

# The NY barber who gives the kidz super cutz and sound advice

*From his shop in Vesterbro and on his trips to suburbs like Ishøj, Bernard Zephryne garners respect from youths who don't normally respect authority*

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On the way to Ishøj, where Bernard Zephryne will give out some free haircuts to schoolchildren, we bond over a really bad smoothie. Overly sweet and chemical food is one of the things he doesn't miss about the States.

Sure, New York has its fair share of organic muffins and farmers' markets, but the son of Haitian immigrants grew up in the projects, so how he has ended up becoming the proud owner of a successful barbershop in Copenhagen is a bit of a mystery – to him most of all.

## **Natural-born barber**

"The funny thing about me being a barber is, I never actually said: 'Okay, I'm going to grow up to be a barber' – it was just something I knew how to do," he reveals.

"I learned how to cut hair practically by cutting my own. I never thought I was any good, but everyone was like: 'Wow, you're good at this!' I found a fire inside of me and I just projected it onto cutting hair and it exploded."

Talking of explosions, his barber shop 'Super Cutz' recently moved to Vesterbro (Haderslevgade 43; 2239 9314), and two months on, he is already thinking about expanding.

"Predominantly I get men in the shop, but I plan on expanding Super Cutz. I don't want to just limit it to men," he contends.

"The way its popularity is growing so fast is incredible. I see the power behind it and what I can do with it: how I can help young people, how what I say matters. They are starting to look at the shop like this is the place to go if you want to get a nice haircut; this is where you have to be! I'm thinking of franchising it: of having different barbershops in different areas."

## **Diverse customer base**

Zephryne has celebrities advertise his shop by taking pictures and tagging themselves, but his clientele comes from everywhere: "I'm cutting black people, Pakistanis, white Danish kids" – different races, colours and economic backgrounds all let their hair down before getting some rapper's new trimmings.

"A lot of the young kids here really look to the rap music and rap videos and they want the haircuts that the rappers have like Kendrick Lamar, NAS and Jay-Z," he continues.

"Some of these rappers get lines in their hair, or designs, and a lot of kids now want a fade. In Denmark they can't find barbers who can give them that type of fade, and the fact that I come from the States and give them that, it's like: 'Wow, you can actually give us a real fade, not an army cut and just shave the side of our head!'"

### **Mad rush, man crush**

As we walk down the hallway of the 'Flyvende Kuffert', an afternoon facility essentially designed to keep the youth off the street, a teenage boy loses the hushed dispute with his friend as to who'll address Zephryne first. "Where are you from?" The answer (New York) is received with such a familiar-sounding mixture of admiration and embarrassment that – hadn't they been guys – it'd be safe to assume they now had a crush on him.

"Yeah, I get that a lot. I think it helps me get their attention, because they idealise the US, and New York especially," muses Zephryne.

"I can see how they're trying to emulate the American lifestyle, which is really not positive for a teenager at this point. They're turning to the streets, turning to drugs, and they don't realise the opportunities that they have here."

### **Debunking the gangsta's paradise**

But Zephryne delivers more than just the hip (hop) hairstyle that they want.

"I don't look at barbering as just giving a person a haircut – I also try to get to know my clients. I have a lot of young teenagers who I cut and I try to talk to them and show that there's more than wanting to be like these gangsters you see in the rap videos," reveals Zephryne.

"I talk to them in a positive manner to get them to acknowledge that. The fact that I'm from New York and into hip-hop culture too helps to get their attention, and they go: 'I'm surprised you're not into gangbans! And you're actually speaking positive!' It's a whole new way of looking at things."

### **Mr Magical Motivator**

Zephryne's haircuts and motivational speeches seem to do their magic. Heck, I feel a strange urge to become a barber myself.

"I have a lot of kids that like what I'm doing, and they wonder: 'Can I do that too?'" says Zephryne.

"I think that's something that this country hasn't been paying attention to – they don't really look at barbering as something that teenagers would want to get involved in. I think I've done a lot of workshops that have proven that young kids and teens are interested in cutting hair. We need to create some avenue – some form of structure that'll allow the kids to utilise that, cause it can actually steer them away from the streets. Let's put something together, let's build a school: a Super Cutz barber school!"

Said and done – or at least got on with. Zephryne is currently designing the curriculum and collaborating with Nørrebrohallen on an application that may

bring the project to life soon. But a barber school à la Bernard doesn't stop at a perfect fade.

"When I start the school, I want to employ the kids who graduate, but you're not going to be able to become your ideal barber unless you get it together within yourself," he contends.

"With the whole curriculum that I'm putting together, there's an emphasis on you as an individual: you have to learn to organise your mind, you have to become stable within yourself. I think we all have that fire within us, but we need to learn to project it onto something positive."

Zephryne certainly has, and now the fresh Danish air is feeding his fire further. By the looks of it, it'll take more than a fire to tip this barber's balance.