

MANI MANIA

A new book charts the rise of polished tips, from risqué beauty gesture to billion-dollar biz

BEAUTY WRITERS HAVE BEEN breathlessly describing the mani since the 1880s, when Parisian parlours began offering the service. But little attention has been paid to the history of polish as a cultural force—until now.

In the new book *Nails: The Story of the Modern Manicure*, Suzanne E. Shapiro, a research assistant at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute, argues that the painted nail isn't mere frill: it reflects changing ideals of femininity.

Gilded fingertips go way back to ancient Egypt, but manicures didn't become commercial until a medical pro cured France's Louis-Philippe I of a pesky hangnail. Suddenly, expert grooming was an important matter of beauty and hygiene, and nail salons began opening in Europe and America. Though most women kept their tips subtly tinted, some early adopters were sporting diamond piercings and other blingy add-ons.

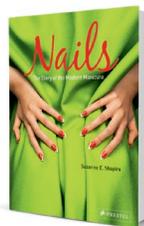
The 1920s brought the first coloured liquid polishes to the masses, and their popularity took off alongside a rebellious new habit: "Smoking was a major influence," says Shapiro. "It was an erotic gesture that showed one's hands," which were often painted in the hue du jour: a racy scarlet. "During the Jazz Age, it was the coolest thing to be a young woman who dressed provocatively, drank with the

boys and danced all night. Part of that culture was about defying norms, so it was a good climate for bold nails."

Although red lacquer ruled for decades, by the '50s it was no longer "a marker of feminine disobedience" but a sign of ladylike perfection—no chips allowed. So it's no surprise that women of the '60s turned away from their grandma's polishes, opting for pales, nudes and pop-art brights.

Fashion's experimental mood in the '70s marked the resurgence of nail art, embraced by stars like Cher. But it was hip hop's love of flamboyant extensions that turned the niche fad into a full-on phenomenon. Showcasing designer logos and sometimes even actual money (one celebrity manicurist adorned Lil' Kim's tips with strips of dollar bills), the look signalled urban cred and unlimited cash flow.

Now, thanks to the Internet, nail art has gone viral. "We're obsessed with details, and we have high-res phones to take photos. Just when you think you've seen it all, a new style creeps up," says Shapiro. "There are articles that ask, *Is nail art dead?* But I don't expect that to happen." Neither do we: with the ongoing innovations at our fingertips—including the futuristic, fresh-off-the-3D-printer press-ons now available online—this enduring trend continues to earn our two thumbs up. —Wing Sze Tang



Nails: The Story of the Modern Manicure
Suzanne E. Shapiro
(Prestel, \$33)



ESSIE
Nail Polish in Topless & Barefoot, \$10

AVON
Pretty Paradise Manicure Kit
(scissors shown), \$8



DEBORAH LIPPMANN
Nail Lacquer in She Drives Me Crazy, \$17



SEPHORA FORMULA X
Neon Top Coat, \$13

TOOL KIT

Stock your paint box with these **FLARE** picks



KISS Salon Secrets
Nail Art Starter Kit
(brushes shown), \$17



ESSIE
Nail Polish in Sittin' Pretty, \$10