



Li Menghua (center), known to his customers as Martin, takes a group photo with his friends and customers on the opening day of the new Martin & Jin Hair Salon on Laowaijie. — Ti Gong

A CUT ABOVE THE REST:

Local hairdresser specializes in expat coiffures



Molly Donegan after her hair is done at the Martin & Jin — Ti Gong

Lu Feiran

Briton Molly Donegan worries that if she leaves Shanghai, she will never find another hairdresser as good as Li Menghua anywhere in the world.

Known to his patrons simply as Martin, Li and his partner run the Martin & Jin Hair Salon on Laowaijie in the Hongqiao area of Minhang District. More than 90 percent of the patrons are expats.

Donegan visits the salon once every five or six weeks. Sometimes she gets her hair fully dyed in eye-catching orange; other times, it's just a cut and conditioning.

"He does such a good job that every time I leave, my hair is so shiny, soft and healthy," said Donegan. "I've been dying my hair at Martin's for over four years, and it's still in quite good condition."

Laowaijie, or "Expat Street," is home to restaurants, bars, bakeries and other businesses run by people from all over the world. Li has more than 4,000 foreign contacts in his WeChat list, and more than 800 have been to his salon, sometimes from far-flung places in China.

"It could be said that I have handled hair from all over the world," said Li, who speaks fluent English.

For expats living in China, finding a hairdresser who understands the structure of non-Asian hair can be problematical. And yes, hair from different ethnic groups has its own characteristics.

Li often travels to Hong Kong to buy imported hair products, especially hair dyes of light colors that aren't available on the mainland. He even has a special room for clients who want privacy, like Muslim women who don't want their hair to be seen by others.

"People from other backgrounds have very different hair quality from we Chinese," he said. "One major difference is that our hair is much stiffer,