

+ vanities



toeing the line

The male pedicure perspective

by **mark rumble** photography by **doug bening**

Over the last few years, as male-only salons began to pop up across America thanks to TV shows broadcasting the manliest of men pampering themselves with facials, pedicures and manicures, I could only shake my head in disgust. The entertainment media had managed to convince everyone that a man visiting the salon in the 21st century is as acceptable as a man visiting the saloon in the 19th. But I refused to buy into the latest media-induced trend. After all, the entertainment gods are the same people who convinced America that *Friends* was a great TV show. How could they be trusted? So when my editor asked me to write an essay on pedicures, I decided that, as a responsible member of the media, it was my duty to put my foot down. Unfortunately, it landed in a mini-whirlpool at Sole Nail Lounge in Wicker Park.

Even though I was forced to endure a pedicure, I was determined not to enjoy it. They could take away my feet, but they'd never take away my manliness. When I walked into Sole, I was happy to see that there were two men inside. But as luck would have it, they were serving as the salon's DJs, and I figured it was only a matter of time before they started spinning Shania Twain's "Man! I Feel Like a Woman" and dedicating it to the guy in the blue shirt. The burning incense sticks in the salon dwindled away with my manhood as I took off my socks and rolled up my jeans. I selected a brown-sugar scrub for my feet, like a prisoner selecting which weapon he wants to be beaten with. I sat in the pedicure seat hoping a bomb threat or a fire alarm would bail me out. Instead, I was given an issue of *Details* magazine to make me feel more at ease.

Sole Nail Lounge
1468 N. Milwaukee Ave.,
773.486.7653 and www.solenailounge.com

In front of me was the mini-whirlpool tub, filled with hot water. Like a little kid afraid to jump in a swimming pool, I cautiously lowered my feet in. The hot water soothed them, while Amy, my pedicurist, took one foot out and started massaging it. My body started to relax, and I even tossed aside the security of the men's magazine I previously held in my kung fu grip. That little kid scared to jump in the pool was now pulling off his floaties and playing Marco Polo in the deep end. Amy, the consummate professional and my new best friend, went over every fine detail of my feet. Like a dedicated sculptor, she used lotions, pumice stones and nail clippers to turn them from jagged rocks into true works of art. After a chocolate lotion and brown-sugar scrub were applied, my feet were left feeling light and airy like angel food cake, and smoother than Barry Bonds' swing. The DJs even started spinning some Jay-Z and I couldn't help but think they were playing it for me. The pedicure had won me over, and, like Apollo Creed and Rocky, we were two enemies now bound by friendship.

I now know that pedicures and other exercises in pampering are simply delightful. There is just no getting around it. Like strawberry daiquiris, Justin Timberlake songs and the Oxygen network, pedicures are destined to fall under the male guilty-pleasure code—just don't talk about them around your friends or you *will* be mocked, no matter how many TV shows support your cause. But if the boys are laughing it up, you won't hear me chiming in. When it comes to pedicures, I've put my immaculately smooth foot in my mouth for the last time. ■