

GMSB 221

[00:00:00] **Antony Whitaker:** Welcome to the Grow My Salon Business podcast, where we focus on the business side of hairdressing. I'm your host, Antony Whitaker, and I'll be talking to thought leaders in the hairdressing industry, discussing insightful, provocative, and inspiring ideas that matter. So get ready to learn, get ready to be challenged, get ready to be inspired, and most importantly, get ready to grow your salon business.

[00:00:28] **Antony Whitaker:** Hello, and welcome to today's episode of the Grow My Salon business podcast. I'm your host, Antony Whitaker. And as I always say, it's great to have you here with us today. Now, just over two years ago, it was in August, 2021, episode 102. I had Debbie Webster, the CEO of Sassoon Global on the podcast. And if you didn't hear it, then I highly recommend that you check that episode out as well.

[00:00:53] **Antony Whitaker:** But as I said, that was more. And two years ago, and since then, Sassoon has certainly undergone some fairly major changes and that culminated in the opening of the House of Sassoon in Greek Street, London at the beginning of October. So Debbie has kindly agreed to join me again today to talk about how that transition is gone and what we can expect from the House of Sassoon in the future.

[00:01:19] **Antony Whitaker:** So in today's podcast, we're going to discuss the relaunch of the Sassoon brand, how the company has evolved since we last spoke and how she sees not just Sassoon, but the salon industry in general evolving and so much more. So without further ado, welcome back Debbie Webster.

[00:01:38] **Debbie Webster:** Thank you. Thank you so much for having me back. I loved being on the podcast, didn't realize it was two years ago. So yeah, lots happened. A lot to catch up on.

[00:01:46] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, I'll say. Well, first of all, I just want to start off by saying congratulations, because, you know, two years ago, there were a lot of people sort of looking at Sassoon as we came out the other end of COVID. And we're sort of wondering if that was it. So soon was sort of finished as a brand. And, uh, for anyone who is in any doubt, I can say to you that, you know, I was at the opening of the house as soon, and I'd been in and had a look around beforehand anyway, but it was a great success.

[00:02:15] **Antony Whitaker:** And, uh, so congratulations because I think, what you've done to, you know, to breathe new life into the brand and to reinvent it is fantastic. And. I know we're sort of at the 70 year mark approximately with Sassoon now. So, uh, that is really some heritage and it looks like you've set it up for, you know, uh, another 30 years in front.

[00:02:36] **Antony Whitaker:** So, uh, uh, congratulations. Well done.

[00:02:39] **Debbie Webster:** Thank you. Thank you. Very excited about it.

[00:02:42] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, I'm sure. So, let's, let's start with that. Let's, uh, talk about the opening night, the sort of launch event. Uh, salon international weekend. Can you sort of talk us through, you know, how it went, if there were any challenges and how was it received in the industry and, you know, if there were any surprises about, how well it was received.

[00:03:03] **Debbie Webster:** Yeah, I mean, I think obviously we put a lot of planning into it and we did it that weekend of Salon International while everyone was in town and the surprise was, we, you know, the building has a capacity of 540 people and so our guest list. We ended up with over 600 people, and we ended up with actually a lot more that wanted to come, and we had to cap it.

[00:03:24] **Debbie Webster:** So that was a surprise. I mean, we knew it was going to be a hit, but we didn't realize that everyone in town would want to come. Um, but it was fantastic. You know, the whole point of the night was we wanted to really celebrate the, the past, the present, and the future of Sassoon. And so, what, what I loved was that we had so many iconic people that came to our event.

[00:03:45] **Debbie Webster:** You know, it was lovely to see Annie, you know, see Annie Humphreys in the building, to see Philip, you know, to see Tim in the building. It was just, it was really special, you know, and I think for us it was a great way for us to launch the new concept. And yes, I think there was a lot of negative talk about Sassoon post-pandemic.

[00:04:06] **Debbie Webster:** You know, people thought we closed Buckingham Gate. Are they really going to reopen? And that was definitely the word out on the street. We knew we were going to reopen. Obviously, this was something we've been planning, um, for a long, long time. So, to be able to, to, to bring

that back and to launch it and to show everyone, you know, that this is Sassoon, we're here to stay.

[00:04:26] **Debbie Webster:** The House of Sassoon is, it's a community for all of the Sassoon enthusiasts. And I think we talked about that in the last podcast of how do we bring, you know, bring some of the band back together, so to speak. And I think the House of Sassoon has been able to do that.

[00:04:43] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, definitely. And, uh, I'll tell you one thing. I always felt that when I saw Sassoon Salons in certain places, definitely in London, they always seem to be in the wrong place. Now, that's just my opinion. Do you know what I mean? Like when they were in Grove in the street or in Knightsbridge or, you know, whatever.

[00:05:03] **Antony Whitaker:** You know, Queen Street in Mayfair, but seeing it in Greek Street in Soho in London and a fantastic location, Buckingham Gate was again, was a bit of an odd fit, but what a great location you walk out the door, there's bars, there's restaurants, there's nightlife, and it really feels like it's, you know, in just a fantastic spot to, you know, to breathe new life into the brand and youth into the brand, and I think it's a, you know, a masterstroke where you put it.

[00:05:33] **Debbie Webster:** Yeah. And I think that was key. You know, it wasn't, um, it wasn't easy to find, you know, I spent probably 18 months looking at locations. I came over every month and don't know how many I looked at at the end. Um, but on the final trip, when I found that location, we'd asked the broker, just give us everything available in London.

[00:05:52] **Debbie Webster:** And it was, it was the weekend of Salon International last year. And I remember getting on the plane, he gave me a list and there was 172 locations for me to look at. And so obviously I narrowed it down on the plane, but as soon as I saw that location, that was number one. So. We went in there and the minute, honestly, the minute I walked through the door, I knew that was the right location.

[00:06:16] **Debbie Webster:** I mean, just the, the, the building itself. I mean, such an iconic building. It was previously, um, Central Saint Martins. It was, uh, Condé Nast Fashion Academy before we took it. Even something that I found out last week, which was, you know, again, added to the history of the building, is the club beneath us used to be Le Beat Route.

[00:06:37] **Debbie Webster:** You know, it was the club where George Michael, where, where Boy George, where Spandau Ballet used to all hang out. It was, it was a place that I used to go and I've forgotten that was the club, but it's right beneath us. So, so the building has such deep history and it just felt right. You know, it felt like if we, if we're gonna reinvent and we're gonna bring this into, again, more of a younger demographic, what better place to do it than right in the heart of soho and you've been there, you walk out of the door and there's just the energy.

[00:07:08] **Debbie Webster:** You know? I mean, being around that energy is, is contagious. And, you know, and seeing, just seeing the models that we get now, you know, Buckingham Great Gate was a fantastic school. It wasn't in the right demographic. It didn't attract the right model base for us for the students. This one. It's all young models, you know, so it definitely it just it's the right location.

[00:07:31] **Debbie Webster:** And all I kept hearing at the grand opening was people saying that. It reminded them of Bond Street back in the day, you know, of having everything under one roof and having that energy and you know, and that is phenomenal to hear. So, so yeah,

[00:07:46] **Antony Whitaker:** Well, I know when I, uh, I first went in there, I don't know that four or five months ago, Mark gave me a tour when it was a bit of a construction site, but I can imagine that you would have walked in the door as soon as you were just saying that, Hey, as soon as you walked in, that was your number one.

[00:07:59] **Antony Whitaker:** it's sort of like, uh, I've walked into places before with, uh, with Melinda and, you know, when you're with an estate agent or something and, and you know that this is the right one, but you don't want to look too keen, you know, and you sort of go poker face, poker face. Don't look too, don't look too keen here.

[00:08:16] **Antony Whitaker:** Do you know what I mean? Like, I, I just, that place would have ticked every box. I mean, it was, uh, already, as you said, used to be St. Martin's. So, um, yeah, great opportunity to take that on. So, let me ask you about the consolidation of the brand in that, you know, you did have salons, um, scattered around London,

[00:08:37] **Debbie Webster:** yeah.

[00:08:38] **Antony Whitaker:** school locations scattered around London.

[00:08:40] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, so have they all gone now? Have you consolidated it all into the house of Sassoon or like how's that worked?

[00:08:47] **Debbie Webster:** We have. Yeah, we have. And that was again a strategic decision because we wanted to bring all of that energy into one place. We had, obviously, we still had Knightsbridge prior to opening. We still had the city. Um, and prior to that, we had the Covent Garden Salon. We decided that having everyone under one roof was just going to create that energy and that synergy and the team have just loved it, you know, because like you say, some of the locations weren't in the right spot and even Covent Garden, you know, at first, we were on Monmouth Street and at first we were a little bit hesitant.

[00:09:21] **Debbie Webster:** Are the clients going to follow us to Soho?

[00:09:23] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah.

[00:09:24] **Debbie Webster:** absolutely every client's followed us. And, and what we're finding is we're getting a lot more of the younger Soho clients, whereas at Covent Garden, it was more of the tourists, you know? So, so definitely, I think it's been a, it's been a great, um, evolution for us to bring it all under that one roof.

[00:09:41] **Debbie Webster:** Um, And obviously through, since we talked in, you know, in 2020, 2021 with COVID, we went into a situation where we had our team working out of pop up locations, you know, Buckingham gate closed and we had to suddenly find places to teach. So we, we switched some of our salons into, into pop up academies. And one of the things I think that's most important to, to, To address is the fact that our team, they went through, they didn't have a home for 18 months, close to two years.

[00:10:13] **Debbie Webster:** Everyone believed in the vision. Everyone was so vested in this brand that they all hung in with us because they knew they weren't listening to the negative chatter on the street that so soon may not reopen. They believed in the vision that we were telling them and they all hung in there. So being able to bring them all back under one roof has been the really the most.

[00:10:34] **Debbie Webster:** most important part for us and gave me the most pride that I was able to not only get this new building together, but bring this group of people that have supported us and who've, you know, just hung in there with us to bring them back together and give them this fantastic new home. It's really, you know, it's made me feel so proud.

[00:10:52] **Antony Whitaker:** Hmm, I'll bet. And so now that you've, you know, got the doors open, you've had the opening party, you've ticked that box, all the other, premises that you had scattered about London have all now been closed and everyone's under one roof. What happens now? How do you see the House of Sassoon, um, evolving from this point going forward?

[00:11:13] **Debbie Webster:** So the house is, Obviously, it's a new concept for us. We've brought together. We've got the salon on the ground floor. We've got the academy on the three floors above that. We've got the head office and the admin team on the top, bringing everyone together in one building gives us the opportunity to launch even more things, you know, so we're launching the

[00:11:33] **Debbie Webster:** the membership, the chair rentals, so that if you're a Sassoon enthusiast that no longer wants to actually work as an employee, you can be an independent artist and you can come and be a part of that community and work within the house. We have an ambassador program where again. Any of our teachers that have gone off independently to work for other, you know, to work themselves or to work for other brands, they can be a part of it as an ambassador and they can teach for us.

[00:11:59] **Debbie Webster:** This has been the most exciting part. You know, I think we've, we've always been a little bit exclusive and now our goal is to be inclusive. And we want everyone to feel that, you know, when, when you think about. Our industry, everyone has a Sassoon story. Everyone started at some point and touched Sassoon in some way.

[00:12:19] **Debbie Webster:** They can all now be a part of it, you know, no matter how they see themselves working, they can be a part of it. So we also have the photographic studio where you can come in. You know, we're going to rent out the space as an event space. So a lot of different things that we're looking at launching in the very, you know, very near future.

[00:12:37] **Debbie Webster:** But I think what's exciting is there's so much opportunity for this business. There's so many people, you know, the launch

has really brought out a lot of excitement in the industry. We've got people talking to us that want us to do their, their in salon training for them. So I think it's going to,

[00:12:52] **Debbie Webster:** it's going to evolve and it's going to give us even more and more that we can do as we start to really, start operating. So I've chosen to go over there to London. I'm going to be spending the next three months over there to really make sure that we capture all of this energy, you know, that we're really getting everything, how we want it to be so that we can make sure that the,

[00:13:12] **Debbie Webster:** the next 30 years, as you said, are as strong as the past. So yeah,

[00:13:18] **Antony Whitaker:** So you're, you're moving back over here for three months.

[00:13:20] **Debbie Webster:** for three months. Yes. So I'm coming over. Yeah. I'm coming over in two weeks. Um, so yeah, I'll be focusing, obviously I'll still be running the U S business, but I'll be doing it from there. So I'll just be working at night.

[00:13:32] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. Well, I'll, I'll pop in then. I'll, um, and I can finally meet you face to face because obviously I was at the opening. You were at the opening. As you said, there was 600 people in there. Um, and I'll tell you what, it felt like every single one of them was, you know, there was 600 people there without a shadow of a doubt.

[00:13:47] **Antony Whitaker:** You just said something, which I was going to talk about this to you at the end, but I'm, um, I'm going to ask you about this now. Have you seen a TV program? It's American. It's called The Beer.

[00:13:58] **Debbie Webster:** haven't, I've heard of it, but I haven't seen it.

[00:14:01] **Antony Whitaker:** Oh my god, it is fantastic. It's the best thing on TV at the moment.

[00:14:04] **Debbie Webster:** Oh, wow.

[00:14:05] **Antony Whitaker:** there's the first two series have come out. I gather they're doing a third season. Um, it's filmed in Chicago and it's, uh, I don't want to give away the story to anybody who's not seen it, but, uh, this isn't giving away anything. It's about a restaurant and, um, it's, it's great TV, but the thing that I loved about it, I mean, I absolutely love it is the vibe that they're creating in a restaurant, passion, the, the mission, the desire to create a brand.

[00:14:40] **Antony Whitaker:** And as I was watching it, I was thinking. Oh my God, that's what hairdressing used to be like. Do you know what I mean? Like if you go back 20 years ago, it was very much about building brands and building a great environment for people to come to and work in and, and people would walk over hot coals to work there.

[00:15:01] **Antony Whitaker:** You know, you've been involved with two very big brands, well, the two biggest brands that there are, Sassoon and Toni and Guy. And, you know, both of them, have encapsulated what it is I'm talking about. And so what I was going to ask you about, and I was going to lead this to the end of the podcast, but you've just said how it's so exciting.

[00:15:19] **Antony Whitaker:** And that is, it was exciting to be there that night. There were a lot of very excited people. And it wasn't just like that Sassoon is back. It was like, Hairdressing is back. Desire to be not a suite renter or a chair renter or be by yourself, but the desire to build something special and to be part of something bigger than just you.

[00:15:45] **Antony Whitaker:** And I think that that's what hairdressing needs. I mean, I've never made a secret of the fact that I totally recognize that there is a space for chair renters. There is a space for the salon suite. You know, they're very legitimate models. That my heart, my passion, my personal preference was about building a brand, building careers for people and creating something that was bigger than the individual.

[00:16:06] **Antony Whitaker:** And so that was what I really loved about going back into, you know, the house of Sassoon and seeing that, that that was alive and kicking. Because it seems to have been disappearing at a rate of knots everywhere in the world, you know, that more and more it's become about the independent and stuff. So,

[00:16:25] **Antony Whitaker:** Uh, what are your, what are your thoughts about

[00:16:29] **Debbie Webster:** Obviously I'm going to watch that TV show. It sounds amazing. So I'll check it out, but I think, yeah, I mean, for me, that was always the mission was to create this community. You know, again, I think we talked a little about it last time coming on board to this brand, everyone has that connection to Sassoon and.

[00:16:46] **Debbie Webster:** in one way or another, they still want to be connected. So I wanted to find a way that we could bring that back together. And so we talk about the community very much. You know, the house is that community where everyone's welcome. Uh, doesn't matter what, you know, you're doing on the outside. If you want to be a part of it, there's something there for you.

[00:17:03] **Debbie Webster:** And I do believe that the, you know, for many years and probably more so in America. The independent, the suites, the, you know, that became massive. But I think people got to a point where they felt very isolated. They're not part of something. And as you know, it's human nature that we want to belong. We want to be part of something.

[00:17:21] **Debbie Webster:** We want to be part of that collective. And when you have like-minded people like you do at Sassoon, to be able to come in and be a part of that creative, you know, that hub, that's huge. And we have this legacy. I mean, obviously you touched on it's our 70th anniversary next year. Who has that, you know, there's, there aren't brands that have that kind of deep-rooted heritage.

[00:17:44] **Debbie Webster:** And what I love about the heritage is we haven't just, you know, we don't just rest on our laurels of that, you know, what was done in the past. We're constantly evolving and people want to be a part of that. So that's what I feel that this new house of Sassoon is going to, is going to bring. And again, just being in that, being in Soho, in that energy, being around that creativity.

[00:18:07] **Debbie Webster:** If you're an independent working, you know, in your chair rental somewhere on your own, you now have access to that. That's pretty huge, you know, so I do think that it is much needed in the industry and that's why we wanted to do it. we didn't even want our salons just being independent salons.

[00:18:24] **Debbie Webster:** We wanted it all together because when, whenever I'm there now, when I go to the top floor, we have our, our team member lounge, the energy in there, having so many people in that building and just that you just want to be a part of it. You know, I didn't want to leave when I left after the opening.

[00:18:42] **Debbie Webster:** I didn't want to come back. You know, I wanted to be a part of it. I want to stay there, which again is why I'm coming over for three months to make sure that we get, we harness all of this energy right now and we really take advantage of it and make sure that we get it right.

[00:18:56] **Antony Whitaker:** Mm. what, what is the key to, you know, you have a brand with a 70 year heritage. It's a huge responsibility. Um, you know, there'll be people listening to this that have got to sell and they've had it for 20 years, 30 years, 40 years, and it's very hard to keep reinventing, um, you know, a brand. What's the key to doing that to keeping a brand current and new and, you know, reinvigorating it.

[00:19:24] **Debbie Webster:** I think you can't be afraid of change, you know, I think, and again, I think we touched on it last time a little bit, you know, we have such deep roots and sometimes that can be scary to change it, but I think you've just got to be, you've got to know what's happening in the, in the industry and you've got to try and stay one step ahead of it.

[00:19:41] **Debbie Webster:** You don't want to become an old brand. That's just been around for 70 years. You, you want to be part of that, that again you're making a difference. You know, you're doing something that other people are looking to. So I think it's just, you've got to be brave. You've got to jump in there. You've got to know what's going on, but you've got to look at how can I adapt that to my model and how can I make that work?

[00:20:03] **Debbie Webster:** And we've been very fortunate that we've been able to do that. You know, I think that our owners are very, you know, that that's so supportive and allow us the freedom to be able to reinvent. So, yeah, I mean, I think you have to, you know, you have to.

[00:20:18] **Antony Whitaker:** and I think a really important message that comes out of this is that consolidation is not a dirty word that some sometimes it's important to consolidate because that is a reflection of the world that we

live in, so, uh, if that means, you know, closing down units, that's what you do and you get something that's more

[00:20:38] **Antony Whitaker:** you know, stronger, um, under one roof. Um, let me ask you about, uh, Los Angeles then, because I know that, House of Sassoon is also going to be in Los Angeles, aren't I? I am correct saying that, aren't I?

[00:20:51] **Debbie Webster:** correct, correct.

[00:20:53] **Antony Whitaker:** and was that, because I know at one point you were planning on reopening both of them at the same time, has, has that happened, or is LA, you know, going to follow, or how does that work?

[00:21:04] **Debbie Webster:** It's going to follow. We're in the process of doing it right now. There's actually construction happening tomorrow. Um, so it's, it's in the works. The London, obviously the Greek street building took a lot of our time and attention to get that ready. And so, yes, I mean, I think we'll have it fully operational by probably February. The Beverly Hills location, but again, I mean, you know, we're already operating, you know, the same as we did at Greek Street. We operated over the time, you know, the 5 months we were building it. We operated on different levels and we're doing that in Beverly Hills. So it's actually open right now, but it will be fully functional by February

[00:21:41] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay, and is it the same sort of model, House of Sassoon, Education Center, Salon, everything in there?

[00:21:48] **Debbie Webster:** Exactly. Everything. And also, if you're a member at the, the Greek Street location, that membership transfers to Los Angeles. So if you've got people that, you know, that have celebrity clients that travel around to do hair, they can do that at both locations. And the goal would be to have more.

[00:22:05] **Debbie Webster:** I would love to have New York next, you know, so it's as we start to get all of these established, we definitely see an opportunity for for growth there,

[00:22:13] **Antony Whitaker:** Hmm,

[00:22:14] **Debbie Webster:** but I wanted to just go back actually in touch on what you said about the consolidation, because I think for a lot of people that's scary, you know, we were in a position where

[00:22:23] **Debbie Webster:** after COVID, the landlords weren't wanting to really play ball with us. And so we were, we were put in a position where we, we chose to move out of some of them. And I think for a lot of people, that's scary, but we were so fortunate. Tony Rizzo at Sanrizz was such a, you know, so generous and allowed us to use his locations as pop ups.

[00:22:43] **Debbie Webster:** And that's how we managed to continue the business while we built this. But for a lot of people that would have been a very scary move to move out of your location and into someone else's, but it worked, you know, it worked really well. And thank you, you know, thank you, Tony, for allowing us that opportunity.

[00:23:00] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, yeah, definitely. Okay. And, uh, what about Germany and Canada? Because I know you've got a significant presence in Germany. I think there's five salons in Germany, uh, and it's a strong business from what I know, uh, the German salons. Is there going to be a house of Sassoon there? Or is that sort of something you can't talk about at the moment?

[00:23:18] **Antony Whitaker:** What's that?

[00:23:19] **Debbie Webster:** it's, it's not. It's not in development yet, but it will be. I mean, that's definitely something that we see. I mean, the house is as soon as the future model for us. I think chair rental in Germany is a little bit different than it is. I mean, obviously it's much greater in the US than it is even in the UK, but I think there's room for a version of the model in Germany.

[00:23:38] **Debbie Webster:** And it is a very, very strong business for us over there. Um, and the same, I mean, it could potentially be something that happens in Canada too. Uh, we, we want to get these two up and running fully before we decide on, um, Where next? But yes, absolutely.

[00:23:52] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. And you mentioned New York a minute ago when we last spoke two years ago, I think you were about to, or maybe you just had opened a salon in Club Monaco. Um, so I'm not sure if it was about to happen or if you had just opened it. So, so what's the status on that at

the moment? Is that working? Because that was a store within a store concept, wasn't it?

[00:24:16] **Debbie Webster:** It was just happening when we talked last time. We hadn't actually opened. Um, we opened October of that year and it's been fantastic and definitely working for us. It's done what we, we hoped it would do. It brings a younger clientele. It is a store within a store. The team up there are doing so well.

[00:24:34] **Debbie Webster:** Uh, we also do education out of that space on Sundays and Mondays. And it's booked in advance. You know, people just love to be able to come to New York and take our classes. So that's definitely something that we've kind of outgrown. We could definitely use more space. Um, so I do see that as a potential for the next House of Sassoon.

[00:24:54] **Debbie Webster:** You know, we definitely need more, more space there, but it's worked as a model. It's been fantastic.

[00:25:00] **Antony Whitaker:** That's very interesting seeing how all this evolves. Uh, I don't know who said it, but I was, impacted by this statement. Someone once said about reinvention and it was something like the challenge isn't just getting new ideas into the business. It's getting old ideas out and, not being afraid to do what you're doing.

[00:25:20] **Antony Whitaker:** And, close things, completely reinvent business models, completely reinvent, you know, how you employ people, looking at co working spaces and multi-use spaces. I think it's really interesting. And, it's the future and other people are doing it and for you with your heritage to go right to the front of the queue, I think is, is fantastic.

[00:25:41] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, what else we're going to ask you about B&A? You, you mentioned, or I mentioned House of, House of Monaco, which is another brand, clothing brand, uh, Club Monaco, sorry. Uh, what did I say? House

[00:25:54] **Debbie Webster:** House of Monaco.

[00:25:54] **Antony Whitaker:** Right. It's the house of everything going on here, right? Club Monaco. And that is also a business that is owned by, uh, Regent,

which is the VC company that own House of Sassoon, amongst other businesses.

[00:26:12] **Antony Whitaker:** Uh, when I was on your Instagram, I'm scrolling through there and I see that something about, um, Drybar and I thought, Drybar, what's Drybar got to do with Sassoon?

[00:26:23] **Antony Whitaker:** And so me being a, you know, sleuth, I then go onto the Regent VC website and see that Drybar is now owned by, uh, Regent, venture capitalist company. So that's really interesting to me, and I'm sure a lot of people in the industry don't know that. So can you talk to us about that relationship? Because you're now responsible, you personally are now responsible for, uh, some dry bar salons and you're also responsible for the Sassoon salons.

[00:26:54] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, tell us how, how that works.

[00:26:57] **Debbie Webster:** So yeah, it was very interesting. We, we acquired what was originally the company owned units for dry bar. Um, we acquired them. April, I think it was of last year and Drybar is phenomenal brand, you know, I think it's a lot bigger in the U. S. than it is in the U. K. right now, but it's a phenomenal brand. And so what I loved about it is we, you know, we talked on our last podcast about how Vidal was a disruptor in the industry and stopped women going to the salon every week to get their shampoo and set and they would come to get the cut at Sassoon.

[00:27:32] **Debbie Webster:** Ali Webb, who launched the Drybar, kind of disrupted it. You know, she was the one that made it really popular for everyone to suddenly want to have their hair blow dried every week again. And it's been brilliant. You know, it's such a good model. So Ali sold the company a few years ago. She sold the product division to Helen of Troy, and then she sold the salon division to Wellbiz.

[00:27:57] **Debbie Webster:** They're a franchise group. And so we are a franchisee of. They own the rights to the full Drybar brand, but we acquired the 40 company owned units is what we have now. And it's been great. You know, there's no competition between Sassoon and Drybar. We're completely separate models, but there's a lot of, you know, there's a lot of things that can cross over.

[00:28:20] **Debbie Webster:** And for me, it was exciting because. for our apprentices at Sassoon. It gives them an opportunity if they want to, to pick up extra shifts, they can do it at the dry bar. They can learn to, to interact with clients. They can, you know, really step up their, their blow dry game while they're going through the program.

[00:28:38] **Debbie Webster:** And that's been great for us. But one of the things I think that's unique about Drybar in this industry is the way that Ali set it up is anyone that works at Drybar is encouraged to. Recruit those clients to follow them to a full-service salon, which again, in our industry was a no, no, you know, most salons would never allow you to take your business somewhere else, but we just blow dry.

[00:29:01] **Debbie Webster:** So, we know those clients want to get cut and color somewhere. Most of our employees work part time and work part time in a full-service salon. So, we encourage them to build their clientele that way. Um, we even recently had one of our Sassoon New York team. Uh, she was just coming back to us wanting to build a clientele.

[00:29:19] **Debbie Webster:** She went to the dry bar and started to recruit clients to come to her over at Sassoon. So really, you know, it's a great model. Uh, and like I say, the two work very well because they're so different.

[00:29:31] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, yeah, I thought as soon as I saw dry bar, I don't know how long ago now, time flies at least 10 years ago, I think, and I just thought that is brilliant. Like the marketing of it, the packaging of it, the design, the whole concept of it, uh, between Ali Webb and I believe it was her brother, uh, who looked after the marketing side.

[00:29:51] **Antony Whitaker:** And I think there was a third person, if I'm right, an architect or someone, I think they just Absolutely nailed it. And it was one of those business models that was then copied by everybody, but no one did it even nearly as well. So, it's interesting that you, have to oversee both of those two brands.

[00:30:08] **Antony Whitaker:** And as you say, there are obviously opportunities that, you know, sort of coexist between the two of them. Um, Well, we're jumping all over the place here, but before we started recording, we were talking a little bit about education and the digital side of education.

[00:30:24] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, and, uh, you know, from my days at Sassoon, obviously there was no digital then we're talking, you know, 80s and the school business. was just huge. It was just bursting at the seams all the time with, you know, students from all over the world. Obviously, that side of things has, you know, changed now.

[00:30:45] **Antony Whitaker:** And, you know, there's digital. People don't need to hop on planes and fly everywhere all the time. Uh, and it's, it's obviously better for the planet that they don't do that. And there's lots of other advantages about digital education as well. Um, I'm not sure where I'm going with this, but I know. That during COVID, you were sort of forced down that route as well to really, expand on the digital education side of things.

[00:31:09] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, you know, now we've sort of moved on from that and all the other changes that you've undergone. What's the sort of picture looking like for Sassoon in an education context as far as digital goes and the expansion into that area? Because obviously you can expand. A lot when you're digital without having to have the physical real estate.

[00:31:32] **Antony Whitaker:** So talk to me about that.

[00:31:34] **Debbie Webster:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, that was a blessing for us that came out of COVID is we have the time to really launch our online platform. Um, it'll never replace in person education for those that can travel. I mean, that was, again, going back to the House of Sassoon when I saw the first two days we were open there, the number of students in that building, phenomenal.

[00:31:53] **Debbie Webster:** You know, so it'll never replace that, but it does. It gives us a greater reach and it's given us the opportunity to be able to teach, you know, we teach classes in India all the time. We're teaching, um, you know, globally, we're teaching classes pretty much every, every week out of the House of Sassoon. One of the things that we also did is we, for our dry bar employees, most of those employees work part time in the dry bar, but they work in a full service salon.

[00:32:18] **Debbie Webster:** So we've been able to give them The gift of Sassoon education, they have access to all of the online content, even have mark to a demo for them. So the online gives us that that, you know, opportunity to reach so many more people. And it's definitely something that

we're very, um. Invested in the growth of that model again, when I'm in London, um, in two weeks from now, that's one of the first things that we're, we're meeting with the team and we're really analyzing the opportunities and what other areas, you know, that we can really tap into, but it's been huge, you know, absolutely been huge for us.

[00:32:52] **Antony Whitaker:** And you know, you're on a very unusual situation because of the fact that you work well now you, you know, CEO of Sassoon Global, you had a very similar position. I'm not sure what the title was at Toni and Guy Um, and with, you know, both of those brands, they have a global footprint.

[00:33:12] **Antony Whitaker:** So, you know, as we've just been talking about, you know, Canada, New York, Germany, you know, the UK with Sassoon and stuff. So you sort of get to see what's, what's happening. Um,

[00:33:22] **Antony Whitaker:** What I want to ask you about is. As we both know, no business models stand still, and you certainly aren't. What sort of changes are you seeing in the Salon Suite model, rental model in California that might impact, you know, what's happening elsewhere on the planet? Are you seeing any trends? Are they continuing to grow at breakneck pace?

[00:33:47] **Antony Whitaker:** Are they, you know, is there a twist on the, um, you know, the model of suites?

[00:33:55] **Debbie Webster:** I think they're still growing very rapidly. I mean, I think right now we're at 60 percent of all hairdressers in the US are in suites. You know, it's definitely, it's, it's definitely something that's taken over here. But I do think that what's happening is people are wanting more of that community spirit.

[00:34:12] **Debbie Webster:** So you're seeing a lot more people opening up. Concepts similar to what we're doing, you know, where you have access to more, you're not just that independent contractor in a room because for hairdressers, that's just not sustainable. You don't just want to be in a little room by yourself. So I think a lot of these businesses are seeing that they're having to evolve.

[00:34:30] **Debbie Webster:** They're having to have more community, um, things available for these, for these independent artists. And people are, you

know, people just want flexibility. And I think that's what we're having to look at is. Even in the, in the chair rental model, people aren't necessarily wanting to just rent a suite that's theirs five days a week.

[00:34:49] **Debbie Webster:** People want to have that flexibility. You know, I think a lot of the hairdressers coming out of the, you know, cosmetology programs in America, they come out already feeling like they they've made it. They don't want to, you know, they don't feel like they've got to do the work to get where they need to go.

[00:35:05] **Debbie Webster:** But one of the things that I'm seeing is a lot of Especially during COVID, I think a lot of hairdressers, the younger hairdressers, were tapped into YouTube. They were learning a lot of their, their skills from YouTube. And what's happening now is they're realizing the foundation wasn't there. They're having to come back.

[00:35:23] **Debbie Webster:** You know, our ABC classes are the busiest they've ever been because people are realizing that they have to get that strong foundation. Yes, you can copy some things off YouTube, but if you don't have that, that base. You're not gonna be able to sustain it. So I think it's shifting it a little bit back in our favor where people are needing to come back and have that, you know, that strong foundational education,

[00:35:45] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, yeah. So, um, when you were talking before, you were talking about how at the House of Sassoon in London, that you were just blown away by the amount of people that wanted live education there. Um, were they Sassoon diehards? Or was it a young generation that you were looking at thinking, Oh my God, a lot of these people you know, hairdressing a couple of years, was it?

[00:36:09] **Debbie Webster:** both, both, I think, obviously, because it's just launching. You've got a lot of this is soon diehards that are wanting to come in and check it out, but both. and even I was talking with our team in New York. Their classes are sold out. You know, as soon as we open up classes, they're sold out and they're saying it's more and more new people that haven't been to our classes before, which again, I think speaks volumes to, to what I was saying about that, that lack of foundational education for the YouTube era, I think is now coming full circle where people are encouraging them to go back and to, to really learn those skills.

[00:36:43] **Debbie Webster:** So yeah, we're seeing both. Yeah, absolutely.

[00:36:46] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. Um, and you mentioned cosmetology schools, and I know, uh, that there's been a lot of movement on, you know, the whole school business in the United States at the moment, but I was talking to someone on the podcast the other week, and she was telling me, she was in California, um, and, The, um, the time that you have to do, and I know it's different amounts of time in different states, but she was saying in California, it was 1600 hours that you had to do at beauty school.

[00:37:16] **Antony Whitaker:** But she said, they've now reduced that down to 1000 hours. Tell me if I've got any of this wrong. And then she said. That and you can also do a hair only component because as you know in the rest of the world You know, of course you do a hair only component, but in America, it's hair and beauty And so you can do a hair only Component in California and that's only 600 hours And so I do the math and I go 600 hours at a 40 hour week, people are saying they're qualified hairdressers after 15 weeks.

[00:37:52] **Antony Whitaker:** I mean, it, good, I'm glad to hear you say that as well. I mean, it's just, what's, what's driving that?

[00:37:59] **Debbie Webster:** I think, again, I think COVID made some of that happen where there weren't enough people getting into the industry. And so they were trying to make it more accessible, but what they've done is. Because what they, when they cut it to 600 hours, that's just for cutting. If you want to do cut and color, then it's a thousand hours.

[00:38:16] **Debbie Webster:** So the whole program before was 1600, but you had to do nails. You had to learn how to do false nails and all of that. That's gone. But now, if you want to do cut and color, it's a thousand. If you want to just cut it 600. No one's qualified at 600, you know, so that, that again helps us because we can do finishing programs.

[00:38:34] **Debbie Webster:** We can help people, you know, it gives you a license. It doesn't give you the ability to be able to go and build a clientele. And, you know, I think it's actually so counterproductive to our industry that they're doing that because people are coming out of school after 600 hours. And if they're confident they've been doing their YouTube, whatever they think they can do it, but you know, I mean. I mean, even after a three-year apprenticeship, you're not really at that level. So, I think it's definitely, doing a

disservice to us. But again, I think what we're finding is it's them pushing people to want to come and take classes. Because they're realizing they're not, nowhere near ready.

[00:39:10] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, that's that. Well, that's positive. How does that work? If I'm, you know, if I've just done cosmetology school in California, and then I come knocking on your door so soon wanting a job as a stylist because I'm Qualified. how do you treat that situation?

[00:39:26] **Debbie Webster:** So you still have to go through an apprenticeship with us. So even if you have your license, you don't just come in and go on the floor and do hair. So you come in and you do your, your program. The program depends on the individual. If you've got someone who's obviously very qualified that you could fast track and get through it quicker than we do that.

[00:39:42] **Debbie Webster:** So again, we're not. We're not the old Sassoon where everything was so rigid and you had to go through, everyone had to do three years or whatever. It's dependent on the individual, and so our teams assess them, and again, if they see someone that has the skillset and then you know, they can get through faster, then we do that.

[00:39:59] **Debbie Webster:** But no one would go on the floor straight from cosmetology school

[00:40:02] **Antony Whitaker:** Right. Yeah. At Sassoon, but they do in other places. And

[00:40:05] **Debbie Webster:** But in other places they do.

[00:40:07] **Antony Whitaker:** yeah. And, and, uh, and the other thing about that, as you said, they come out after 600 hours or a thousand hours, and they think they're qualified. And some of them actually go and open a business.

[00:40:20] **Debbie Webster:** Yes.

[00:40:21] **Antony Whitaker:** They actually open up their own salon suite.

[00:40:23] **Antony Whitaker:** Like I'm qualified to do hair and I'm now going to open my own business as well. I mean, I just look at that and it's like, you know, an absolute recipe for disaster for the majority of them. Um, and, and so

I was sort of, that's what I was curious about with, with your feeling about. What is the success rate of sweets and stuff?

[00:40:42] **Antony Whitaker:** Because you had different things. And I, I'm not a suite basher, so to speak. Um, I recognize that it's a, it's a very interesting model. I really like Salon Republic in California. I think that Eric has done an amazing job with that, but they're not all like that. that. And there's a lot of people that, you know, you hear the success rate or failure rate and it's very difficult to get any accurate figures is something like 40 percent of gone within the first year.

[00:41:09] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, and that's a shame because for a lot of them, they were sort of sold a a bad, you know, bill of goods, so to speak, um, thinking that that was possible. Um, let me just, just change direction here a little bit. I wanted to ask you about retail. Um, because that was another thing I thought was interesting in the House of Sassoon is the retail mix you had was different to what it used to be.

[00:41:32] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, so talk to us about that.

[00:41:36] **Debbie Webster:** Yeah. I mean, I think again, as with everything you have to evolve. And so when we were looking at our client base, because obviously now in the house of Sassoon, you have everything, you know, you have the full service salon on the ground floor, you have the students and the models. And so we wanted to have a retail range that was affordable at every level, but we also wanted to have brands that we really believed in.

[00:41:57] **Debbie Webster:** So we launched O& M. Original and mineral. And so that's a very clean beauty line. And so it's sustainable beauty. It's very affordable. And so that fills a niche that we didn't have. We have Sassoon Professional, which obviously we 100 percent believe in. And we have Oribe. And so Oribe is for that higher end clientele that's looking for more of the luxury brand.

[00:42:21] **Debbie Webster:** So at each price point, we have something available to the client. And then we also partnered with Diva. And Deva does all of the appliances for the house of Sassoon and love their brand, love their, their appliances. And so we're using them on all of our stations throughout the building. Um, so yeah, I think we've, we've got a good mix and again, you can't

just stay, you can't just rest on your laurels and just always have the same product.

[00:42:46] **Debbie Webster:** Clients are continuing, you know, they're evolving that they know the latest and greatest products out there and they want them. So we wanted to, to definitely shift the model that we carried. And it's been great. Yeah.

[00:42:58] **Antony Whitaker:** is it, is it a big part of the business in terms of revenue? Is it a good percentage?

[00:43:02] **Debbie Webster:** No, I don't think retail is ever the biggest part of the business. Unfortunately, you know, hairdressers never like to really recommend retail. Um, but it's important to have, you know, I think it's important for us to recommend and I think it's important to have products that you believe in that are going to perform at the level that you want them to perform at, to be able to create the looks that you do.

[00:43:23] **Debbie Webster:** So, yeah, it's always, it's always going to be a part of what we do. We absolutely sell a lot of our Academy. Retail there too. I mean, that's a huge part of our business. So we have all of our books, our tools, all of that, um, which you didn't see at the, the launch, but we have a, a full offering of Academy tools and that's a huge part of the business.

[00:43:43] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, definitely. Definitely. Okay.

[00:43:45] **Antony Whitaker:** So when we're talking about retail, and I hate bringing up the word COVID, but COVID, you know, it happened, um, past tense, and let's hope it stays there. But it obviously shook lots of things up, um, in business. Some of those things have now just gone back to normal. Um, other things have stayed the same. One of the things that obviously happened with retail is that there was a big, uh, boost for the online side of things.

[00:44:13] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, have you found that that impact in terms of the salons has. Stayed, stayed online or has salon retail bounce back to what it was pre COVID levels.

[00:44:25] **Debbie Webster:** It's bouncing back. We're not there yet, but I do think that nothing, nothing replaces that face to face recommendation of product in a salon. When you, when you know, when you finish someone's hair

and they love how it looks, they're not going to be able to reproduce that look at home. If you, if you're not going to recommend the product to use.

[00:44:41] **Debbie Webster:** So it's definitely, we're seeing it come back. There's always going to be that client that turned to online sales for convenience, who is going to continue to shop that way and will never be able to change that. But we are definitely looking at our online model for retail as well, so that we can take advantage of those that have shifted.

[00:45:00] **Debbie Webster:** So that's something that's, that's more in the works for us as well.

[00:45:03] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. Yeah. Okay. What do you think? Um, looking into a crystal ball, what a salon is going to look like in 10 years time?

[00:45:13] **Debbie Webster:** It's going to, you know, it's going to constantly evolve. I think it's going to have to be a flexible mix. There's always going to be a need for commissioned employees. You know, there's always going to be those people that want to come in and be taken care of. But I think all salons are going to end up moving more into that flex model where you've got to, you know, people don't want to work five days a week, every week.

[00:45:32] **Debbie Webster:** Now, you've got to really be in tune with your, your team and you know, what's important to them. So I think salons have got to, we've got to evolve, you know, and we were very much that way in the past where you had to work a full schedule, you had to work every day. We've changed that, you know, you've got to really be in tune with you, with your audience.

[00:45:52] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. I mean, I get that and I'm, you know, all for it. I mean, I happen to love what I do. So I don't mind working five, six, seven days a week. And I constantly do that. And I'm okay with that. Um, I'm a committed, you know, workaholic. I wouldn't have it any other way at this point in time. Um, so, but what I wanted to ask you is, is for those people that now do only want to work two, three days a week, whatever, and that's fine.

[00:46:16] **Antony Whitaker:** And we can adapt our businesses to accommodate them. Do they, Okay. accept that they're not going to earn as much or do they want to earn as much and therefore produce as much, but in a more condensed time? How do you find that works?

[00:46:32] **Debbie Webster:** Yeah, I mean, I think that model only works for those that are very busy, you know, people that can consolidate their clients into, into lesser days. I think it works for those that just don't want to work. You know, if you just, if you, if you don't have a good clientele and you just want to cut your days, you're never going to make enough money.

[00:46:47] **Debbie Webster:** So you've got to be smart in how you talk to the team members that want to shift. But yeah, I've absolutely seen team members that have gone from a five day week to a three day week. And they've just opened up a few more hours on those days and consolidated and they're bringing in as much as they did prior.

[00:47:03] **Debbie Webster:** It's just about using the time more wisely, but it's up to us as business owners and managers to really educate them on how that's going to look because it can quickly go the other way. If you don't have a strong clientele.

[00:47:14] **Antony Whitaker:** Definitely. Yeah. Okay. All right. Well, listen, thank you so much for spending some more time with us today and updating us on all things Sassoon, because I know a lot of people in the industry look to what's happening there to what is happening with hairdressing in general. And um, if, you know, the House of Sassoon, anything.

[00:47:34] **Antony Whitaker:** Is there anything to go by, then what's happening to hairdressing is in a healthy place, um, I would like to think. So, uh, whereabouts can people connect with you on Instagram or any other, uh, social media channels or any websites you'd like to point them towards?

[00:47:49] **Debbie Webster:** So Sassoon Academy official is our official Instagram, and that's where I would, I would. Um, and then Sassoon Online obviously is, you know, for anything education related. And we also, if you're interested in finding out more about the membership, you can go to members at sassoonglobal.com.

[00:48:08] **Antony Whitaker:** Is that only for Sassoon alumni or is that for anybody?

[00:48:14] **Debbie Webster:** I got it wrong. It's membership at sassoonglobal.com. So it's from, it's for alumni. So again, when I say alumni, we use that in a very broad sense. It's for anyone who's studied with us, who's a

Sassoon enthusiast, because obviously they're the people that are going to want to be part of this community and be surrounded by those like-minded people.

[00:48:33] **Debbie Webster:** So, so yeah,

[00:48:35] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay, so they don't have to have been a former employee.

[00:48:38] **Debbie Webster:** no,

[00:48:38] **Antony Whitaker:** Right. Got it. Okay. All right. Well, I will put those links, uh, on our website, growmysalonbusiness.com and the show notes for today's podcast. If you're listening to this podcast with Debbie Webster and you've enjoyed it, then do me a favour, take a screenshot on your phone and share it to your Instagram stories.

[00:48:55] **Antony Whitaker:** And don't forget to subscribe and leave us a rating and review on the Apple podcast app. So to wrap up Debbie Webster, CEO of Sassoon Global, thank you for being on this week's episode of the Grow My Salon Business Podcast.

[00:49:09] **Debbie Webster:** Thank you for having me back. it was a joy talking to you as always and come by and see me at the house of Sassoon when I'm back in London.

[00:49:15] **Antony Whitaker:** I fully intend to. Hopefully we can go and have lunch or something together.

[00:49:18] **Debbie Webster:** Sounds good.

[00:49:19] **Antony Whitaker:** All right. Thanks again.

[00:49:21] **Debbie Webster:** All right. Thank you. Bye.

[00:49:23] **Antony Whitaker:** Thank you for listening to today's podcast If you'd like to connect with us you'll find us at Grow My Salon business.com or on Facebook and Instagram at [Grow My Salon business](https://www.facebook.com/growmysalonbusiness) And if you enjoy tuning into our podcast make sure that you subscribe like and share it with your friends Until next time this is Antony Whitaker wishing you continued success