

GMSB 229

[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

[00:00:27] **Antony Whitaker:** Hey, it's Antony here and welcome to today's episode of the Grow My Salon business podcast. It's great to have you here with us today. I started out in the hairdressing industry a long time ago and so I have met or worked with some of the biggest names in the industry, many of who had a great impact on my development as a person and as a professional hairdresser.

[00:00:51] **Antony Whitaker:** In 1980, I first started working at Vidal Sassoon in London, and amongst the many incredible people from that era was Annie Humphreys, who is, without doubt, the most famous colourist of all time. Anyone who knows anything about this industry will know of Annie. The story goes that Vidal bought an existing salon where Annie worked, and all the staff left except for Annie.

[00:01:18] **Antony Whitaker:** So she was effectively Vidal's first employee in the famous 171 Bond Street Salon in the 60s. Annie went on to become a part owner of the company and only retired when the Sassoon Salons and Schools were sold in the early 2000s. And although she is now in her 80s, she is still fit and healthy. And a force to be reckoned with.

[00:01:41] **Antony Whitaker:** I had the pleasure of interviewing Annie for an audio series I did in 2015 called Grow Unplugged, which was my first foray into podcasting. And so today's episode is a re release of that interview from 2015. This industry often has a short memory that sometimes builds people up as icons, which is a word that is totally overused.

[00:02:05] **Antony Whitaker:** But Annie Humphreys is an icon. She is a giant in the industry. And if you're a hair colorist today, you owe much of what you do to the path that was walked before you. So I hope that you enjoy this interview with the one and only Annie Humphreys.

[00:02:23] **Antony Whitaker:** Welcome Annie

[00:02:24] **Annie Humphreys:** Thank you Antony It's great to be here with you.

[00:02:26] **Antony Whitaker:** Annie, there may be some young hairdressers who don't know who you are. of your history. So we need to start at the beginning a little bit and go back to where it all began.

[00:02:35] **Antony Whitaker:** Uh, you started in the 1950s. You were an apprentice in London. The salon you worked in was then, um, bought by an unknown young man by the name of Vidal Sassoon. And legend has it that he gave all the staff working there the option to leave or to stay. And you were the only one who chose to stick by Vidal and turn his plan of groundbreaking modern salon, um, into reality.

[00:03:00] **Antony Whitaker:** Is that, is that about it? Have I got the story right? Perfectly correct. Okay. Now, can you remember? So you're working for someone else who owns the salon. Who was it who owned the salon?

[00:03:09] **Annie Humphreys:** His name was Jose Powell. Right. And he was a completely different type of hairdresser to Vidal. He was a very old school in a way.

[00:03:18] **Annie Humphreys:** Right. Um, you know, uh, that did competitions and all that, very intricate, very meticulous, uh, very, very artistic. Okay. Uh, in his mannerisms. Yeah. Um, very, you know, but I thought, well, I don't know.

[00:03:34] **Antony Whitaker:** And so when Vidal came and took over, were you the only staff member? Was it just you and him, or did he bring someone else with him?

[00:03:40] **Annie Humphreys:** He brought his staff with him. Right. From where? So where was he before that? We were in 171 Bond Street. Right. New Bond Street, which is two doors away from Asprey's. Right. And definitely in the right area, which was very important in those days, that you were in the right

[00:04:00] **Antony Whitaker:** area. But I thought the first salon was up the other end of Bond Street.

[00:04:04] **Annie Humphreys:** Up, but Vidal was, had his small salon, which was his first salon, at the other end of Bond Street. Right, okay. Which was Oxford Street, end of Bond Street, over a shoe shop called Mondain. Which is right next door up on the third floor. Yeah. Um, which is right next door to where Steven Way Salon is.

[00:04:28] **Annie Humphreys:** Right.

[00:04:28] **Antony Whitaker:** And so is that the one that you were working in? But they were saying no. Oh, it wasn't Right. Okay.

[00:04:32] **Annie Humphreys:** No, I was working in 171, the salon that everybody knows the iconic

[00:04:36] **Antony Whitaker:** big salon. Right. And that was the one he came and took over? Yes. Oh, I didn't realize that. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So he already had a salon on V Street.

[00:04:43] **Annie Humphreys:** He already had a salon, but, so he brought those people down. It was, um, because it was. In those, it was up by Oxford Street.

[00:04:51] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, sure. Yeah, yeah. And it was on the third floor at the back. Yeah. Yeah, looking over the, you know, the yard or whatever.

[00:04:57] **Annie Humphreys:** Where this was right on

[00:04:59] **Antony Whitaker:** Bond Street. Yeah, opposite where Cartier is or Ralph Lauren.

[00:05:03] **Antony Whitaker:** The 171 Bond Street, the big salon in Bond Street, he had that as early as the 50s. In the late 50s?

[00:05:10] **Annie Humphreys:** It was 1958. I thought

[00:05:12] **Antony Whitaker:** that was it, because that was the year I was born, so yeah. Okay.

[00:05:14] **Annie Humphreys:** But the first salon that he actually had was 1954.

[00:05:19] **Antony Whitaker:** Right, which was the one up the other end, the Oxford Street end. Yes, yes.

[00:05:23] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay, so he, so you stayed, all the other staff left.

[00:05:26] **Annie Humphreys:** The staff worked in the big salon for a month or so, while he was planning what he was going to do with it, because he wanted to be very different. Yeah. Um, from most of the other places. And obviously it took a while before, you know, all the plans.

[00:05:51] **Antony Whitaker:** And so he was, he was an unknown at this stage still.

[00:05:54] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah. In terms of like all the big names in London weren't being able to say. So he took on that big space

[00:05:59] **Annie Humphreys:** in Bond Street. It was the first, the ground floor. Yeah. The basement and the first floor.

[00:06:06] **Antony Whitaker:** So what was it like when in those days working with Bedell? So he's a stylist He's behind the chair doing a full column of clients every day at this point in his life.

[00:06:14] **Annie Humphreys:** Yes. Oh, yes Yes, and in the beginning I he did use rollers But not rollers as most people would think about right. He used to have his his rollers made every day Made. Made. Right. Okay. From cotton wool. Right. So the assistants used to have to get the cotton wool and roll and roll and roll and roll and press until they got this perfect Cylinder.

[00:06:43] **Annie Humphreys:** Cylinder. Yeah. Yes. Okay. In all different sizes. Yeah. And he had a basket of these rollers and also pins. Yeah. He would do pin curls. as well. And he would just use two pins to keep the pin curls in place. Right. And they went in like that so quick you wouldn't even see them go in. Yeah. And most of the assistants used to fumble because they couldn't pass the pins quick enough for him.

[00:07:10] **Antony Whitaker:** Exactly. So, so when he was working then and you'd be watching him as like a young hairdresser, did he stand out as someone who was just like this guy is so talented or was, um, was it still early, early days yet?

[00:07:22] **Annie Humphreys:** He was always. He was always different. He always, he always had a sort of very different approach to people in this kind of, um, the only way I can think of it is it was quite, it was very open.

[00:07:38] **Annie Humphreys:** It wasn't hushed at all, because a lot of people in those days, the tones were quite hushed. Yeah. Um, and in some, some of the sounds still had like cubicles, you see, everything was sort of cosseted and quiet and hushed and, and he was very, very open and not loud, but he, you, everybody could hear what he was saying.

[00:08:02] **Annie Humphreys:** saying or what he was talking about, you know, so it was quite, it was, it was just different.

[00:08:08] **Antony Whitaker:** And, and how did he, in those days, how, how were clients treated? How was staff treated? When we're talking 1958, 1959, I mean, it must have been a very different. You know, compared to what it's like now, like, did apprentices pay to come to work in those days?

[00:08:23] **Antony Whitaker:** Uh, yes. So you, if you're an apprentice, you had to pay to be there?

[00:08:26] **Annie Humphreys:** A lot of people came. Right. And paid. Yeah. Not everybody. Yeah. Um, by the time we got, everybody got back working full swing in, um, in 171, there were apprentices that he took on that didn't pay, that got minimal, very minimal wage, um, and then he took on people that wanted to pay to learn his ways.

[00:08:53] **Annie Humphreys:** And we called those people Vardarers. And they watched during the day. Because it's an old theatre word, Vardar, for looking, for watching. So, because they watched all day, they got nicknamed Vardarers, and to this day, it's stuck.

[00:09:11] **Antony Whitaker:** It's everywhere, everyone uses it now.

[00:09:13] **Annie Humphreys:** And, um, in the evening, they would be allowed to do a model.

[00:09:18] **Annie Humphreys:** And they had to pay The big premium to do that, right? Okay. Um, and there was just a small amount taken each time There

wasn't masses of people because you didn't want loads of people cluttering the place up So it was very privileged because they look quite a lot.

[00:09:35] **Antony Whitaker:** How many staff would have been there in those days in the salon?

[00:09:38] **Annie Humphreys:** I think we must have had about 20 Okay, so a big

[00:09:42] **Antony Whitaker:** salon. Yes. So, you know, Vidal has never made any secret of the fact that he came from, you know, very humble beginnings. How did he finance this big salon, which it was a big salon still, in Bond Street in those days?

[00:09:56] **Annie Humphreys:** Well, I think he was just one of those people.

[00:10:01] **Annie Humphreys:** He was lucky, he was very lucky. I think in life you have to be lucky as well as talented. And he met a New Zealand sheep farmer. Really? Sheep farmer.

[00:10:13] **Antony Whitaker:** Hold his hope for me yet then. Ha ha ha ha.

[00:10:19] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah, okay. And um, somehow, must have just clicked with this gentleman. Right, okay. Who was very, very lovely.

[00:10:26] **Antony Whitaker:** So a New Zealand sheep farmer financed Vidal Sassoon's first salon.

[00:10:30] **Antony Whitaker:** Or, or Big Salon on Bond Street. Yes. Right, okay. And was he a partner in it? Um. Or was this purely an investment? He got his money back after a certain amount of time.

[00:10:39] **Annie Humphreys:** You never saw this gentleman. Right, okay. It was too busy on the farm. I, I, I, I don't know the intricate details of the financial side, but I know that's where the money comes from.

[00:10:51] **Antony Whitaker:** I've talked to a few people about the fact that I was talking to you today, and there was some interesting things that people asked me to make sure I asked you. But one of them also said Um, she said to

me, she said, now ask her questions about today, like ask her things about what advice would you give to someone young, starting out today?

[00:11:09] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, so what would you, you know, a 16 year old today starting hairdressing, if you had to give them a one sentence bit of advice, what would it be?

[00:11:17] **Annie Humphreys:** Make sure it's what you want to do, because it's not easy. Mm, that's for sure. Um, and if it's what you want to do, then you have to work hard at it. Unless you are a complete natural.

[00:11:29] **Annie Humphreys:** Mm. And In all the years that I've been working, there's not 50 percent of people that are natural, not naturals. Yeah, not even nearly. Yeah, yeah. As you know, it's a small percentage that it just comes. Um, so to be really good, you have to work hard at it. Yeah. And if you put everything into it, and you work hard at it, you will get a lot out of it.

[00:11:54] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah. But if you put your toe in the water, and then take it out again, think about it, and then, oh maybe, maybe, it won't work for you.

[00:12:03] **Antony Whitaker:** You're wasting your time. It won't work. Yeah, I agree with that. What, what, what about a, um, a young salon owner? So someone who's just opened their salon today, what, what advice would you give them as someone who used to be part owner of Vidal Sassoon, I mean, what would you say to them?

[00:12:17] **Annie Humphreys:** Well, it's obviously, I'm saying it's obvious, but sometimes Because you're so wound up about trying to build up a clientele, trying to, you know, get the people into the salon, right, and getting your name known, don't neglect the figure side because if your numbers don't add up, it doesn't matter how many people that you've got coming in the door, it won't be, it won't be a success because your numbers have to work out in the end.

[00:12:47] **Annie Humphreys:** It's boring, I know. Bye. Bye. Okay, first of all, I agree. You've got to, you look after the work. You also have to look after everybody in that place. And remember, you are not the most important person in the salon. Your staff are more important than you are. Because without them, you ain't gonna get anywhere.

[00:13:11] **Antony Whitaker:** All right,

[00:13:12] **Antony Whitaker:** let's just get back to the 70s for a minute then I know that you did a lot of work with some of the big stars of the day. I've heard names like Dusty Springfield and Diana Dawes and Mandy Rice Davis and a lot of stuff with Vogue etc in the 70s.

[00:13:28] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, tell me some stories about that.

[00:13:30] **Annie Humphreys:** I think it was so part of being, it was a bit normal actually because in those days, there were so many different people that were in theatre and arts of different sorts. And, um, also we had a large clientele of the ladies of the night. Um, that used to come into Bond Street.

[00:13:56] **Annie Humphreys:** Fabulous, right. It was a very, and duchesses and all sorts, it was very mixed. So, it was a very sort of open, so you would have, you could have cool girls, and you'd have royalty, and you could have Cleaners and you could have solicitors and you could have it was just a big mismatch of all sorts of people So whoever came in it was quite normal and nobody really thought any more of it.

[00:14:21] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah People used to fly in from Paris quite a lot. Yeah, New York people used to come in from LA people came in But it was just kind of, because it wasn't unusual, it happened with different people all the time, you just became a bit blasé, I suppose. You just expected it to be normal, but it probably wasn't.

[00:14:44] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah, yeah. Um, and also in those days everybody was larger in life in any case.

[00:14:49] **Antony Whitaker:** Right. So when, are we talking now still late 60s, 70s? 70s, yeah. 70s, okay.

[00:14:55] **Annie Humphreys:** Um, early 80s. Right. Um,

[00:14:57] **Antony Whitaker:** and I gather in the 70s. From what I've been told, is that there was a lot of work done with magazines. It was quite common for you to be doing work with Vogue and stuff like that, is that right?

[00:15:07] **Annie Humphreys:** Yes, I mean, Vidal did quite, Vidal, this is probably something that people don't know, but he was probably the original session stylist. Really? Because he would go to Paris. Yeah. And take Roger Thompson with him. Yeah. And they would go and do the magazines, and they would go and do the shows. And he would do magazines in London and stuff, because he'd done the Paris shows, uh, and the Milan shows.

[00:15:35] **Annie Humphreys:** So, it wasn't called Session then, because it was the beginning, really.

[00:15:40] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, because I know a lot of models used to do their own hair and makeup. They'd bring their own shoes and all that sort of stuff, wouldn't they?

[00:15:45] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah. Uh, in those days most people, most of the models did their own hair. Yeah. The photographic sessions were not as they are now.

[00:15:51] **Annie Humphreys:** The shoots weren't, you know, it was all very style and contrived and stuff like that.

[00:15:58] **Antony Whitaker:** Did you ever do that side of things? Did you ever get into dressing hair yourself? Okay. So was there ever a decade? Or an era that was particularly inspiring for you? Was there one decade that you went, Oh, that's when I was hot.

[00:16:10] **Antony Whitaker:** That's when, I mean, okay, Anna, you were hot all the time that I did. You know, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s.

[00:16:16] **Annie Humphreys:** Well, I suppose as colour became an accepted thing, When I say accepted, when I first started I used to do, In Bond Street when the bob, right, the five point, obviously is dark. Yeah. And in those days we did loads of work.

[00:16:32] **Annie Humphreys:** It was either blonde or black. Yeah. Or red. You know, so it was very mono. And also that, I suppose, it went with the haircuts, which were all perimeter, it was all about lines on the outside. And then the hair cutting got towards working with interior shapes. And then people were having colour because of the hair cut and stuff like that.

[00:16:56] **Antony Whitaker:** This is sort of when I turned up then, isn't it, so beginning of the 80s. But

[00:17:00] **Annie Humphreys:** before that, I mean, people had their hair coloured when they were in the theatre. You know, starlets, or in the theatre, or if you're a cool girl. Um, and they had brighter colours and more flamboyant stuff. If you were not from that era, it, you know, it's the type of You came in and you said, Please can you do my hair, cover my grey up?

[00:17:22] **Annie Humphreys:** I want it to look as natural as possible. I don't want anybody to know that my hair is tinted. Yeah. Then it changed for people to say. Oh, yes. I would like people to notice my hair's colored, right? Okay, so it's a change from people not wanting to look tinted or colored. Yeah to saying. Oh, yes I do do it.

[00:17:42] **Annie Humphreys:** It was kind of accepted. Yeah, it was a bit like when Lipstick first came out, people didn't want people to think they'd put red on their lips to make

[00:17:50] **Annie Humphreys:** them. Yeah.

[00:17:51] **Antony Whitaker:** They just bite their lips for a bit, wouldn't it? Yeah. To make them go red.. Okay.

[00:17:55] **Annie Humphreys:** And then of course we had the crazy color era. Yeah. Which was um, very strong.

[00:18:00] **Antony Whitaker:** Taking it to the extreme. Yeah.

[00:18:02] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah. I mean the punk and stuff like that. Um, I think one of the things that people probably don't realize that there's a very unsung hero. Of cutting called Daryl Benson. Yeah. And he's really the forefather, or the grandfather, or the godfather, whatever you want to say, of cutting as we know it today.

[00:18:22] **Annie Humphreys:** Mm. Because the way that he cut was to make hair shorter to support longer hair. So it was really the first concave, the beginning of the concave, um, and people had not thought of making structure out of a haircut, really, or they were doing, you know, going away from Vidal's

perimeter into the interior shapes, which they'd done before where they just layered stuff through, but it was just a kind of layer all over where this was.

[00:18:57] **Annie Humphreys:** Actually like building a house. So you were building, you were building a haircut to, you know, to support one area to support another. And that's really when the coloring came into its own because you then made, um, areas. darker and lighter to enhance the shapes. Um, and you'd use the darker colours to make the hair recede and the brighter colours to make it pop out.

[00:19:21] **Annie Humphreys:** Um, so really that, all the cutting, that when it really started getting really intricate and stuff like that, then the colours got, went in tandem with the haircuts.

[00:19:33] **Antony Whitaker:** So this is now, um, early mid seventies. And so Vidal, by this point, he's gone to America.

[00:19:41] **Antony Whitaker:** Yes. Yeah. And Christopher Brooker is also in America. Yes. So you're in, you're in London. Yeah. With Daryl Benson. Mm hmm. Um, who else from that era are the unsung heroes?

[00:19:52] **Annie Humphreys:** If we just pop back a little bit to Christopher Brooker. Yeah. Um, We did the first by color together, which was the Firefly. Mm-Hmm. . And that was in 73.

[00:20:06] **Annie Humphreys:** 73. 74. Okay. Yeah. Seven three. Seven four. Yeah. Um, and that was when that started. Yeah. And then. He actually did the first colored photograph of Riddell. So did it all be black and white up until that point? Up until, um, main photograph was in black and white, but there was one colored photograph done of it.

[00:20:26] **Annie Humphreys:** And also at the same time there was a, um, he did a haircut called Erte. Yeah. Which was Blood red and that was colored, but both of those were colored by hand and all the retouching was done by hand. He was very pioneering Christopher. He was completely different from Roger Thompson because Roger took over from Fidel and he was different.

[00:20:55] **Annie Humphreys:** Then you got Christopher that was different again. Then you went from. Then you had a short period with Herta Keller.

Yeah, who was talking about girls. She was very strong So she held a very strong position and then you came into the Tim Harley era

[00:21:08] **Antony Whitaker:** But that before the Tim there was the Daryl Benton.

[00:21:11] **Annie Humphreys:** Yes, but he did not become International creative director, right?

[00:21:15] **Annie Humphreys:** Okay. Yeah, of course but directly before Tim you had the Daryl Benson that did a lot of the what I think was the godfather of the hair cutting and I think if you speak to Tim, he'll probably tell you the same.

[00:21:28] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, yeah. There's two names that pop up often. Daryl and Flint. Flint, yes. Who used to work together a lot, didn't they?

[00:21:34] **Annie Humphreys:** Daryl came up with it, but then Flint worked very, very strongly with Daryl. Yeah. And, um, they're both very, very pioneering. Very, very different.

[00:21:46] **Antony Whitaker:** So, in this period of time, just talking about Sassoon as a company, you know, Vidal's gone. Yeah, he's working. And he's in America. Mm hmm. And he's working on developing products and stuff.

[00:21:56] **Antony Whitaker:** The company itself must sort of, well, I know, um, without [00:22:00] putting the words in your mouth. It was a bit split. Yeah. It was, it was split and it was, as a business, as you just said before about the numbers, you've got to know the numbers. Yeah. Obviously, there were, there were times, like any business, where it maybe lost its way a little bit.

[00:22:13] **Annie Humphreys:** Right. Right. Well, I think because LL was concentrating on the products. Yeah. Right. And he spent most of his time in the us. Um, there was this kind of split, because we had the Darryl Benson Flint thing, which was hair. Hair progress. Progress. Hair progress. Color. Color progress, hair doing stuff. You, you're pushing the boundaries.

[00:22:33] **Annie Humphreys:** Pushing the boundaries. Mm. Hairwise. Mm. Um, Fidel was pushing the boundaries, the other side of the pond on products. Yeah. So he was still pushing the boundaries, but in a different way to the way

we were doing it in the UK. Yeah. Um, and the UK never, ever. Loft this push, you know creative.

[00:22:55] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah, it's yeah,

[00:22:57] **Antony Whitaker:** but business wise it was there was a lack of it was yeah It was control or lack of leadership or a lack of business acumen at the time.

[00:23:05] **Annie Humphreys:** No, I know well for no we had Tommy you die. Yes was managing director. Yeah, and and and I think maybe You try to do different things, maybe we, um, try to spread our wings a little bit too far in, in opening in different directions. Mm-hmm. In the seventies was the first salon outside London, which opened in 73 in Manchester, 74 it went to Leeds.

[00:23:32] **Annie Humphreys:** Um, also in that the same time we opened in Munich. Mm-Hmm, . And then about a year or so later, we opened in Hamburg. And then a year or so after that, we opened in Frankfurt. The same time as we opened in Hamburg, we opened in Milan. And then we opened in Birmingham a bit later than that. So there was quite a lot all going on in the same, you know, expansion at the same time.

[00:23:58] **Annie Humphreys:** And always when you try to expand very, very quickly. You're always, you know, stretching. Sure. Your resources. Yeah. In every direction. Yeah,

[00:24:07] **Antony Whitaker:** so often I mean You never hear about the things that didn't work and I mean just an amazing company That's had a great history, but I'm always curious about things like like you just mentioned then so Birmingham I arrived at so soon at the end of the at the end of 1980 and be just before I arrived Croydon had closed Birmingham closed and somewhere, Wilmslow closed.

[00:24:30] **Antony Whitaker:** So that must have been a, a fairly

[00:24:33] **Annie Humphreys:** Well, it was just after that. What I'm saying, it was wrong, in the wrong place at the wrong time. And also, I think it was too early to be in those areas. Yeah. And I mean, we closed Milan after a few years as well, because Milan was not the place at the time for Sassoon, because they had not got into that hair.

[00:24:51] **Annie Humphreys:** And, um, also Because of business, the salon didn't open right on a main big fashion street. Yeah, sure. It was tapped away in more of a residential area.

[00:25:05] **Antony Whitaker:** The Milan one you're talking about.

[00:25:06] **Annie Humphreys:** Yes, which was the wrong move, especially with the Italian mentality, was not the wrong place, wrong time, you know, and plus we were too early for Italy.

[00:25:16] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah,

[00:25:16] **Antony Whitaker:** so with like the Croydon salon, the Wilmslow salon, the Birmingham salon, were they just hemorrhaging money? Was the expansion just too quick and there was a lack of management?

[00:25:27] **Annie Humphreys:** The space that was taken in Birmingham was huge. I mean huge. And we only opened half of it, which was huge. And the other half stayed closed.

[00:25:38] **Annie Humphreys:** It was too big. All the salons that were there. were smaller salons. Although they had some good names there, they weren't, it wasn't this big place, you know. Yes.

[00:25:49] **Antony Whitaker:** So this 80s and that was when you and Christopher and Philip then took over ownership of the company. So you start off as a 16 year old kid. And now all of a sudden you own the biggest name in the world of hairdressing.

[00:26:05] **Annie Humphreys:** He didn't think about it. Vidal's in America, he's concentrating on the products. And

[00:26:10] **Annie Humphreys:** meanwhile, Tommy Yee died, also moved to the States. Right. And Felicity Green came in to be the managing director. Fabulous lady. Um, obviously, um, well known journalist. But, maybe

[00:26:26] **Antony Whitaker:** Not with the right business acumen to run Sassoon

[00:26:29] **Annie Humphreys:** yes, and also, um, hairdressers are very estranged people, as I'm sure everybody knows. We're all a bit odd. And you can't actually wave a big stick at them and tell them that's what they have to do. Because if you do that, it definitely doesn't work. They like to have a certain amount of rope and freedom and creativity.

[00:26:51] **Antony Whitaker:** So who owned the salons at that point, before you and Philip and Christopher Kent? Oh, Vidal Sasson Inc. Of which Vidal was a shareholder. Yes, and there were other, yes, yes. And they decided to

[00:27:03] **Annie Humphreys:** They decided to let Part of the salon group go

[00:27:07] **Antony Whitaker:** just the UK or you can't Germany at this time

[00:27:10] **Annie Humphreys:** Um only a percentage and also a similar time the managers in the US Had a small percentage in their salon. So now we're getting quite fragmented. Yeah, sure Yeah, because there's a small percentage of people running the UK

[00:27:27] **Annie Humphreys:** But they also had to Answer to the corporation. Yeah, because there's only a percentage that was held here by the three of us Yeah, and then in the States you had Individuals just having a small percentage in their salon, right?

[00:27:42] **Annie Humphreys:** So obviously they were interested in in their salon. Yeah. Because that's what human nature, that's what you, that's your pie. Yeah. Um, so it was quite fragmented obviously because, you know, obviously people wanted to do very well and the salons were busy. And I don't think at that time the creativity and the leadership of following Breaking, you know, trying to progress and always bringing out new things and collections and moving forward was not really Necessarily on their agenda and also not just the managers, but the Americans as a whole Didn't move forward as quickly in their fashion arena in those days as they did in Europe

[00:28:27] **Antony Whitaker:** So the salon owners in America had a percentage of their salons But it wasn't a franchise, they just got a profit sharing percentage or something.

[00:28:35] **Annie Humphreys:** Yes, it was just, I don't know the details, but they had a certain, it was just in their own, only in their own, yeah.

[00:28:41] **Antony Whitaker:** So you and Philip and Christopher took over ownership of the UK and Germany. Or part of it. And then phase two, you took over all of it.

[00:28:50] **Annie Humphreys:** Yes, of the UK. Right. And then the next stage was.

[00:28:55] **Antony Whitaker:** America and Canada. Was there ever a day where you woke up and punched a year with a fist and went, yes, I've made it.

[00:29:02] **Annie Humphreys:** And now you're too busy. No, not really. You had to be quite fearless to not think about it because everything that I own wasn't mine anymore.

[00:29:13] **Antony Whitaker:** Because you had to leverage everything.

[00:29:15] **Annie Humphreys:** It belonged to the company.

[00:29:16] **Antony Whitaker:** Right. Yeah. Because you had to leverage everything to borrow the money to buy into the sales. Right. Didn't matter. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Um, I know another red herring I want to just chuck in here. I know there was a school at one stage in Hong Kong. Yes. So what happened there?

[00:29:29] **Annie Humphreys:** Didn't work, right? No. Um, I think that was another one of Tommy ADA's babies.

[00:29:34] **Annie Humphreys:** I think it was just really trying to get the mix of Western cultured people. There were people from the US and people from the UK that went to open the school and then trying to also bring on the Chinese. Which they did, and they had quite a few people in the end that were there that were Chinese that were on the staff.

[00:29:57] **Annie Humphreys:** But, um, I just don't think that it had enough of a pull for people to go there for education.

[00:30:06] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, again, before it's time. Yeah. I think that's the thing people have to remember about Sassoon, is that it's done all these things that were groundbreaking. No one else had done them before. There'd never been a, a celebrity product line.

[00:30:18] **Antony Whitaker:** There'd never been schools the way Sassoon did. There'd never

[00:30:21] **Annie Humphreys:** But also, probably another thing that people don't realise that when Vidal opened his second salon, which was Grove to House, and that was in 1963, he opened with a health bar and a nurse.

[00:30:35] **Antony Whitaker:** In the salon.

[00:30:36] **Annie Humphreys:** In the salon.

[00:30:37] **Antony Whitaker:** That's very revolutionary, isn't it?

[00:30:38] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah. So it's always been, you know, so we had

[00:30:41] **Antony Whitaker:** What was the nurse doing?

[00:30:42] **Annie Humphreys:** She would give injections. vitamins. So, you know, it was very, very, very, yeah, and very different. You know, you went, it was a whole special area. Um, and that phased out because again, really too early, too early. Um, in Bond Street, we had our own wig department.

[00:31:02] **Annie Humphreys:** We used to make wigs.

[00:31:04] **Antony Whitaker:** And I also heard in Sloane Street you had like a full time chef downstairs and all the same stuff.

[00:31:09] **Annie Humphreys:** Yes, yes, we did in the kitchens. We're not quite three course meals, but we had our

[00:31:14] **Annie Humphreys:** own chef, yeah.

[00:31:15] **Antony Whitaker:** So you had your own wig department in Bond Street? Yes. Of making handmade wigs?

[00:31:19] **Annie Humphreys:** Handmade wigs.

[00:31:20] **Antony Whitaker:** Right. And this is for fashion?

[00:31:21] **Annie Humphreys:** Fashion. Because, um, in the 60s, you know, the beehives and all of that. Yeah. And even when the five point and the, you know, the geometrics were in, there was still a lot of dressed hair going on. And that was still going on in the salon when Fidel was doing five points.

[00:31:37] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah. Because he didn't suddenly, one day, he did the five point and everybody had it. Yeah. It doesn't happen like that. Yeah, no, exactly. You know, people change over. So, we used to make false points. You know, pieces so that you could have your hair up, down, long, you know, and also not so much with theatre because they had their own type of wigs that they wanted usually.

[00:31:57] **Antony Whitaker:** By now, when you're talking that this period of time, you know, beginning of the 80s, whatever, did you see Fidel much? I mean, was he a part of the business or was he now just so elevated in the States, his own TV shows?

[00:32:09] **Annie Humphreys:** You wouldn't see him.

[00:32:10] **Annie Humphreys:** He would come and you'd probably see him for a half a day or something.

[00:32:14] **Annie Humphreys:** I mean, he would visit all the salons, but people wouldn't see him for very long. Right.

[00:32:20] **Antony Whitaker:** But did you? Did you have, I mean, because you had a different relationship?

[00:32:22] **Annie Humphreys:** Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:32:24] **Annie Humphreys:** You would see him, but yeah, he was

[00:32:26] **Annie Humphreys:** always. And he was just the same guy? Always

[00:32:28] **Annie Humphreys:** the same, yeah. Always the same. But probably people didn't realize that also one of the reasons we had our own week department was when Vidal went to Paris and he did.

[00:32:38] **Annie Humphreys:** like Courage and all these fashion people's shows, and they all had the Vidal Sassoon haircut. He'd taken all these

handmade wigs. Not all of them were wigs, but there was wigs taken, so that if one of the top girls wouldn't have their hair done, then they had the wig.

[00:32:56] **Antony Whitaker:** The look, yeah. Well, that was the main thing.

[00:32:58] **Antony Whitaker:** Let me ask you about colorist. What is it? That makes a good colorist. What do you look for? You've got some kid who starts with you in the salon, and, uh, they're doing their, you know, their training, and you're looking at them and thinking, would they be a stylist, would they be a colorist? What is it that you look for?

[00:33:12] **Antony Whitaker:** Or what is it that you should look for within yourself?

[00:33:14] **Annie Humphreys:** When you start someone in the salon, and they're shampooing and stuff like that, you usually see which area they gravitate to. And majority gravitate towards cutting. It's just the odds. you that are interested, they just show an interest in colour.

[00:33:30] **Annie Humphreys:** Because most people want to do cutting, I think. Didn't you find that, that most of the people that came into the salon to be

[00:33:38] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, I mean, I never, I never had any affinity with colour at all. No. None at all. I didn't want to get my hands dirty.

[00:33:45] **Annie Humphreys:** No, exactly. So you know when you've got the juniors that come in, the apprentices that come in, there's those few that migrate towards that colour department and then you nurture them and on.

[00:33:58] **Annie Humphreys:** Others just don't want to go near you.

[00:33:59] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, well that was me. Yeah, yeah. There are also very different creative processes. Like, from the point of view that when you cut hair, you see what you're getting as you're getting it. Whereas I always think that when you colour hair, You color it, and then you've got no real idea what's happening until it's been No, you do.

[00:34:16] **Annie Humphreys:** You have to know what you're doing.

[00:34:18] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay, so you hope you know what's happening, but it's not until it's finished and it's dried off that you can see it. Whereas, if you cut on there, you can go, Oh, that needs to be a bit shorter. Or, I need to break that up a bit more. You can sort of see it as you're doing it, whereas with color

[00:34:32] **Annie Humphreys:** Well, you can have a look as it's developing to see if it's doing the

[00:34:36] **Annie Humphreys:** right thing.

[00:34:37] **Annie Humphreys:** All right.

[00:34:38] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. So, here's a question for you. Have you ever made a mistake? Or, or a hair disaster that couldn't be camouflaged. I don't think so. Okay, you always manage to get away with it. I think you can It's back to those wigs again, is it?

[00:34:51] **Annie Humphreys:** Oh no, definitely not the wigs. No, I think you can. I mean, **a mistake is never a mistake until it leaves your chair.**

[00:34:58] **Antony Whitaker:** That's worth remembering.

[00:34:59] **Annie Humphreys:** Right. Yeah, yeah, good. And, um, Christian Gardner, who was a great colourist with me for years, um, I always used to say, it's never a mistake. And the first time I met him, when he came to an interview, and we got on, and I said to him, well you've got to remember it's never a mistake until it leaves the chair, and he never forgot that, and he would always say that to all the kids so they're learning.

[00:35:21] **Antony Whitaker:** Well, no, it's good, it's a nice little sentence which has a very good message behind it.

[00:35:26] **Annie Humphreys:** So you can always You know, if you see it, rectify it, don't leave it. If you spot it straight away, if you know what you're doing, you can counteract it and you can do it. Don't leave it.

[00:35:39] **Antony Whitaker:** A lot of your job was always about developing a team of people, not just as colourists, as part owner of the company, you're responsible for building a team.

[00:35:48] **Antony Whitaker:** What are the key things that you need to develop a good team?

[00:35:52] **Annie Humphreys:** You have to make them believe in themselves. And that they are as important, they are an important part. And that, I always think that, you know, I always used to say to the kids, because I loved when I used to do a lot of staff training, you can do this.

[00:36:11] **Annie Humphreys:** And they'd say, this is going to be difficult. No, it's not. It's not. You can do it. You can do it. Just think you can do it. Just think about it. You can do it. You've got to make people believe in themselves that they can do it. But because they, you've got to make them, they want to do it, you know? That they can do it.

[00:36:30] **Annie Humphreys:** Yes, I'm going to do this. I can do this. I think that's, you know, they have to be, feel like they belong and that they are producing something and they're contributing and that they're important in what they're giving to the whole thing. Okay.

[00:36:44] **Antony Whitaker:** And believing in themselves, right?

[00:36:46] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah. In believing in themselves.

[00:36:48] **Annie Humphreys:** They're contribu that they are contributing to the whole, not that they're not important 'cause that they are.

[00:36:53] **Antony Whitaker:** How do

[00:36:53] **Antony Whitaker:** you deal with failure when things haven't worked out for you? Business wise or, you know, people [00:37:00] wise that have let you down, disappointed you, whatever it is. How do you deal with that so that you move on?

[00:37:04] **Antony Whitaker:** What's your sort of philosophy on how you handle failure?

[00:37:07] **Annie Humphreys:** You can't change history, you just have to move forward, and you learn from it, because once it's done, it's done. Don't do anything you regret, but never regret anything you do.

[00:37:18] **Antony Whitaker:** Was there any one thing, like what you've just given an example of, any one sentence or statement or idea or conversation that was said to you that had a real big impact on the direction that your life took?

[00:37:33] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah, I think for now, because it was always, yeah, it'll work.

[00:37:38] **Antony Whitaker:** Was there any one thing he ever said to you, Annie, come sit down over here, I'm gonna tell you this. Remember it. Was there anything like that that stuck with you, that's sort of been like

[00:37:46] **Annie Humphreys:** No, it's, no, we can do it, and it's got, we can do it. And I think it's that, that word is very important.

[00:37:53] **Antony Whitaker:** We. Now you always had a phenomenal work ethic. I can always remember you were the first one there, and you were the last one to go. Where's that from?

[00:38:01] **Annie Humphreys:** I think it's from my family actually.

[00:38:02] **Antony Whitaker:** What did

[00:38:03] **Antony Whitaker:** your family do? What did your mum and dad do for a day?

[00:38:04] **Annie Humphreys:** They were in um, green grocery.

[00:38:07] **Antony Whitaker:** So just like Margaret Thatcher's family.

[00:38:09] **Annie Humphreys:** I suppose so.

[00:38:10] **Antony Whitaker:** So that, that work ethic.

[00:38:12] **Annie Humphreys:** Well yeah, because obviously green groceries you used to have to go to Covent Garden Market very early in the morning. Four o'clock in the morning you were up to go to the market. Yeah. And then when you, you know, you worked all day. And then when you came home at night, you had to balance the books.

[00:38:25] **Antony Whitaker:** Right, so you just rolled your sleeves up and got on with it. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And you were amazing. I would take my hat off to you. What do you think of colour today? Because it seems to be a lot more relaxed, the techniques and the rules of colour. When you look at colour today and you see what's happening, what are your thoughts?

[00:38:42] **Annie Humphreys:** Well, I think it's great because I think there's some of the things that you can do now because they're saying you can put colors on top. They're not going to bleed. Certain companies say this and you, and there's lots of things that have been developed, which makes it easier. And also I think everybody's so into having color and And, uh, changing it and having different things and there's so many different colors out now.

[00:39:05] **Annie Humphreys:** There are so many more things that are primary, you know, before you were very limited to primary colors and bright colors where there's lots and lots of choice now. And I think it's great.

[00:39:15] **Antony Whitaker:** I was intrigued as to what you'd say by that because I know you were always like the queen of foil and now there's so much more looser.

[00:39:22] **Antony Whitaker:** More freehand sort of stuff. Would you love to have had your hands in there doing more of that then?

[00:39:26] **Annie Humphreys:** I did quite a lot of freehand. I mean, do you remember we were doing Yeah,

[00:39:28] **Antony Whitaker:** well, right at the beginning with like flying colours and combots. Flying colours, yes.

[00:39:32] **Annie Humphreys:** And also all of those things with, you know, icing bags.

[00:39:36] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah, yeah, that's true. You know, um, rolling, putting colour on rollers and rolling it over the hair. And all sorts of things like that. We went through this era, which was trying to make things very quick, um, because the economy wasn't very well, and people didn't want to spend a lot of money going through a crisis.

[00:39:53] **Antony Whitaker:** And I think that's what's driven it again now, hasn't it? Yeah. Yeah, all the balayage, freehand techniques, it's all about money and speed. Yeah. Get a result and get it quickly.

[00:40:01] **Annie Humphreys:** Yeah, and quick.

[00:40:02] **Antony Whitaker:** you mentioned Tommy year die a couple of times and I don't know him obviously But I knew of him and I know that he wanted to take the company and franchise it a long time before Franchising was happening and that because it didn't happen That's why he left. Do you think it should have been franchised?

[00:40:20] **Antony Whitaker:** Um, I mean obviously they dabbled with the thought because you said Salon owners in America had a slice of the action

[00:40:26] **Annie Humphreys:** Yes, but I don't, it depends, the word franchising is quite big, quite loose, isn't it, in a way? Um You see, the thing is, when Regis took over, they were going to do these studios, and they were going to roll out.

[00:40:40] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah, 250 of them or something like that.

[00:40:42] **Annie Humphreys:** Yes. So that's why I say, no, it didn't go the way I thought it was going to go. Because it was expected that it would do that. As we are now, people have done franchising or that type of thing, and it has worked for them. I think because there's much more control now, and people have learned, people have grown up.

[00:41:03] **Annie Humphreys:** They've learned of the mistakes of the first franchises and stuff like that. And I mean, you know, Tony and Guy have done fantastically well, and it's because it's very well run. You know, Tony controls it, and all the people he's got do a fabulous job. So if one person can do it, why? It means it can be done.

[00:41:21] **Antony Whitaker:** So do you think that should have happened or is that a in line with your statement about the past?

[00:41:26] **Annie Humphreys:** Well, again, it's the right time in the right place. I think No, I don't think it would have happened at that particular time, to be honest. I don't think it was the right time.

[00:41:35] **Antony Whitaker:** And when you and Philip eventually sold the company, was that a good day for you?

[00:41:39] **Annie Humphreys:** No. Oh, right.

[00:41:41] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. So that was your baby. That was a bad day. Okay. 30 seconds or less. Do you want to tell us how you felt?

[00:41:52] **Annie Humphreys:** Odd. Odd.

[00:41:53] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay. That's less than 30 seconds. I'll let you off there. So Annie Humphries, you're in retirement now. Do you enjoy retirement?

[00:41:59] **Annie Humphreys:** I've got used to it.

[00:42:00] **Antony Whitaker:** Yeah? Okay, you'd never miss standing behind a chair?

[00:42:04] **Annie Humphreys:** Um, of course.

[00:42:05] **Antony Whitaker:** You do miss that, do you? Of course. I know that you had, you were sort of plagued in your sort of last years behind the chair with shoulder problems, weren't you? Well that was hairdressing inflicted?

[00:42:17] **Annie Humphreys:** Yes. Being short, having to stand on my toes with my arms up in the air because all that foiling and all that, it's almost on top of the head.

[00:42:27] **Annie Humphreys:** Um, it's just too, too long. Right, okay. And a lot of that is because I used to do a lot of shows and so when you went out and did shows, it was very, very long days. Yeah, yeah. You know, to get all the things ready for going on stage, all the, you know, models that were on stage.

[00:42:42] **Antony Whitaker:** Anything you'd change? No. No, you wouldn't change a thing.

[00:42:45] **Antony Whitaker:** What would you like to be remembered for? Eventually, one day, many years from now, when you're no longer here.

[00:42:53] **Annie Humphreys:** Colour.

[00:42:54] **Antony Whitaker:** Okay, so nothing specific, just, you know, colour.

[00:42:58] **Annie Humphreys:** Just making colour exciting for people and accessible and accepted.

[00:43:01] **Antony Whitaker:** You have been an amazing influence to a lot of people over, well, 55, 56 years or whatever.

[00:43:08] **Antony Whitaker:** You've influenced generations of hairdressers. And, uh, and you certainly had an influence on my career and my life. which I'll thank you for, but I know that hearing you talk today, a lot of people everywhere would have been intrigued and interested, and I'm sure that everyone has learned something from what you've said today.

[00:43:23] **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](https://www.growmysalonbusiness.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