

The Barber of Knoxville

The classic barbershop is reborn and reinvented for a bunch of guys who haven't changed a bit.

Frank's Barbershop
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Some startups take years of painstaking planning—and then there's Frank's Barbershop, the brainchild of Knoxville, Tennessee-based Frank Gambuzza, wife Belinda and friend Adam Brown. "About a year ago, Adam was telling me about this great hot towel shave he'd had on a cruise," recalls Frank. "We had what was probably a two-and-a-half-minute conversation about how we should open a barbershop here. The following Monday we were scouting for a place."

It wasn't like the partners didn't know their business. Frank, an Intercoiffure member and co-owner with Belinda of the multi-location, award-winning Salon Visage, learned barbering under old-school Italian pros in '70s New Jersey. Brown owns the 100-year-old Tennessee School of Beauty. All saw the need for a place that Knoxville men and boys could call their own. "We noticed that guys would come to our salon once and not come back," says Frank. "When we asked them why, they said, 'I felt like I was at my wife's salon.'"

Not the case at Frank's Barbershop, where the testosterone flows as freely as the root beer (served in frosty mugs), and clients shoot the breeze at pool tables or grab a game of darts before their service. Less than a year in business, the shop is already a neighborhood institution, thanks to some very savvy decisions made at the onset.

The partners chose one of Salon Visage's 1,800-square-foot locations for the space.

"The shop is on an artery to every upscale subdivision in West Knoxville, and down the street from a park where the Little League baseball and soccer teams play—so thousands of people pass the shop several times a week," Frank explains. Frank's Barbershop sponsors a team in every league. "We also supply popcorn—in bags with our logo and story printed on them," Frank laughs. "And we donate more than 1,000 logo-ed baseballs for a winning 'player of the game.' That kid receives a Frank's baseball that he can bring in to the shop for a free haircut."

Along with clever marketing, the shop stays on the cutting edge of trends. Of course, it



Working with Takara Belmont designer Jason Desantis, Frank and Belinda Gambuzza and Adam Brown drew inspiration from Ralph Lauren and the traditional American steakhouse for their barbershop decor.

helps that today's styles are barber-friendly. "Guys are getting the clean-line look, but the cuts are modern, with products playing a major role in finishing," Frank reports. Beards are bushier, but in a conscious way, he adds. Retail opportunities abound too, with emphasis on items from The Art of Shaving strategically placed throughout the shop.

The key to the shop's ongoing success is over-delivery and training, relates Frank, who teaches classic techniques such as straight-razor work. Seven wet stations allow clients to receive certain services discreetly, including haircoloring as well as nose and ear hair waxing. Shampoos include essential oil-infused hot towels and a vigorous shoulder massage. Yet, despite all the add-ons, the prices remain moderate. "Some things change, but men's buying habits haven't," Frank reminds with a smile. "It's still all about need, time and value." —Linda Kossoff



Local designer Rick Bennett drew on archives of bygone-era Italian family photos to create the sense of a former barbershop now resurrected.

Haircolor: L'Oréal Professionnel
Hair care: Towel Dry, Fuel For Men, The Art of Shaving
Best-selling products: The Art of Shaving Starter Kit
Furniture: Takara Belmont