

Cutting edge

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He could charge \$A1300 a haircut, but this Australian in Paris tells Sarina Lewis he'd rather "keep it real" for about \$A500.

David Mallett, Perth boy turned Paris hairdresser to the jet-set, is talking a million miles an hour.

We're on the phone, trying to arrange an interview, and things are getting tight. "I'm in Versaille on the weekend, then Rome next week for an advertising campaign, then I'm coming back to do Japanese Vogue, then L'Oreal." He pauses for breath, mumbles something about a cancelled Hermes shoot he just couldn't squeeze in. "Monday's my day off. Let's do it then." Frantic, glamorous, at times surreal, for the past 15 years Mallett's life has been a whirlwind of models, fashion shoots, ad campaigns and exotic locations.

It's a fabulous existence. Flying by private jet with Naomi Campbell to do hair on a Moroccan shoot, being whisked from Paris by helicopter to cut a famous fringe on a "two-million-metre boat", styling models on top of the Andes mountains in Chile. And today? The private Parisian salon where, from a mere 300 euros (\$A511), Mallett will treat any mere mortal to the wonder of a supermodel haircut.

This is where we are sitting, talking hair and superstardom, over a pot of white tea from the haute French tea house, Mariage Freres. Despite the high-fashion stratosphere in which he circulates, Mallett appears unaffected, open, friendly, more prone to swearing than simpering. "Occasionally I'll have an 'Am I really here?' thing going on," he confi des, recounting his invitation to a recent birthday party where everybody was somebody and original Da Vincis graced the apartment walls. "Sometimes when I see stuff like that, with butlers walking around, I do feel like I'm in a Woody Allen film."

Back in the 1970s, the greenhaired then 15-year old ("I was a freak") was apprenticed to Perth hairdresser Ed Burton, before moving to Sloane's in Sydney. He scooped the Australian hairdresser of the year award at just 21, and flew the Australian coop soon after. "I got a job in Milan doing Greta Scacchi's hair for a photo shoot. That's how I got asked to join an agency."

Now in his early 40s, Mallett has made a decision to adopt a stable existence. "For 15 years of my life I worked wherever I got sent. And I loved it. They'd say, 'You're going for a week in Morocco' and I'd say, 'Great.' Or a week in Chile? 'Unreal'. Ten days in Tanzania? 'Bloody brilliant.'"

But age has soured some experiences, he says. That, and the dissatisfaction of operating exclusively within fashion's rarefied bubble, where being young and gorgeous is a pre-requisite, and everyone is "fabulous". "Everything you do in fashion is ephemeral. But when you do a haircut, it lasts." Mallett will spend more time in his Paris salon. But his daily life will remain anything but ordinary.

There is still weekly travel and a clientele that reads like a who's who of European fashion glitterati: the head designers for Chloe and Sonia Rykiel, the editor of French Vogue, a couple of well-known actresses (no names, please), and stars of the modelling world. With such a high-octane list of clients, Mallett is privy to celebrity tittle-tattle, but, unfortunately for gossip hounds, he's smart enough not to dish.

And, he insists it isn't all stardust and model faces. The neighbourhood baker's wife is a regular, and, he's also quick to point out, the price of a consultation and cut — from 300 euros — is a good 500 euros (\$A852) cheaper than what other stylists of a similar standing charge. "It's not that I'm not worth it. I am," he says, of his decision to shy away from the "standard" 800 euros (\$A1362). "I just didn't want to exclude real people."