

Manny Padron, Substance Salon's Creative Director, Brings SoHo Style to Park Avenue by Clifford W. Evan

To step inside Substance Salon at 52 Park Avenue in downtown Rutherford, one feels instantly transported a few miles east, across the Hudson, and into a den of downtown style. Here the atmosphere doesn't just shout the chic and the now, it wears that sophistication like a glamor couple—she of the heart-stopping cocktail dress, he in the tailored Italian suit. Substance strikes you as the go-to place that turns each woman into that dazzling head turner, that grooms the men who close the deals.

While a team of black-clad stylists confidently transforms their clients with hair and face makeovers in front of elegantly-lit mirrors, a neon sign glowing from an accent wall of reclaimed wood urges all who see it to “Do What You Love.” The sign hangs above a vintage 1953 Belmont barber chair, the can't-miss feature in the work station of Substance's owner and creative director, Manny Padron. Words which clearly reflect both Manny's passion for inspiring style and creativity in his customers, and the vision he brings to a Park Avenue he sees transforming in front of his eyes.

“The people in Rutherford appreciate the kind of businesses that are thriving here,” he adds, with a nod to the host of new and unique storefronts that continue to open along Park Avenue.

Manny first considered opening Substance Salon on Park Avenue in 2008, but didn't believe the time was right. Three years ago, however, he saw new potential in the area. “I had a vision of a real bustling downtown with a feel that spoke of both the city and of a tight community,” Manny says about the decision to move his business across Route 3 from Lyndhurst to Rutherford.

The result is a premiere luxury salon that would seem equally at home in Manhattan, Miami's South Beach, or any other high-end locale. But also a place that has that neighborhood feel where all are welcome.

“We're a place where people feel pampered and appreciated as individuals,” Manny says. “We want our customers to leave looking and feeling better about themselves.”

While Substance has all the ambience of a salon that typically caters to women, nearly half of its clientele are men. As a master barber who once worked exclusively as a stylist for men, Manny embraces his craft as something of a lost art. Part of a resurgence of artisans such as custom shoemakers, farm-to-table chefs, and bespoke suit

designers that have sprung up in the nation's most trend-setting areas. For Manny, who grew up across the street from a neighborhood barber shop, and has been cutting hair since he was thirteen, the work for him is undeniably a calling. One more way to make art from his life.

In fact, Manny sees the salon as just one element of a ever-growing personal brand recognized as a go-to authority in men's grooming and fashion. As an image consultant for executives and media figures, a brand ambassador for a line of Italian suits, and a public speaker who travels the country teaching the fine details of men's grooming, Manny also understands his role as an educator. "My job," he says, "is to inspire others to be their best and most creative selves when it comes to personal style and fashion."

As the neon sign on his wall says, Manny Padron clearly "does what he loves," and the epicenter of it all starts at Substance Salon in Rutherford.

"I feel very blessed to be where I am today," he adds. "I want to keep exercising my creativity and collaborating with other creative people. I'm really looking forward to what the future brings."