

HIDDEN HEROES

By Jonathan Reiner

PERMANENT WAVE

Key hairstylist Russell Latham gives the Sunset cast its crowning glory

NO MATTER HOW HUMID THE AIR OR PREPOSTEROUS the plot, Russell Latham sees to it that no one on *Sunset Beach* ever has a bad hair day.

Latham, *Sunset*'s key hairstylist, doesn't only take good care of the actors' tresses; in the process, he has forged fast friendships with them. "Sarah Buxton (Annie) was my first friend here. At the company's first meeting, at Mr. Spelling's office on Wilshire Boulevard, we were in the bathroom adjusting her wig," he recalls. "A lovely gentleman walked by and asked us if we'd like coffee, juice or water. This is in the bathroom, mind you! Well, he brought us our drinks on a silver tray, and Sarah and I immediately realized that we're going to like it here."

According to Latham, "A key hairstylist, simply put, is the one who gets yelled at. Seriously, you could call me the head person in the hair department. The 'key' works with the producers and actors to design the look of the show, as well as execute new styles and colors."

Latham heard about the *Sunset* gig while staying with veteran soap actress Patricia Barry, a friend from his days in the hair department at *Loving*. "Hope Smith (*Sunset*'s supervising producer) called to quiz me about how my acting career was going. It wasn't," he deadpans. "Then she asked if I might be enticed to come and play with them at *Sunset Beach* and design the hair for the show. I interviewed with Hope and another producer, Lisa Hesser — whom I absolutely adore! Then I saw (head writer) Bob Guza, with whom I had worked on *Loving*, met executive producer Gary Tomlin, and decided that this could be exciting."

Although Latham has worked backstage at several soaps, including *The Young and the Restless*, *Sunset* is a unique opportunity, since he and his staff got to design styles from scratch. "From that first meeting with the producers and Mr. Spelling, it was very clear that they wanted a fresh, exciting, beach-type look," Latham explains. "They want us to set trends rather than follow them, which is exciting. Much of the cast is young and beautiful, so anything we do with their hair will set trends."

Latham's work is already garnering attention. "One of the most exciting moments was when Kimberly Spiteri, one of my stylists, who still

works Saturdays in one of those upscale salons, told me a story about a client who did not know that Kimberly worked on the show. The client came in and asked Kimberly if she'd seen that new soap *Sunset Beach*, because she wanted a style like Sarah Buxton wears!"

Latham explains that creating a hairstyle is more than a question of what looks good. "I get as much biographical information as possible, to see what the character is about," he says. "Then I meet with the actor to see what their hair is like and what they are all about. Then there is a meeting with the producer to present all the options — the cut, color, wigs if necessary. After that, we test a few styles on the actor to see how they look on-camera, and the producers make the final decision."

Of course, everything must be approved by "Mr. Spelling." "He's very specific about his characters' hair, and actually enjoys being a part of process," Latham explains. "He had a brilliant mandate that we still adhere to, which is that the characters' hair may not change for the first four to six weeks. That way, the audience can identify who is who. However, this drives many of the actors and stylists insane, since in real life we change our hair all the time. But I guess it's OK, because this business is all about maintaining the illusion."

The beach is one important component of the show that isn't an illusion. "We tape the location scenes in Seal Beach, which is a lovely community in the South Bay area of Los Angeles. It's beautiful, but depending on the weather, oyl!" Latham says



Latham takes good care of the actors. A few minutes with the stylist is always a highlight for Timothy Adams (Casey).

he "never knows what nature has in store, and there is no product on the market — short of a helmet, which does have its time and place — that can do anything about it. But, that said, all hair does tend to look lovely blowing in the wind."

Latham, who appeared on-camera in the recurring role of a stylist who gave Tim a makeover on *Y&R*, says you can't compare working for daytime king Bill Bell with prime-time auteur Spelling. "They're both icons in the industry and it's an honor to work for them, but the experiences are completely different. Mr. Bell's shows are both well-oiled machines, one running for more than 20 years and the other more than 10 years. *Sunset* is Mr. Spelling's first venture into daytime; that's why this job is so exciting."

But the most exciting part of the *Sunset* experience for Latham is the people he works with and the friends he's made. He describes Kathleen Noone (*Bette*) as "wonderful," and has also bonded with Leigh Taylor-Young, Lesley-Anne Down and Sam Behrens (Elaine, Olivia and Gregory). Vanessa Dorman (Caitlin) recently moved into his building. "She's so excited about moving in. It's like *Melrose Place*," he quips.

Latham also is friends with Robert Tyler and Jessica Collins (Trucker McKenzie and Dinah Lee Mayberry, *Loving*) — "I was 'maid of honor' at their wedding last November" — and Jess Walton (Jill, *Y&R*). "What's it all about?" he asks rhetorically. "Money? Fame? Ratings? Hair? No! It's about the relationships we build. That's what lasts forever." ★

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