

After the tour, Kenneth, killing 20 minutes before his noon appointment, walks out of the salon into the hallway and leans against the wall. "This is my office," he says. "The hallway. I'm not kidding." Just then a woman trots past with hair fashioned into a cloud of flaming red cotton candy.

"One of the Eva customers," whispers Kenneth. "They all have that color hair."

"Which is what?" I ask.

"Mercurochrome," he snickers.

When I inquire whose hair he's cutting today, he walks back into the salon and picks up the booking sheet. "Mrs. Goodman, a psychologist. Dr. Alexander, the ex-wife of the former mayor of Syracuse, who's now in jail. Barbara Davis, who's a writer."

He looks at me over the top of his glasses. "So you know, fame you're not looking at today. All right? You'll live. You'll survive it."

On the day of the brunch in December, Kenneth gave me a very brief guided tour of the two blocks that are Beekman Place, an aristocratic cul-de-sac tucked away in a rare quiet corner of the city. He turned down my request to view his apartment—mentioning building renovations. "It's what I call my Cole Porter apartment, painted dark brown," he said. "In my head I imagine that's what Cole Porter looked at when he looked out of the Waldorf."

"It's very private," says Joan Rivers. "It took him a long time to invite me up there. It's really his haven with his dog. He's out of the Edwardian age. He's honorable, he's a gentleman in the really true sense of the word. I mean, if he gives you his word, that's it. The tragedy of Kenneth is that he expects the same of you. Every other word I say to him is 'Grow up.'"

Rivers met Kenneth 21 years ago when she went to him for a haircut. But it wasn't until 1987, when her husband, Edgar Rosenberg, committed suicide, that they became really close. "You know, the most important thing I've learned from him is to look behind everybody's facade. If I saw this man coming into a room, I would avoid him like the plague because he looks so formal. And yet this is my best friend. He's the sweetest, most adorable, funniest child inside that perfectly tailored suit."

A couple of years ago, Rivers and Kenneth started showing up at a lot of New York social functions together ("I think he enjoys watching me make a fool of myself trying desperately to fit in," says Rivers). When I tell Rivers that someone once remarked that she "gave Kenneth a new life," she balks. "I didn't change Kenneth's social life. It's just that he became more visible because I'm so highly visible. He's always been invited to the right parties." Nevertheless, Kenneth has eased up on the social whirl. "I don't want to become—what can I say?—Joan's walker," he says. "And I'm not putting myself or her down or saying that I don't love to go out with her. Besides, Joan's not going to make it in New York in the social swing of things if she's out with her hairdresser all the time."

Joan Rivers aside, Kenneth doesn't really like to go out anyway. He'd rather garden or cook or shop or read. But mostly, for Kenneth, the work's the thing. He recently secured 5,000 square feet of space at the Waldorf-Astoria and will move in late this summer. "It will probably be sort of Italian," he says, "Palladian influenced, but smaller. I have to be sensible. It has to be something that can earn, that can produce." Meanwhile, Victoria Meekins toils away in a rented apartment-office on East 70th Street, trying to keep Kenneth's product line going and standing guard over hundreds of smoke-damaged boxes—28 years' worth of paperwork and press clippings.

Shortly after the salon burned down, Rivers suggested to Kenneth that he try something new. "Why don't you become the most sought-after private hairdresser in the world?" I asked him. "Get a Rolls-Royce, and you pull up, and you do a whole new thing—Kenneth comes to your house." Well, he just stared at me for ten minutes like, *You're the biggest fool I've ever met.*

Kenneth was having none of it because, in the end, he is as dogged and tenacious as he is mannered and elegant. "He's really stuck around," says Rivers finally. "And it proves it was not the salon they were after. It was him. But the salon was...ohhh, I can't wait for the new one." ●

Asian

By Craig Bromberg

When Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese army in 1975, Lea Salonga was four years old. Now she is 20 and the star of Broadway's *Miss Saigon*, the latest musical extravaganza from producer Cameron Mackintosh, who brought us *Cats*, *Les Misérables*, and *Phantom of the Opera*.

In Manila, where Salonga grew up, she was a child star: on stage by seven, on magazine covers by nine, and, with her younger brother, the star of her own TV show, *Love, Lea*. When the *Miss Saigon* team of Mackintosh, composer Claude-Michel Schönberg, and librettist Alain Boublil breezed into Manila hunting for a big-voiced Asian beauty to play the leading role of Kim (an orphaned Vietnamese prostitute who becomes pregnant by an American GI and is deserted by him in the final days of the war), Salonga was hardly languishing on the Philippine pop scene. Still, no one expected the tiny (five foot two) singer to adapt so quickly to the taxing role, which she originated in the London production of the play.

It is a tough part, one that bears more than a passing resemblance to Madame Butterfly. In the play, after Saigon falls, Kim becomes a boat person and flees Vietnam for Patpong, the infamous Thai pleasure district, where she becomes rather more expert at her trade. Months later, she runs into her GI—this time with his American wife in tow—and makes the painful decision to give up her child.

Jonathan Pryce (who is Caucasian) plays Kim's Vietnamese pimp, the Engineer. The actor's race caused a great deal of controversy in the early days of the American production; Actors Equity stepped in, suggesting that an

Asian should play the part and nearly halting the project altogether. When Pryce first played the Engineer in London, he wore prosthetics on his eyes and makeup that transformed him into an Asian (his makeup has since been altered). For Salonga to become Kim, she says, it only

takes a quick dusting of pancake base, some light brown eye shadow ("to fix my eyebrows and make my eyes a little smaller"), a bit of blusher, "and I'm on. Very simple." Save for a few daubs of dirt on her face, arms, and neck after Kim becomes a boat person, Salonga's makeup remains unchanged throughout the show. She's proud of that.

"Kim doesn't have to work to make herself attractive to the GI—she just is," she says. "Right from the first act, she's the new girl. She has no idea how to look like a prostitute. She's a virgin. When she meets the GI, he just wants to go home to America, but there's something about Kim that's so different. She's proud, she still has her chin up, and her body is held very straight. She's beautiful because of her innocence and naïveté. In her own way, she's very sexy." ●

Lea Salonga
is the big-
voiced star
of Broadway's
"Miss Saigon."

Divva



Salonga wears
an antique
chiffon and
velvet dress
from Jean
Hoffman-Jana
Starr Antiques.
Earrings by
Patricia Locke.