



# Au Naturel

JANUARY 2011

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## Upcoming Events

"From Root to Tip: An African America Hairstory" Panel Discussion – Hosted by the NCSU Africana Studies Program - February 17, 2011 @ 7pm

"Nappyness: The Linguistics, Psychology and Economics of a Cultural Renaissance" – Lecture to Dr. Deidre Crumbley's "Introduction to the African Diaspora" class – March 1, 2011 @ 3pm on NCSU's campus.

*Schatzi's Design Gallery & Day Spa, LLC*

258 W. Millbrook Rd.  
Raleigh, NC 27609

Phone: 919-844-1933

Phone: 919-844-2867

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## Wishing You a Peaceful & Blessed New Year!

It's really hard to believe that another year has flown by so rapidly. As I sat and spoke with my grandmother this week-end, she noted how January is already half-way through and February is a very short month. Spring will be here before you know it! And I can't wait!! I appreciate the winter and love it all the more when it's over. ☺ Guess I should consider moving back to Jamaica. Clearly, my body was down with the climes there. What can I say: I'm a true child of Africa.

Well after contemplating several subjects with which to begin this year's newsletter series, I decided to leaf through my photo archives for ideas. There I found two beautiful photos of my girlfriend Meiko. Suddenly, inspiration hit and I knew what my topics for this month would be. These articles address hair locking issues: points for reflection and the rare process of reversal. Read further down to learn more.

**Artist Mention:** *As the photos were the source of inspiration, I want to take a minute to praise the photographer whose eye captured these beautiful images. His name is Dauwd El of 9eyesience. His works are very artsy and tend to capture the true essence of the individual. I can testify that these images capture Meiko's soul. If you would like to contact Dauwd, please email him at [9eyesience@gmail.com](mailto:9eyesience@gmail.com). He's a very talented photographer! Thanks for permission to reprint your work Dauwd! And thanks Meiko for being willing to be a focus for this newsletter!!*

On the salon side, we look forward to another year to serve you naturally. To kick off this new year, we would like to offer a Winter Special to help to combat the dryness of cold weather. The special includes a deep conditioning treatment, a trim and a blow-out for \$40.00. This special runs through February 28, 2011. In the arena of teaching and sharing, we will be participating in two activities hosted at NC State University. The first is a panel discussion called "From Root to Tip: An African American Hairstory" organized by Ms. Ranata Reeder and hosted by the Africana Studies Program at NCSU. The discussion will take place on February 17, 2011 at 7pm. We will also present a lecture to students in the Africana Studies Program on March 1, 2011. I personally believe that these opportunities for open dialogue and sharing are critical to increased social understanding of cultural differences and of self-acceptance. So, we will continue to participate in growing and sharing opportunities as they become available, with God's grace.

## Decisions, decisions, decisions: Is locking for me?

As a natural hair salon, one of the most consistent questions that we get from clients who have successfully made the transition to natural hair is: "Should I lock my hair?" It's no surprise really as I too have posed the question at different points

of time throughout my years as a naturalist. Many of you natural readers have posed the question to yourselves as well. You've either made a conscious decision that you're currently living with or you're on the fence. Because I appreciate the challenges of this decision-making process, I wanted to say a few words to help to inform your decision. First, I'll provide a brief anecdotal discussion based on my own personal experience. I'll then follow-up with issues to consider when making your own decision. While I have made a formal decision for myself, I have no bias for or against freeform natural vs. locked natural hair. But one beautiful thing about hair decisions, they can always be undone--no matter how permanent they may seem.

### ***A Personal Reflection on My Lock Decision-making Process***

It was in the early 90s while living in Jamaica that I decided: "I'm going to do it! I'm going to lock my hair." I had been living in Jamaica for a few years and felt the beauty and love for natural hair. It was a beautiful time--a time of discovery and appreciation. I walked the streets of Kingston, Jamaica and saw lock diversity that I would never have experienced in the NC or VA. I found that the hottest styles were often worn by women who were entertainers within the Reggae community. I recall seeing one woman with thick locked tendrils that cascaded around her shoulders and down her back in curly cues reminiscent of a pig's tail. I said, "How did you get that look?!" She said, "I wet my hair, Chiny bumped it and slept on it. When it was dry, I took it a loose." I said "Chiny bump?" She then described "Nubian knots" and I knew what she was talking about. (Aside: I later concluded that Chiny Bump came about as a reference to some images of the Buddha. In Jamaican Patois, Chiny means Chinese. If you look at the head of the Buddha, there are "Nubian knots" all over his head. With so many Chinese people living in Jamaica, I figured that the locals could best describe the style by referencing the Buddha head and there would be no ambiguity about what you were describing. But then, that's just my supposition. Check out the photos below and tell me what you'd conclude.)



(Left Photo of Old Bronze Buddha Heads borrowed from [www.fengshuiportal.com](http://www.fengshuiportal.com))

Anyway at the time, my natural hair was past shoulder length and very thick. I kept it in a two strand twist style. Because it always took about 4-5 hours to shampoo and re-style my hair, I was seeking a style that would offer a quicker solution. I had two young sons and had to fit my monthly hair maintenance routine in between all of the other responsibilities of work, wifedom and motherhood. I decided that locking was low maintenance and easy. I had a rather simplistic view of the true reality of locked hair. But, that's where I was at the time.

My husband, who is Jamaican, felt that I should really think about it a lot more before taking that decision. In his mind, locked hair is a lifestyle--a religious and political statement, and he wasn't sure that I was committed to the social image/biases that I would project by wearing locks. Because I had already worn

natural hair throughout the 80s--a time when it was rather unpopular in the US, I was unperturbed by public opinion. I could give a flying flip what other people might *think* they knew about me. I still feel that way about most things. But, I did carefully consider the full reality of locking my hair before making a final decision. My dear friend Tynsi, God rest her soul, had beautiful calf length locks that swayed when she walked and were absolutely divine. I asked her about how she cared for her locks and learned that she didn't do much. She mainly shampooed as she felt the need and tightened the locks when they needed more definition. The tightening routine was news to me so I began to look and observe locked sisters much more.

At the time, I spent a lot of days at Mutabaruka's vegetarian restaurant, where Tynsi worked, so I watched his wife and daughters and looked at how they maintained their hair. I was fascinated by the fact that the girls wore their hair in elegant ponytails that from the front looked like loose natural hair until you saw the point where the hair was knotted into a tail. There, the individual locks cascaded down their backs, revealing a locked beauty therein. I thought, if the roots/front of their hair is "free" (*for want of a better word*) while the rear is locked, then they have not bothered with lock tightening for at least a year. That fascinated me because the look really was very regal and elegant. So, I then considered the whole reality of maintenance and realized that the style is not really carefree unless you're into the freeform look. I knew that wouldn't be my approach for the long haul so I then reflected on the reality of maintaining locks: the process, the time and the look.

### ***Core Questions to Consider When Deciding***

At the end of the day, I came full circle and had to ask myself the most important question that anyone should carefully consider before locking their hair: "What is my goal?" In other words, what future do I envision for my hair? And how will my hair fit into my life and my lifestyle? After coming to this core vision, I had to ask the next logical set of questions:

- What hairstyles appeal to me most? Are they locked or loose?
- Do I want long hair (which I already had) or really long hair (which locks would surely provide)?
- How much time do I want to spend monthly with hair care and maintenance and what do I ideally want that process to look like? Will I maintain it myself and how prepared am I to do so once I've made my decision?
- What styles are unique to locked hair, what styles are unique to natural hair? Of the styles noted, which do I most want to wear and which will I most regret being unable to wear?
- How does my exercise and fitness routine impact my hair care and maintenance program?
- How much do I value the freedom of living without a comb or a brush?
- Am I comfortable with the notion that I won't be actively shedding my hair as long as I'm wearing mature, established locks? (*Note: Hair has three phases of growth, the telogen phase of development below the scalp, the anagen phase--characterized by growth above the scalp, and the catagen phase--the final phase of hair shedding or release from the hair root to make way for a new strand of hair. For mature locks, hair strands that have reached the catagen phase are inter-twined with other hairs which are still in the anagen phase of growth. These shedding strands help to make the locking process "permanent".*)

- If I lock and decide I want to change back to loose, natural hair, will I be comfortable with cutting my locks and starting over with short hair? (*Note: This issue may or may not be relevant depending on the individual. I'll explain why I say this a bit more in the next section called "Unlocking Locked Tresses."*)

Once all of these questions have been addressed, each individual should be at a good place to determine what option is most appropriate for your lifestyle. What I have found within the salon is that once people decide to lock, they love the freedom, the flexibility and the beauty of the look! Most will never go back to any other way of being! EVER!! But whatever YOU decide, it's nice to know that at the end of the day, no decision is permanent. We ARE talking about hair which will most definitely grow back as long as health, nutrition and a proper care and maintenance program are a part of your normal routine.

## Unlocking Locked Tresses

The lead photo of this newsletter is of my dear friend Meiko—a tall, willowy and brilliant young woman who I met at a conference for professionals serving children and families with developmental delays. She's a speech pathologist and an avid researcher. When I met her at the conference in 2009, she was a locked beauty, whose hair fell to her lower back. As a naturalist, I was immediately drawn to her and we hit it off famously. In her own words when we met at the time, she said "I'm transitioning." I was confused as she was wearing locks. When she saw my puzzled look, she further explained. I was fascinated as I had never heard the term *transitioning* used to describe going from locks to natural hair. The photo to the bottom left is how Meiko's hair looks today—absolutely gorgeous and ultra-healthy.



Her transition process took some months but was doable. In her words 'I wanted a change in my life but I didn't want to cut my locks and go back to short hair.' So, Meiko methodically loosened each one of her locks and released the resulting beautiful mane of hair. Needless to say, the process required considerable patience and a strong dose of will power. She has an abundance of both.

The process that she used to release her 2+ foot long locks is outlined below for those who may be interested in considering this approach. Just know: It ain't for the faint of heart. I personally would have opted for the scissors but when I saw the final result, I was SO GLAD she didn't.

### ***Meiko's Process for De-locking Palm Rolled Locks***

Meiko wore locks for approximately 10 years. Her locks were therefore mature and well established. Because she had locked and maintained them herself, she was well aware of the process used to care for them. So, she knew that loosening them was a possibility that could be successful. It is important to understand the locking technique used because the process outlined below is only effective with palm-rolled or free-form locks. It WILL NOT work with inter-locked tresses. There is absolutely no way to effectively and efficiently loosen interlocked hair. It simply must be cut off in order to start over. So with that understanding, let's look at how the process works.

*Provisory statement: It's important to note that palm rolled (and free form) locks are held together primarily through tangling caused by the kinetic dance of individual hair strands merging together over considerable time and tide. Some stylists use beeswax and other gels to coerce the hair into locking sooner rather than later. While this is an acceptable practice within the natural hair care arena, it is not always the advisable method as products often weigh the hair down prematurely and tend to remain in the lock indefinitely. Ideally, no product should remain in the hair indefinitely. For this reason, we don't favor the beeswax method of locking. The extent to which heavy gels were used to form your locks may impact your success with this approach.*

The most important step in the process is to be methodical. It will be impossible, YES IMPOSSIBLE...to loosen long, mature locks in a few hours or even a few days. So, because it is a start and stop process, it is important to plan your loosening process to ensure that you're able to wear a professional look at all times throughout the process. For Meiko, she started in the front and worked around the periphery of her hair working gradually towards the middle. When individual locks were loosened, she braided or twisted them and wore them mingled in with the rest of her loose locks or pulled them all into a large, thick ponytail.

#### **Tools:**

Moisturizing Conditioner  
Scrunchies  
Metal Pick or Rattail Comb  
Several Metal Tooth Combs  
Safety Pin or Push Pin  
Scissors  
Hot Tea  
Television or Music for Distraction

Select the first lock to begin with. Moisturize the lock with a generous amount of conditioner. Using the metal pick or rattail comb, punch holes in the lock being sure to cover the full length of the lock. This process allows air to enter the interior of the lock and begins the process of dissociation. Massage the conditioner into the spaces created by the holes. Take the metal tooth comb and starting at the end of the lock, begin picking the hair out from the base working your way up the lock shaft. As shedded strands are released, pulled them away from the others, but avoid retangling them at the root. If there is any resistance while pulling strands to release them, STOP! Don't force them alose as you will only tighten a knot that you have yet to reach. Continue working methodically and patiently. Use a safety pin or push pin to detangle knots that are too small for a comb. It's important to value the hair by taking the time to be as meticulous as possible.

Once you have several locks in a section loosened and you can assess the full length of your anagen phase hair strands (those still connected at the scalp), you now have a decision to make: You can decide to cut the remaining locks IN THAT SECTION ONLY, approximately 4-6 inches below the longest strands or maintain your progress without the use of scissors. The scissors serve only to expedite the process by cutting away hair that is ultimately going to be shed through the loosening process. However, there is a risk of cutting anagen hair strands so be cautious when cutting and ensure that you leave ample room for uncertainty. When you reach another section of the hair (front, rear, side, top and back), take the time to loosen several locks from the tip to the root to determine the natural length of that given section before you decide to cut below the hair growth line. Hair grows at different rates at different points on the head; therefore, it is important to assess each section of the hair independently before "taking the short cut." Once all of

your hair has been loosened, you'll then be in a better position to decide on a length or cut that suits your personal needs. Or you may simply work with whatever the process brings. The experience is your own; there is no right or wrong approach.

### **What to expect?**

The amount of time that de-locking takes is a factor of your hair length, texture, efficiency and available time to commit to the process. So, how long it will take will vary from person to person. But, there are some realities that are universal to all:

***Lots and lots of hair shedding.*** These shedded strands were released by the root at varying points in time throughout the years but have remained woven within the lock. Since the average head sheds between 50-100 strands of hair per day, then you can anticipate that your head would have lost anywhere between 18,250 and 36,500 strands of hair per year. These strands are now intertwined with anagen phase hair strands that remain connected at the scalp and must be released. So, do not be at alarmed by the volume of hair lost? It's natural and expected.

***Very slow progress.*** Meiko says that her first lock took 8 hours to loosen. By the time she had streamlined the process, she was taking 20 minutes per lock. Anything worth having is worth waiting for, so be patient and take your time. When you find yourself getting frustrated. Stop the process, style your hair until the next "go-round" and find something else fun and entertaining to do.

***Tired arms and possibly stiff neck muscles.*** Any repetitive motion that is new and different from your normal routine places stress and strain on muscles. Holding the head in place to facilitate the work that you are undertaking may be challenging. As a result, muscle stiffening and tightness can be anticipated and is also expected. Adjust your position as frequently and as comfortably as necessary to assist you with your final goal. With time, the muscles will become more conditioned and tolerant of the process.

Overall, the experience is yours. Be patient and kind to your hair. If you find the process to difficult, get a friend to help. Your reward will be a healthy and beautiful mane of loosened hair that will be fun for experimenting with and styling! Good luck!!

### **About Us**

Schatzi's is a natural hair and personal care salon with a warm and nurturing ambiance for clients to "Embrace the Beauty of You." Schatzi's is located in the Park on Millbrook Condominium complex, near the intersection of Six Forks and Millbrook Rds.

Schatzi's design gallery provides services that nurture natural hair with talented stylists who are happy to guide you through and beyond the naturalization process. Our two-floor art gallery is provided courtesy of local artist Jasmine Hawthorne.

Au Naturel newsletter, an essential part of our information sharing services, is a wondrous labor of love that is a joy to create and a gift to you our valued clients and to the public at large.