

Barbers make the cut in rise of small shops

As chain stores crumble, high streets are bristling with independents

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When high streets reopen tomorrow morning, shoppers will discover who has survived and who hasn't. The answer may surprise them.

A rise in the number of new barber shops is leading a resurgence of independent businesses on the high street.

While fashion chains have collapsed, the grooming industry saw the greatest growth of any retail sector last year, despite being closed for large parts of it.

By the end of 2020, there were 800 more barbers, 526 more beauty salons and 206 more nail salons than there had been 12 months earlier, according to analysis by the Local Data Company (LDC).

To capitalise on pent-up demand after 14 weeks of being closed, some barbers will open their doors at one minute past midnight on Monday.

Once a place for "short back and sides" haircuts, barbers have evolved in recent years, and many now offer a range of men's grooming, including beard trims and faded haircuts. The Refinery, in Mayfair, offers full-body "manscaping" for £130, using clippers to shape and trim body hair. Turkish barbers are offering services such as hot towel shaves and nasal hair singeing.

The London School of Barbering says it now trains 800 barbers a year at its London and Manchester centres, while the

Hair for Men Academy said it had moved to a larger three-storey premises in Shoreditch, east London, during lockdown to meet demand for barber courses. Paul Guy, director of the academy, said many people who had lost their jobs in creative industries during the pandemic were retraining as barbers.

While barbers are thriving, the number of hair salons in Great Britain fell by 203 last year. Ronald Nyakairu, a senior analyst at LDC, said: "We believe the rise in men's barbers is due to a combination of the increase in men being interested in personal grooming in recent years and a fashion returning for men to grow beards, which need trimming.

"We think they are growing faster than hair salons, as salons are heading towards market saturation after many, many years of rapid growth, whereas barbers have been growing more recently."

The analysis revealed the resilience of Britain's independent shops in comparison with chains such as Debenhams, Oasis, Warehouse and Cath Kidston, which have all closed. By the end of last year, Britain had 9,877 fewer chain stores than in 2019, but only 1,442 fewer independents.

Living up to the UK's 200-year-old reputation as a nation of shopkeepers, independent retailers now account for 65 per cent of shops, up from 63 per cent five

years ago.

Kyle Monk, director of insight at the British Retail Consortium, said: "People like to say that the high street is dead, but it's just in a constant state of change."

Almost a fifth of town centres in Britain had more businesses open in 2020 than close, the majority of which were independent, according to LDC. Some towns gained as many as 39 businesses last year, ranging from patisseries to pet shops.

While clothing retailers, betting shops, charity shops and estate agents suffered the greatest decline, entrepreneurs took advantage of the relaxed planning laws to open yoga studios, boxing gyms and Pilates centres, at a time when the public had a renewed focus on health.

Andrew Goodacre, of the British Independent Retailers Association, said: "For some time now, we have seen more retail chains close stores as their business model fails or they look to move online, leaving independents to fill the gap."

Commuter towns have fared particularly well in recent months, because workers who used to travel into city centres for work were told to stay at home and therefore shopped locally, a trend that is expected to continue.

Richard Lim, chief executive of the consultancy Retail Economics, said that with retail rents at an almost decade-long low, and plenty of retail space available, there was a window of opportunity for

small business owners. “If you are a small business with a proposition that stands out in the market, there’s good reason to think about taking a physical presence on some streets in the UK,” Lim said.

Chains including Next, John Lewis, Waterstones, B&Q and Homebase have revealed new launches to lure customers back to physical shops. Next will open its third-largest UK store tomorrow at Fosse Park West shopping complex, on the edge of Leicester, one of the cities hardest hit by lockdown. The store will feature a Waterstones concession, a Virgin Holidays travel agent, a Costa Coffee and its first “home fragrance room”, in response to a rise in diffuser and candle sales.

Shops are back — but what about shoppers?, Business, pages 2-3



Men's grooming is enjoying a boom