

# Lifestyle

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## Hair, there and everywhere...

The Beatles' hairdresser Leslie Cavendish tells *Alex Galbinski* about his new book revealing his experiences with the Fab Four



Publicity photo for the opening of the Beatles-backed Apple hairdressing salon in Chelsea

**A**s hairdresser to the Beatles in the 1960s, Leslie Cavendish was exposed to sex, drugs and rock n' roll. However, working for Vidal Sassoon, the most famous hairdresser of the time, he was under strict instructions that the female clientele – including Jane Asher, Mary Quant and singer Shirley Bassey – were off limits. And drugs didn't float his boat. But rock n' roll and the Beatles were a dream come true.

In his recently-published book, *The Cutting Edge: The Story of the Beatles' Hairdresser Who Defined An Era*, Cavendish (who is pictured above, strumming the Gretsch guitar John Lennon used during the recording of *Paperback Writer*), lifts the lid not just on Beatlemania, but also on popular culture in an era when the BBC only played "safe and proper" music by artists speaking "the Queen's equerry".

As he was blow-drying her hair one day in 1966, Asher turned to the 19-year-old Jewish boy from Burnt Oak – who had fallen into hairdressing after following his best friend Lawrence Palk into it, seduced by the fashionable lifestyle the salon seemed to offer – and asked: "Would you cut my boyfriend's hair?"

Her boyfriend was none other than Paul McCartney, and Cavendish couldn't believe his luck. "I was 19 and a Beatles fan, so you can imagine how I felt! You don't say no, do you?!" he recalls, laughing.

What happened when Cavendish, now 70, turned up to cut Macca's hair? "I got to Paul's house and there were half a dozen girls outside...they knew everybody who went in. Inside the courtyard, there was a green Aston Martin – the only time you ever saw one of those was in a Bond film!

"When I knocked, I expected a house-

keeper to open the door, but it was Mr McCartney, saying: 'You must be Leslie, Jane's told me a lot about you.' Everything was very relaxed."

Cavendish – who was born in Cable Street to Jewish refugees fleeing pogroms in Russia, Poland and Georgia – says he felt like he'd won the "Beatles lottery".

"I sat down and had a cup of tea with Paul. It was a few weeks after they finished touring, and that Beatles mop top look was a bit untidy. So I gave it a little trim. I was

George was trying to find himself at the time and trying to get his songs out.

"Paul was excited to be around because he was Beatle-ish – you were seeing a Beatle. He was very focused – and still is – on his music. I had a nice time with him – nothing heavy. Watching him work was a privilege."

I ask Cavendish – who, in his lengthy career also tended to the locks of The Bee Gees, Graham Nash, Peter Cook, among many other celebrities as well as the general public – why he thinks the fab four trusted him.

"One of the things I learnt at Vidal's was to be discreet. I was the only London boy in that set – and I was Jewish as well. I never told the press about anything.

"I realised what a great excitement it was for me to be hanging around people who were really great and whose music I liked – I thought, 'I'm not going to blow this.'"

Cavendish was the one who facilitated McCartney going incognito on safari with Asher in late 1966, when he cut his hair very short. The headlines screamed: "Barber who made Paul a skinhead". And he gave the stars their iconic look between the *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *Let It Be* albums.

Being Jewish is important to Cavendish and while he wasn't religious, he was always aware of his roots. One of only three Jewish boys in his school, the class bullies "would regularly hassle us for being Jew boys", he writes.

Indeed, it was before the Six-Day War in 1967, when he saw the front page of *The Daily Express*, showing the map of Israel with arrows from Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Syria all pointing towards it and pushing it into the sea, that he saw red.

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with rock royalty and would have hung around all day."

Within a short time, Cavendish became McCartney's regular stylist until 1975, and to the rest of the fab four from 1967 until 1970, part of a close circle around the cheeky Liverpudlians.

What were they like, I ask him. "Ringo was involved in what the other three were doing, John was very individual and



Above: Cavendish cutting George Harrison's hair and, right, training as a junior under Mark Hilliard at Vidal Sassoon's salon at the Grosvenor House Hotel

"That got to me right into my heart," he recalls. He signed up to help at Kibbutz Mahanayim in the Galil, where many of its members had gone to fight.

"I told McCartney I was going to Israel; that they needed some help. I think he understood where I was coming from. My mother didn't understand, though," he laughs. "She said: 'You're mad! Leave them alone, you don't have to go there!'"

Not long after he returned, and two weeks after the death of their manager, Brian Epstein, McCartney invited Cavendish onto the psychedelic yellow coach along with 40-odd people for the Sergeant Pepper Magical Mystery Tour

from London to Cornwall.

Cavendish, who now manages a north London shop for Jewish charity All Aboard, says his best recollections of the tour are of being with the Fab Four in close proximity. "I'd never seen them together before. It was fun to watch them muck about altogether and to chat with them."

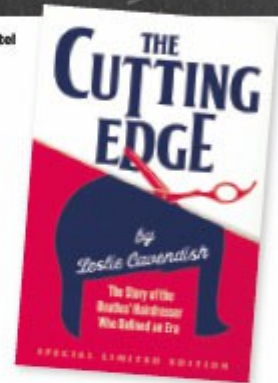
"The moment we stopped the coach, that's when you saw Beatlemania – people gathered and screamed their names. It was fascinating to watch that, wondering how they could live like this."

In 2012, for the Magical Mystery Tour's 50th anniversary, Cavendish was invited to a special screening at the British Film

Institute. He attended with Aidan, one of his two sons, and was pleased when McCartney recognised him.

"As we were coming out of the theatre, Paul looked at me and said my name. He put his arm around me and I introduced him to my son. We made small talk, and I said to him, 'There is a promise that I made to you – that we'd both kept our hair – and I was right!'"

◆ **The Cutting Edge: The Story of the Beatles' Hairdresser Who Defined An Era** by Leslie Cavendish is published by Alma Books, priced £14.99, and is available now



Above: The Magical Mystery Tour coach party. Cavendish is sitting second right from Harrison with a cigarette in his mouth



Cavendish, right, with friend Lawrence Falk



Cavendish outside the barbers in Penny Lane