



Nail tales

Manicures often mark moments in your life, a deep red for a new job or a swish of pink when you're feeling down. And whether done in a nail salon or by yourself in your bedroom, it's a time just for you

photos *charlotte may*
nails by *house of lady muck*, houseoflady muck.com



*“Getting my nails done is rarely just
about being pretty”*

words tahmina begum

Coating my nails with colour has always been synonymous with that special time of the month. Growing up as a Muslim girl, I would scan the hands of my aunts, cousins and friends at family parties, past the gold dripping from their wrists and bejewelled knuckles to their nails to know who was on their period. This wasn't because I was a weirdo but because to do the traditional *salah* (prayer), you perform *wudu* – a wash as a form of respect where water has to permeate the hands and nail beds; so when you're praying up to five times a day, it feels like a waste to remove your nail polish frequently. But orthodox Muslim women are not required to pray when they are on their period, not because anything exiting the body is dirty, but this is a time to rest. So popular fuchsia pink nails, which seemed to be the go-to colour in the 1990s, or a classic red polish was the unspoken telltale sign that something else was happening from within.

Finding a spot of blood in my (always laced-trimmed, always high waisted) knickers has now become part of a bigger self-care routine which flows like clockwork every time. After I put on a pad, I instantly head into my bedroom to find my pouch of nail colours. I have various 'nudes' that range from cool greys, for when I'm feeling minimal, to warm peachy tones and pastel coloured varnishes – blues and yellows and the colours of flowers. Then there

are the must-haves: a myriad of reds. There are also metallic pots waiting to cover your nails on the days you're feeling wild. In my teens, every time I got a period, it felt like freedom. Every day was a different colour to match a different mood. My nails would naturally be battered at the end of the week, needing to breathe for at least three weeks.

Habits of constantly changing my nail colour still remain with me now. It's why a rainbow mani – whether just on the tips or swirled together like a hipster multi-coloured bagel is a favourite. It's also why I rarely get my nails done in the salon, as I've never been loyal to one colour. For me, getting my nails done is rarely just about being pretty. With a history of burning out after months of non-stop work, I've learned self-love should not be something medicated when it's too late but something to be nurtured in the everyday. It's the reason why nails are painted frequently in the early morning when I'm feeling too stressed to sleep.

It sounds frivolous and so female to claim painting your nails is another way to rescue yourself from the tiny and tremendous things we go through every day, but to try and make it sound anything less would be to try to make it sound less pink. And one thing I've learned from looking after yourself and getting a manicure: you can soothe your soul and cuticles at the same time. →



Manicures done at **House of Lady Muck**. Nail polish bottle: **French Affair by Essie**

Nail polishes:
Galactic Glitz,
& Other Stories
Come To Bed Red,
Butter London
Walnut Grove,
part of the Heritage
colours gift set, Mavala

*“We leave layers of our bodies behind
and become something new”*

words bre graham

There is something about a nail salon that I find almost sacred in its universality. No matter where you are in the world, nail salons all feel the same. The hum of the pleather massage chairs, the powder of acrylic nails collecting in the air and the scent of acetone fill me with such comfort. Nail salons are where I escape to when I need a break from everything.

When you go to get your nails done, you have two choices – shades of colour and shape of nails – then the rest is out of your control. I love mulling over those decisions, perhaps in avoidance of thinking about the real and scary choices adult life requires. I like the frivolity of choosing between red or pink, which have consequences on nothing and no one if we choose the wrong one. I often go into my local salon when it's quiet – I know I'll be totally alone so I can think.

But a nail salon also captures a community. Over the years in my local salon, it's been the place where I've met the women I share my streets with. I've met women I've ended up babysitting for and the women behind the tills at my corner shop and chemist. Colour choice sparks conversation: “wow I wish I could wear that shade of pink”, or “I had that one last time” is enough to bond two women into sharing much more about their lives.

My favourite nail salon is my secret space, not because it's the best in the city or the cheapest, but because it's mine and it's where I've lived through the big moments of my life. New job manicures with serious dark red shellac or pre-holiday pedicures in pale lilac or first date glitter tips to signify that, yes, I am fun. I love bringing friends with me too, because I want them to love it like I do. I want them to have my experience there. I make sure my favourite lady is working, we always talk about work and love, and she reads the lines on my palms when she massages my hands at the end.

I often wonder why I go and spend so much more to have someone else paint my nails when I could do it okay at home. But as we sit next to strangers and watch other women shave dead skin off our toes, we leave layers of our bodies behind in these places and we become something new. Going to a salon feels like meditation. Dead parts of me are cut away and new parts are polished. It makes me feel like I'm in control of my life and isn't that all we are ever trying to feel? ♦

