

# AI'S SECRET STYLING MAN

By Jason R. Rich

What do talk show host Leeza Gibbons, *American Idol* host Ryan Seacrest, pianist Jim Brickman, inspirational speaker/infomercial guru Tony Robbins, fitness expert Bill Phillips, Gerry from *Survivor* (Season 2) and all of the *American Idol* Top 12 contestants (from Seasons 1 through 4) have in common?

They all get their hair styled by Dean Banowetz, the Hollywood Hair Guy.

*American Idol* may be a talent competition and the nation's top television show, but it's also about personality and appearance. Once the contestants reach the Top 12, they begin working with fashion stylists, hairstylists, a choreographer and the show's vocal coach and associate music director. All of these people help to transform the contestants from random people off the street into performers with true star quality.

As *American Idol*'s lead hairstylist, Banowetz is in charge of styling each contestant's hair before every show. He's also the hairstylist for Simon Cowell and, most notably, Seacrest (someone who is known for having trendy and stylish hair). He has been styling hair professionally for more than a dozen years.

"From a hair standpoint, I am responsible for every person on the show, except for Paula," Banowetz said. "My goal is to help transition each contestant and polish their look. They need to have flawless skin and perfect hair, which is something nobody is actually born with."

Banowetz's job begins with the same process for each contestant. "My mission is to look at their facial

shape and design hairstyles I believe will be most attractive on them. I then offer up those suggestions. If each contestant wants to follow my advice, that's great. If not, we try something else," he said.

Many of the *AI* contestants who first sit in Banowetz' styling chair have never worked with a professional hairstylist and have never been introduced to this art form. According to Banowetz, "If you look at the hugely successful celebrities, like Cher, Jennifer Aniston



As Ryan Seacrest sits in the red room, Dean Banowetz touches up his hair for his next on-camera appearance.

or Madonna, they change their looks often, because it allows them to get more press and to reinvent themselves. The same principles apply to the *American Idol* contestants.”

As soon as the judges picked *AI*'s Top 24 contestants for season four, Banowetz started doing his homework. While he'd only be working with the Top 12 contestants, he immediately began brainstorming new style ideas for each contestant. “Take Nadia Turner, for example. When I first saw her afro, I started to think about how I'd change her look if she continued into the Top 12. Her hair defines her. Yet, mid-season, she has fabulous hair to straighten and press. Getting her away from that afro would transition her entire appearance,” said Banowetz, who always seeks to develop several ideas about ways in which he can improve the appearance of each person with whom he works.

As the stylist for *Seacrest*, Banowetz is responsible for being sure *AI*'s host always looks his absolute best. The two have worked together since *Seacrest*'s days on the television show *Extra*. “If I had my way, Ryan would grow his hair longer, but that makes him crazy,” he said. “This season, I'm giving Ryan's hair more color, but still leaving plenty of texture. I love the fact that people identify with Ryan because of his hair. Ryan has naturally curly and wavy hair. To make it look the way it does requires gel, a blow dryer, a flat iron, thermal sprays, putty, pomade, hair paste and hairspray. It takes me between 15 to 18 minutes to style Ryan's hair, if he sits still.”

Because Banowetz must work with so many people on

*AI* each week, he keeps a team of two assistant stylists and one intern very busy. Due to time limitations, he can only personally spend about 20 minutes with a contestant before each show.

*Seacrest* is responsible for connecting Banowetz with *American Idol*, which happened at the beginning of season one. From the start, the experiences have been interesting and memorable. “When I started working with Kelly Clarkson, she had no clue what a hair extension was,” Banowetz recalled. “There was one day when I straightened her hair and added extensions. She was wearing a beautiful dress and she looked very refined and totally put together. That was a huge transition for her. During season two, transforming Clay Aiken was another of my proudest accomplishments. He's been my best male makeover on the show. Throughout the season, we grew out Clay's hair and changed the color at least four times to give it a softer look that would cover the tips of his ears. It was a gradual transition, so nobody really noticed until they looked at the before and after photos.”

Banowetz enjoys making big statements when altering a contestant's look, but also fully understands the importance of making smaller changes over the course of several weeks or months.

*American Idol* airs throughout the spring – the season for weddings, Spring Break, school dances and proms. Banowetz believes this is the perfect season for almost anyone to introduce color highlights



to their hair. “I think honey or caramel tone highlights will be popular this spring, as will having a slight curl or wave. For guys, longer hair is really in. That Beatlesque, disheveled look that's still clean and appropriate is pretty hot,” he said.

Banowetz received plenty of on-the-job training as a hairdresser while still living in his childhood home. As the 13th of 15 kids, he grew up helping his seven sisters style and braid their hair. He formally began studying his art form in Iowa, at a local college of cosmetology. He finished his training in Hollywood.

“The highlight of my job is being around people and helping them to feel really good about their look. When people look good, their confidence is up. Having confidence is what *American Idol* is all about. Ultimately, global hair dominance is my mission,” he said with a laugh.

For more information on Dean Banowetz, visit [www.hollywoodhairguy.com](http://www.hollywoodhairguy.com).

## Choosing A New Hairstylist?

The Hollywood Hair Guy, *AI* hairstylist Dean Banowetz, offers five tips that will help you make the right choice when picking a new hairstylist:

1. “The best way to find a stylist is through a referral from someone you know and trust. If you like your friend's hair, ask them where he or she gets it done.”
2. “The first time you meet with a new hair stylist, don't have them cut your hair. Just have them style it. See if you like their personality and if they have the skill to properly work with your hair. You want to make sure your stylist will listen to you and make good recommendations.”
3. “Never pay more for a hairstylist than you can afford. If you go to a place that charges \$15.00 for a haircut, understand the quality of work you'll receive, compared with the \$150.00 or more you will pay at a high-end salon. If you're going to pay \$150.00, \$250.00 or more to get your hair cut, colored and/or styled, you'd better absolutely love how it turns out!”
4. “I personally love it when a client brings me a photo of a hairstyle that they want. A lot of people have trouble communicating what they want done to their hair. Providing a photo, from a magazine, for example, offers a visual starting point for the client and stylist to work with.”
5. “Understand that everyone has their own unique hair and look. Expectations have to be realistic.”

