



Beauty

Sarah Vine

Why I'm a gel girl

The manicure to beat all manicures



A few years ago, the idea of painting your nails in Chanel's iconic Jade green shade was terribly daring. Now it seems rather tame. In the past few months, the nation's nails have gone nuts. We've had leather-look (courtesy of Nails Inc and Alexa Chung), the liquorice allsort effect (lots of tiny coloured balls, from Ciaté), cavegirl fur (from Mua; dubious if you ask me), concrete, feathers, snakeskin and even denim (just in from Nails Inc). Ciaté's latest idea is the chalkboard manicure (at Selfridges, from April 23), which turns your nails into tiny blackboards, on which you can doodle your own designs with the pen provided.

All that on top of last year's obsessions: crackle finishes, crystals and CND's Shellac, plus its many imitators. In fact, gel colour that

dries instantly using UV light and lasts anything up to three weeks is now so ubiquitous it even has its own health scare. Some American dermatologists have said that there's an increased risk of skin cancer associated with the drying process, and have recommended limiting the use of UV lamps, as well as wearing an SPF throughout. [The company behind Shellac has denied any link to skin cancer and says the lamps are no more dangerous than fluorescent lighting.]

Nevertheless, it remains a popular request in nail bars, one of the few areas of the British economy that is booming. At around £20, a manicure represents a relatively inexpensive treat, which also might explain why British company Nails Inc, founded by Thea Green in 1999, had a turnover of £22 million last year.

For me, gel polish has been a revelation. It stops me biting my nails and allows them to get to a decent length. Often, I get a neutral shade (OPI's Samoan Sand is ideal, or Shellac's Clearly Pink) and then just paint a normal colour over the top if I fancy a change. As long as I use an acetone-free remover to take it off, the gel colour stays intact. Otherwise, I tend to go for a classic deep red: OPI's Malaga Wine. The advantage that OPI has over Shellac is that it sells all the gel colours in normal polish, so you can touch up any chips.

One of the other concerns about using gel polish is that it weakens the nails. But veteran nail technician Marian Newman says this has nothing to do with the gel itself, and everything to do with how you remove it. You have to soak the nail in acetone to lift the gel colour, which makes the nail surface very soft. Many technicians try to save time by using an orange stick to lift off the gel, and in so doing damage the surface of the nail. If your manicurist does this to you, tell them off from me. The correct way is to allow the varnish sufficient soaking time so that it simply comes off in one piece.

Then you should let the nail recover for a few days, preferably with the help of a good oil before your next set. Sarah Chapman Overnight Hand and Nail Treatment (£35; sarahchapman.net) contains a powerful mixture of oils and active ingredients: the perfect rehab for busy hands. ■

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New nail colours



FROM TOP: Pop Nail Glam Nail Polish, £13 as part of Bright Glam Trio set (asos.com). Pierre Hardy for Nars Nail Polish Pairs in Ethno Run, £22 (narscosmetics.co.uk). OPI Liquid Sand Nail Lacquer in Jinx, £11.50 (lenawhite.co.uk). Nails Inc Denim Effect nail varnish, £19 (020-7235 5000). Revlon Nail Art Moon Candy in Galactic, £7.99 (boots.com). PRUE WHITE