUILD

Whether your inspiration for big hair is Amy Winehouse or Betty Draper, Eric Del Monaco, official hair artist and colourist for L'Oréal Paris in Canada, recommends applying some thickening product or mousse to begin with. Add it to the roots while your hair is still wet, then finish with a good upside-down blow-dry. "You have to create a really good base," he says.

The next step? Tease the hair – lots. Gio Smaldino, art director at Toni&Guy in Vancouver, suggests subsectioning

the hair at the crown (where you want the most volume) and prepping each piece with a bit of hairspray. Once it's all teased out, comb your bangs or the front piece of your hair overtop. "Pull your brush lightly over the surface of this top section of hair so that it doesn't look like a jumbled mess," says Smaldino. A wide headband also looks sleek and helps anchor the look.

I added some volumizing product, did the upside-down blow-dry and set about teasing and spraying my hair into what amounted to one giant dreadlock. Halfway through, I broke a sweat and needed to take a break. **THE RESULTS** What came of my first attempt was a foot-high hair mound. I felt slightly ridiculous – as if I was wearing some strange hat that didn't quite suit my head. But, because I'm not used to seeing my hair with any sort of lift, it looked kind of cute. The next step? See if others agree.

ON THE TOWN

I added some red lipstick, picked out an outfit that I thought would match (leather leggings, boots and a trench) and headed to a friend's house for drinks. The bouffant survived the bike ride brilliantly and was a hit with my girlfriends, who oohed and aahed when I walked in the door. After downing some liquid courage, we headed out to a just-opened hipster bar.

THE RESULTS I walked in feeling less confident than usual and almost slightly foolish – like the time I showed up at a Halloween party dressed as a chicken when all the other women in the room were dressed as naughty nurses and sexy devils. But by the end of the night, the number of compliments I received made me feel much happier with my look.

THE OFFICE

After much Monday-morning teasing, spraying and pinning, I arrived at work

30 minutes late feeling self-conscious, even though I was getting the hang of the height. My co-worker Laura was the first to spot my enormous hair stack peeking out over my cubicle wall. "Woo-hoo!" she exclaimed. "Big plans tonight?" I didn't have any but smiled and nodded mysteriously.

THE RESULTS Oddly, looking and feeling put together made me feel more

noticeable, which made me feel a little uncomfortable. I guess there's some safety to be found in low-lying, low-maintenance hair.

THE LUNCH DATE

My boyfriend is the kind of person who would tell me that I look amazing no matter what was happening on my head, but I was still nervous, feeling a bit more severe than sexy.

THE RESULTS As I expected, my boyfriend told me that he thought the new 'do looked great. "You look smart," he said. "Very mature." I know he meant it as a compliment, but he's two years younger than me, so I felt a bit gross. (Wary of the "mature" compliment, I later asked Smaldino if the look was one that suited every age. "It's more of a younger look," he said delicately,

"unless you don't mind looking like a cougar from Vegas." Duly noted.)

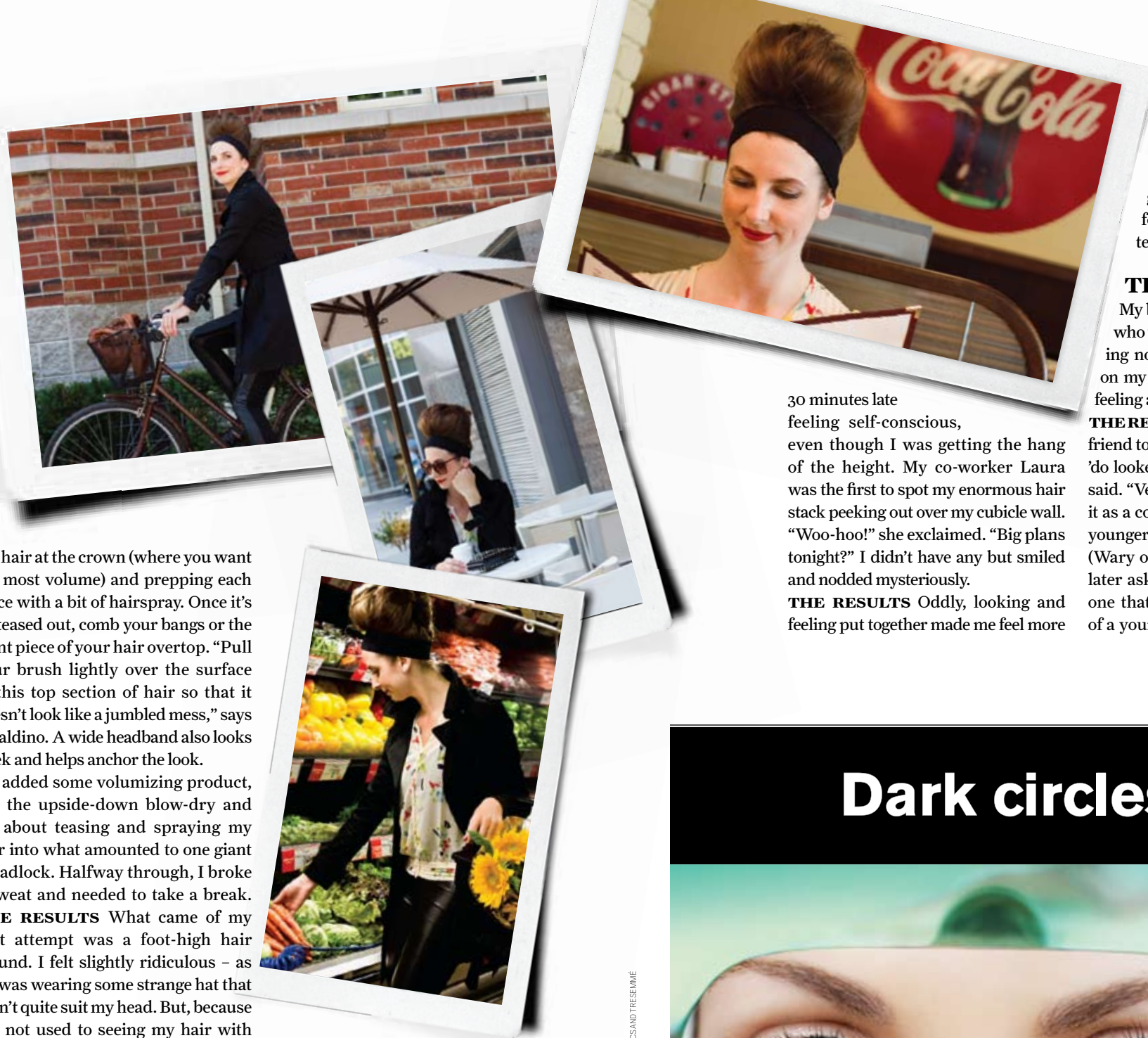
THE GROCERY STORE

Reassured with the response at work, I decided to take my hairdo grocery shopping, figuring that I'd get at least one confused staredown. But nothing – not even a second look.

THE RESULTS It was kind of fun to be time-machined back to the '60s – an era when it was *de rigueur* to hit the grocery store looking just as polished as you would at a dinner party.

THE VERDICT

So, will I wear it again? I think so. The bigger-than-thou look was easier to achieve than I expected once I got the hang of it, and for a smart work dinner or *Mad Men* premiere party, it would be ideal. ☺



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