

**MASTERS Audio Club, October 2016**  
Sharon Blain  
World-Acclaimed Long-Hair Educational Artist



**Sharon Blain** is one of hairdressing's most recognized and esteemed icons and teachers. For more than five decades she has toiled at her craft, perfected her skills, and shared her unrivaled knowledge with hairdressers from all corners of the globe at her workshops, seminars, and highly acclaimed boot camps.

Interviewed by **Winn Claybaugh**, this true artist and educator has created a legacy as the trainer's trainer. At 65 years old, this passionate, humble woman sets the stage for everyone to know that life gets better and better!

Winn: Hi everybody, Winn Claybaugh here. Welcome to this wonderful issue of MASTERS, which, you know, some of these interviews I fight hard *[laughs]* to make them happen. And when I became aware of this brilliant, brilliant woman who's sitting with me right now, I was determined to make this interview happen. And when I contacted her, her beautiful people and she herself connected with me. She lives in Australia. She said, "Hey, I'm going to be in the U.S. on these dates," and we probably scheduled this over six months ago—

Sharon: Oh, absolutely.

Winn: —to be able to make this happen.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: I am sitting with the amazing, world-acclaimed long-hair educational artist, Sharon Blain. Sharon, welcome to MASTERS.

Sharon: Thank you so much for having me.

Winn: I'd—I'm a little bit star struck today and I'll tell you, my partner lays in bed and watches video after video after video of you 'cause you have over 100 videos on YouTube—educational videos—and millions of views.

Sharon: Yes. I think we're getting close to about 4 million views.

Winn: What does that feel like? Like, did you ever imagine that you—

Sharon: Well—

Winn: You put a video out there and said, “Gosh, I wonder if anybody will watch this”?

Sharon: Well, you know, I always say if it wasn’t for YouTube, I wouldn’t be sitting here today because I think the power of social media and YouTube, I think it’s basically brought all the countries together. It’s made life so much easier for everybody. And, for me, most of my students are—you know, incredible amount of them say to me, “I saw you on YouTube and that’s why I wanted to come to your class.” So that’s connected me and that’s given me a business here in the States that I do not believe I would never have had—it would never have been possible had it not been for the power of social media, and YouTube particularly.

Winn: We would all agree with you on that but what do you say to those people who think, *Oh I watched a YouTube video, so I now know how to do that.*

Sharon: Oh my God.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: I have this conversation all the time and—

Winn: “Why do I need to come to your class?”

Sharon: Oh, I know.

Winn: “Why do I need to attend that? I watched it on YouTube. I’m an expert now.”

Sharon: Oh, you know, it’s so sad that people think that that’s all it needs to be.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: Because, you know, it’s just smoke and mirrors.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: You know, we see these people on Insta—the insta-famous colorists.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: Do you really believe that color was that easy to achieve?

Winn: Right.

Sharon: Do you actually believe it was on real hair? Do you think it maybe was a wig?

Winn: Right.

Sharon: You know, it's all about the vision and making it—you know, making an impression. For me, the posts on YouTube were all about just things that I was doing. We started that off, gosh, I think I'd have to say nine years ago, maybe ten.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: And I just posted some things to—we just started up a YouTube channel and my guy who does all my graphics and all my videoing, he said, "Well, let's see how it goes." And I was absolutely amazed how many people were liking—I've never done a thing. I've never responded to anyone. It's not something—people send me messages, I don't know how to respond.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: I mean, I don't respond—I don't know how to—

Winn: Do you know your password?

Sharon: I don't—no. *[laughs]*

Winn: To log on?

Sharon: No, I do not know.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: And the only reason why I know I've got that many views is because when we submit an entry for an award, sometimes there's a question about, you know, social media and give stats on different things. And then my girl, who does my work for me, will go in and say, "Oh, do you realize we've got this many views now?"

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: And that's the only time I know what's going on.

Winn: Good for you.

Sharon: Yeah, so I don't—

Winn: You've just got your head down. You're just working hard.

Sharon: When you surround yourself with great people that are competent with what they do, then you can focus on what you do.

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: So don't be everything for everybody. So I know nothing about social media yet I have over 400,000 Facebook fans. I don't know how we got them but we have them.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: I don't know how they post but we post.

Winn: Oh my gosh.

Sharon: But I have Vanessa who does everything like that and she's an absolute wiz. So I employ her to do those jobs.

Winn: Wow, Sharon, you're adorable. Okay, so let me just read, educate our audience about who you are. Sharon Blain is one of the most acclaimed hairdressers and educators in the world today. For more than five decades she has been toiling her craft, perfecting her skills, and sharing her unrivaled knowledge with thousands of hairdressers from all corners of the globe at workshops, seminars, online, and at her highly acclaimed boot camps, which we're going to talk about. That's what—that's why you're here. We're actually, by the way, we're in Santa Monica, California.

Sharon: Mm-hm.

Winn: And you're here teaching us—

Sharon: So we're in day two. We just finished day two—

Winn: A four-day course.

Sharon: —of a four-day class.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: Yeah. And we flew in, I think, last Thursday and we've done the four-day in New York and then we're about to head to Houston on Saturday and we start on Sunday in Houston, another four days there. So, it's this—every week we do four days, so crazy.

Winn: And how many people are in your class, in this boot camp?

Sharon: Today, this boot camp, we've got 27. We sort of cut it off at 30.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: Because it gets a little bit challenging.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: We like to do a 1 to 10 ratio. So with 27, we've got a little less than 1 to 10 ratio. We have three educators. Actually, we had four. We have a stand-in one. So Traci Sakosits from Vidal Sassoon, she's one of my—

Winn: Oh, I love Traci.

Sharon: She's one of my educators.

Winn: Oh, I love Traci.

Sharon: Because in May this year, I went—Sassoon's took me to London—

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: —to train Mark and all the art team how to do dressed hair.

Winn: Congratulations.

Sharon: So Traci gets to be the star of the class so she's now coming to assist me when she can fit in a little bit with me, as well.

Winn: That was actually going to be one of my questions later on, of who you train. You train the world.

Sharon: Yeah, I do, actually. Yeah, I've got to say, the tick box would have been Sassoon's, in May.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: That was pretty sensational to be asked to look after those guys.

Winn: Good for you.

Sharon: Yeah, it was very, very exciting, challenging. These guys are amazing artists, as we know, but they don't dress hair. So we took them right back to basics. They were doing the finger waves, they were doing the pin curls. They had to do all those skills that were something they've never really done.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: And if they have, it's many, many years ago. So we had to knock them into shape.

Winn: Well, it's kind of amazing how many people—they're in beauty school or they're at some early stage of their careers or their educational careers, thinking, *I'm just going through the motions right here*—

Sharon: Hm.

Winn: —*learning pin curls or finger waves or whatever, but this is not going to serve me later.* What do you say to those people?

Sharon: Um, I say just do it now, get it right, perfect it. Otherwise you're going to have to pay some serious dollars to me to help you.

Winn: *[laughs]* Serious dollars. So how much are these people—if you don't mind me asking—that are at your boot camp now, how much are they paying you to be at this four-day training?

Sharon: I'm just thinking, I think it's about \$2,700 Australian.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: So depending on the exchange rate, however that rolls on any one day—

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: —around \$2,100 for four days.

Winn: Good. Wonderful.

Sharon: So they're getting 36 hours, probably 20 minutes lunch break.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: They get to take lunch.

Winn: No lunch, hurry, hurry, hurry.

Sharon: No, we don't—

Winn: Right.

Sharon: —get lunch breaks.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: We don't do morning teas and no smokes.

Winn: Okay. Thank you.

Sharon: No smoking on my shift.

Winn: Thank you. *[laughs]*

Sharon: *[laughs]*

Winn: And the people that are in your class, are they all local to LA or did people fly in for this and—?

Sharon: I have one—yes. So I've got someone from Austria, someone coming from London, a couple from Mexico this time. Last week we had someone from Korea. So we have them fly in all around the world.

Winn: Congratulations. You really—

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: —have become this global—

Sharon: Yes.

Winn: —global, known hairdresser.

Sharon: It just blows my—blows my mind because, you know, at the end of the day when I walk away from that class and I'm flying home, I still do my own washing.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: I still wash the floor and I still cook the meals.

Winn: There you go. *[laughs]*

Sharon: So I'm still just normal. *[laughs]*

Winn: Okay, more about Sharon. Let's see. Educational programs cover the entire spectrum of long-hair prowess from stunning bridal and celebrity red carpet hairstyling through to editorial and beautiful avant-garde hairdressing. She is recognized for her exceptional creativity through stunning photographic imagery that has been published worldwide and has been bestowed with a myriad of prestigious accolades and achievements and awards—which I want to talk about—to include—oh my gosh—four times you've been honored as the Hair Expo Australian Hall of Fame recipient.

Sharon: So, no, no, no. I just have to kind of correct you on that. We only get that once. So four times probably for other awards.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: But only once. So they recognize one person every year in Australia.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: Who they believe has done a lot for the industry. Now, usually—

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: —they're usually with one foot in the grave.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: And I got this in 1996, so I was not actually in the grave.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: So it was—I was probably the youngest one at that stage.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: So I was pretty proud of that because most of them were like people that had long gone—

Winn: Right.

Sharon: —or nearly gone, that got this award. So that was very important—that's the one award that most people just would die—

Winn: Isn't it great?

Sharon: —to have in Australia. It's a really special award.

Winn: So I received a lifetime achievement award thirteen years ago—

Sharon: You know, it's really important, isn't it?

Winn: —which I'm proud of. I'm more proud of—well, not more proud—I'm just as proud to say I was the youngest recipient—

Sharon: Yeah, well I'm all of that for me.

Winn: —as I was for the award.

Sharon: Yes.

Winn: Good for you.

Sharon: Same.

Winn: Well, let me just share with you—okay, so winner 2016 Australian Hair Fashion Awards Excellence in Education, winner 2015 Education Business of the Year, winner 2015 Industry Business Performance of the Year for your boot camp, winner 2014 Hair Expo Business Performance of the Year. I mean, this goes on and on. Winner in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013 Hair Expo Educator of the Year; Goldwell Color Zoom Challenge winner; Photographic



Collection of the Year. Let's see. Four times Educator of the Year, Hair Expo Australia; two times Business Performance of the Year, Boot Camp, Hair Expo; seven times finalist Hairdresser of the Year, Hair Expo Australia.

Sharon: And I may stop you there. I'm still trying to win that one.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: I've only been a finalist. So that's the—yes.

Winn: Well, what—

Sharon: That's what keeps me going, I think, that one.

Winn: *[laughs]* Congratulations.

Sharon: *[laughs]*

Winn: How important is competition to you?

Sharon: Do you know what? I couldn't—

Winn: Is it for the press? Is it for the—or is it—

Sharon: No.

Winn: —is it—

Sharon: Self-motivation.

Winn: —to keep yourself—

Sharon: Self-motivation. To challenge oneself creatively all the time. If I wake up on January 1 and I haven't got a goal set for this 12 months, then I don't feel like I know where I'm going. It's a bit like a roadmap, you know.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: If you're in the car and you don't have a map, you don't really know which way to go.

Winn: All right.

Sharon: So you get a little bit confused. So, for me, I've got to have a definite direction on what I want to achieve this year.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: I've got to be able to tick that box all the way through. So, for me, yes, I joke about not being a winner of Hair Expo Hairdresser of the Year. To me, I've flicked it. It doesn't matter. But what does matter for me is to still create a beautiful image—set of images, I should say—that I can put into the awards. If they win, they win. If they don't, they don't.

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: But it's challenging me every time to come up with something new. Something that people will stand back and say, "Wow. How did she do that?" So that's what I need to do to survive and keep going every year, is to challenge myself personally, creatively.

Winn: You—before we started recording, you mentioned Ann Bray.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: Who I fortunately met many, many years ago. She was heavily into competition.

Sharon: Absolutely.

Winn: But she was a mentor of yours, as well?

Sharon: Yeah, so in my earlier days of hairdressing—so before I decided that I was going to now go and do photographic work, I think four times I was representing Australia in world championships around the world, and I came into Ann on, I think, three occasions. And both her and Gary had mentored me through teaching me the finer points of classical styling.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: And that's what I was saying to you: I feel the skills that those guys taught me have set me up to be the stylist that I am today. So although they are very advanced and we wouldn't normally call on those skills that much on a day-to-day basis, to have that background knowledge is absolutely vital to be able to achieve the things that I've been able to do.

Winn: Well, in addition to winning, what is it about competition that is important to you? Is it that you get to document your skillset?

Sharon: Yes.

Winn: Is it that you have to put so much time and energy and focus into one look?

Sharon: Mm-hm. So, for me, as an educator, how can I expect people to want to come to my class if I'm not continually producing beautiful images to inspire them to want to meet and come to my classes?

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: So every single year, I must complete and create something that's, you know, really exceptional. So I have to work really, really hard because there's not that much new out there. There's a lot of, "Let's—we did it this way. We'll just do it again but do it something different." So I'm always challenging myself to do something—hair in a different way, come up with a technique that hopefully nobody's seen, or maybe something I've never done before. Because if I am not showing myself as an educator as being innovative and creative, I cannot expect people to want to follow and be part of my tribe. So, for me, it's all about the marketing. It's all about the motivation, the excitement that I can generate through beautiful images that people will want to come and be in my class to see more of.

Winn: I don't want to revisit that but I do want to hear from you a challenge to people who think that they can get all the education that they need through a YouTube video.

Sharon: You know, it's tough because today the younger world—young hairdressers out there—see YouTube and Instagram as being the key educational tool for them. I feel that, yes, there's something to be learned. And I joke about this little 9-year-old Japanese kid in Japan that I learned this braid from.

Winn: Really?

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: You really did? *[laughs]*

Sharon: Yeah. People were asking me how to do a waterfall braid. And I thought, *I have no idea how to do a waterfall braid. I don't think I know how to do a waterfall braid.* So I Googled "waterfall braid," this little 9-year-old kid come up—

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: —and I saw her doing this. I said, "Oh, hello. I do know what a waterfall braid is. I did that 10 years ago in this particular collection."

Winn: Right.

Sharon: But I didn't call it a waterfall braid then but people are calling it a waterfall braid now.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: So thanks to little—and we call her Miss So. *[laughs]*

Winn: Miss So, okay.

Sharon: After the soup. That's my joke.

Winn: I love it.

Sharon: So we call her Miss So but that's not her name. I now realize I already knew that but it was called something different. In my world, I called it something completely different. I just needed to confirm.

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: We don't know what we know until we go to a class.

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: And then we get to experience that. But if you think that you can get and finesse your skills by watching a video on YouTube, you are dreaming.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: Because you need someone to guide your hand. You need someone—you need to sit, you need to watch, you need to do, you need to repeat, you need to do. Repetition, repetition, repetition.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: And unless you're sitting in front of that YouTube channel with a mannequin head in your hand and you're stopping and starting and redoing it, you know, it's never going to be quite right. And what I'm seeing today is this constant, constant posting of colorful hair with some rather messed-up looking braids. And it seems to me that young people think that is all they need to know. And sadly enough, that trend will move on and we're going to come up with something new and that's—if that's all you think you need to know, then you're done. There's nothing for you in this industry because you've now stopped your learning. So you must constantly be going out and searching for more education, taking classes. You commit yourself at least every year for at least two classes that you invest in, invest in yourself, to be better at what you do.

Winn: Now you—and maybe my mom will hit me for asking this—but how old are you, Sharon?

Sharon: I'm 65.

Winn: You're 65.

Sharon: I'm very proud of that, yeah.

Winn: Okay, okay. So, was 50 a benchmark for you as it can be for—

Sharon: Fifty was definitely my—

Winn: —a lot of us?

Sharon: Fifty was my benchmark because I—I all of a sudden looked around my salon, I—that stage, I think, I employed about 46 staff. So in Australia, that's actually a very large salon.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: And I looked around those staff and they're all young, hip, happening, cool dudes. And needless to say they were giving me a lot of headaches because they were what they were. And I started to think, *You know, I don't know how long I can keep being a salon owner.* The stress of being a salon owner was overwhelming for me. The demands of the young people—more money, more money, "I don't want to work any harder. I don't want to work on Saturday." You know, "And don't let me work a late night and I just want to do what I want to do but I still want more money."

Winn: Right.

Sharon: It was just getting ridiculous. It was like I was taking nothing and just giving them, just to try and keep them on board.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: Because in Australia, I have to pay people a wage.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: Whether they work or not. Whether they do one client all week or whether they do 30, I still have to pay them money. So I started to think, *You know what? I'm a bit done with this.* And I started to feel old. All of a sudden, when I hit 50, I had this weird, overwhelmed sense of déjà vu that I thought, *You know, I'm actually on the other side of being young now.* And that was the same year that my daughter told me I was going to be a grandma so that probably didn't help me, either.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: So I thought, *You know what? I'm too old for this industry. I need to go out and find myself another job.*

Winn: Doing what?

Sharon: Well, you know, I've done 12 months with a floristry.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: So I've done commercial floristry, so I've been to college and I've done that. I've done interior design—

Winn: Oh wow.

Sharon: —so I've studied that for 12 months. I've done a lot of design, fashion design and dressmaking. So I thought, *Yeah, maybe there's something out there. Or maybe it's just a beautiful shop that I might want to work in so now I'll go into retail.* 'Cause I was always great at selling shampoo. So I searched for three months, looked at different business options, and thought about how this was going to go and then I laid in bed one night and I was really out of control now because I just didn't know what to do. And then it hit me. I thought, *You know what? There's only one thing you really love*—and this is in the words of Anthony Robbins. So I was a bit of an Anthony Robbins fan that many years back, and you have to follow your passion. Find something you're passionate about and go for it.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: And I thought, *You know what? I am actually passionate about being a hairdresser.*

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: *So forget about all these other ideas that you're cooking up. Think about, okay, you're passionate about hairdressing. What is it about hairdressing you love?* So I started questioning myself and I realized it was—

Winn: So it wasn't being a salon owner?

Sharon: I decided I wasn't passionate about being a salon owner.

Winn: Wait, are you still a salon owner, though?

Sharon: Yes. I have two salons.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: Not so passionate about.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: But I still have them.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: There's another story behind that.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: That's a glass of wine and a—and two salons later. But—

Winn: Oh. We're having wine tonight later, by the way.

Sharon: Yes, I'll tell you about that one.

Winn: Okay, thank you.

Sharon: So then I thought, *Okay, so what is it in this industry that you want to be famous for? What do you want to do? Where do you want to go now? Because if you're going to stay here, you're going to be damn good. Because the claws are going to be out—the nails are going to be in, if you're an old has-been.*

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: Because that's how you feel. That's how young people made me feel, that I was feeling like I could be a little bit of a has-been. So I thought, *You get out there, girl, and you do this damn good and you do it harder and better than you've ever done in the past.* So I started taking more classes. That's when I started doing more photographs. There's photograph collections that no one has ever seen because, to me, they never met the standard.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: Funnily enough, you know, I pulled a few out when I had my 50<sup>th</sup>-year celebration in the industry.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: And I was going through my archives and I looked and I thought, *Yeah, actually, they're not that bad.*

Winn: Really? *[laughs]*

Sharon: Yeah. I could actually send them out to print.

Winn: Did you let people see them, then?

Sharon: No, I didn't but—

Winn: Okay. *[laughs]*

Sharon: —you know, I said—they're actually film. They were film.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: So it's not so easy on film. So, anyhow, I realized they actually weren't that bad. I was just a bit hard on myself.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: But from that moment on, then I committed that I was going to be a better hairdresser. I was going to make a name for myself. I was going to be the best at what I could be. I've never looked back.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: And those last 15 years have been the hardest, longest, most exciting, most creative I've ever been in my whole time in the industry.

Winn: Well, okay, so now you're—how much are you on the road? All over the world, by the way.

Sharon: I reckon—

Winn: You're not going down the street or—

Sharon: No, no.

Winn: —to the next town.

Sharon: Well, yeah—

Winn: Globally, how much are you on the road?

Sharon: Yeah, so including all around Australia, 'cause that's nearly like going around the world 'cause it's a big—

Winn: Right.

Sharon: —it's a big country, believe me.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: At least six months.

Winn: Really?

Sharon: Mm-hm. Yeah.

Winn: Do you have goldfish?

Sharon: I have a dog.

Winn: Do you have plants? *[laughs]*



Sharon: I have a fantastic dog and a great partner—

Winn: Okay. *[laughs]*

Sharon: —who keeps the home fires burning.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: Yeah, and looks after my dog.

Winn: Just—okay, all right, just wondering who's suffering in your absence here.

Sharon: And occasionally waters the garden. Sometimes he forgets and it dies and—

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: —I'm an absolute garden fanatic. Yeah, I miss my grandkids. I miss the kids, you know, but I'm in and out, in and out all the time.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: You know, Facebook's fab. You know, I can send messages. They send me photographs all the time. We're talking all the time on one of those apps that we talk on. I can't remember what it's—I'm not so good on social media.

Winn: It's not important.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: I'm with you.

Sharon: So we talk all the time.

Winn: So, 'cause we hear that a lot: that you hit 50 or you hit whatever the age is—

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: —and you're a has-been.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: That's the word you use. I have students that sign up for my school and they almost like apologetically, you know, "Gosh, Winn, will I ever amount to much because, you know, I'm in my 30s, I'm in my—"

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: "—40s."

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: "And everybody in my class at school, they are in their 20s." And they're looking at that like those in their 20s have something over them because they're more mature in life.

Sharon: No, no. Maturity, to me, will always win down over youth.

Winn: Yeah.

Sharon: Particularly when you find an older student deciding to make a career change. And I get a show of hands in my first morning at boot camp and say, "How many people in this class have had a different career?" And, you know, I've had architects. I've had math students.

Winn: Really?

Sharon: I've had a doctor whose parents said, "Don't be a hairdresser because that's a dead-end job."

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: "You're going to need to be an academic. You need to go to university. You need to do that."

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: They get so far and then they still have it in their heart that it's not what they want to do.

Winn: Oh yeah.

Sharon: So sooner or later they make a career change and it's hairdressing. It's interesting how many people see this as a creative outlet for them. So these are creative people that have gone to university and now they make this change. They are the best hairdressers. They are the best students I have in my class.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: Oh my God. Well, because I guess they come a little bit more intelligent.

Winn: Well, they have life skills.

Sharon: They have also done other things.

Winn: Yeah.

Sharon: They've worked for corporations. They've done the whole sort of miles. They are now determined to be the best they can possibly be, generally to prove to the parents—

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: —that, “I can be a success and be more as a hairdresser, as well as being an architect or a mathematics teacher.”

Winn: I've asked this question a lot of very successful women in the beauty industry. You know, can you have it all?

Sharon: Yeah. Yes, you can.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: You know—

Winn: 'Cause you're a mother.

Sharon: I'm a mother—

Winn: You're a grandmother.

Sharon: —of three children. I'm a grandmother of three. You know—

Winn: You're a salon owner.

Sharon: I'm a salon owner.

Winn: Now you're traveling the world.

Sharon: Yes.

Winn: You're healthy.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: You're beautiful. You're vibrant. You're—

Sharon: You know, there's a lot of pain that comes with being a working mum because when you're working and you've got children that you're also nurturing and they're growing up as well, it becomes a challenge that you aren't being the right mum that you should be.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: But I always believe I've been a better mum because I'm happy doing what I do. Because if you're not a happy mum then that happiness—that unhappy mum unloads and offloads onto those kids.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: So my kids—they have never suffered. On their day—when it's their day—I am 100 percent with them. So there's no hair, there's no phones. It's me with them. When they were little kids—and always—

Winn: And you're happy.

Sharon: I'm happy. And always on Sunday was our day, whatever they wanted whether we were going on the Manly Ferry, whether we were going to go the Opera House, whether we were going to go to a show or a movie, they called it and we went and we did that, whether it was a picnic, whether it was going out on the boat.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: So I was present for them and I always made sure that I made special memories for my children.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: And even today, I have a 42-year-old, a 39-year-old, and a 36-year-old.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: And when we get together as a family, they constantly bring up, "Do you remember that birthday party when you—"

Winn: Oh my gosh.

Sharon: "—did that rotten birthday cake and it took on a garlic flavor?"

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: "Do you remember that birthday cake you made and it melted because of the sun?" They remember everything that I did, so I made—I believe you've got to be a memory maker for your children. So they don't want to remember their mum as just running out the door every day, going to work.

Winn: To a job that she hated.

Sharon: Yep. They remember the mum that, yes, went to work, come home happy but tired, but they always remember every occasion was always a real special occasion.

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: And as tough and as tired and as exhausted as I was, that never came up.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: I was still going to make it happen for them. So, you know, I think as a mom, being a career person, as long as you make great memories for them, as long as you don't carry the guilt that you can't make something for them. My eldest daughter, she's a qualified chef and an amazing chef. My son is an IT guru in security who's a masters in Cisco Systems. Now, it takes so much study to be that. And my youngest daughter is six months out of being a qualified gynecologist/obstetrician.

Winn: Wow, congratulations.

Sharon: So none of my kids suffered at all—

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: —because of what I did. They were motivated more because they saw what I was doing. So if you are a great example and a motivator and you are being fulfilled and achieving, they follow that. So that's the learning I've set up for them so that's how they evolved.

Winn: What a great lesson.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: Teach your kids to pursue what you love to do.

Sharon: Yeah. And I think—

Winn: Rather than settle into a job that you hate—

Sharon: That you're just doing because you want to make the money.

Winn: —just 'cause you need a paycheck. Right.

Sharon: Yeah, just move on.

Winn: Good for you.

Sharon: So I never feel guilty about being the mum and the working mum.

Winn: You mentioned your personal ongoing education.

Sharon: Mm-hm.

Winn: So when you turned 50, you just stopped learning, correct?

Sharon: Let me tell you—

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: No. Let me tell you—for a lot of people, they're very shocked—51 years ago, in a very small country town in Australia, there was no college to go to. So I never went to trade school. Every skill I have has been self-learned or I've invested in myself to learn from someone.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: So I've never been to TAFE, as we call it in Australia, or trade school as you have it here. I'm self-taught as a hairdresser, okay? So I realized very early that I always felt like I was a lesser hairdresser because I never got that sort of training. So I've been constantly pursuing myself to train and learn because I never got it from college. So from Sassoon's, from, you know, any class I could attend, I've continually done so to try to make myself believe that I'm still okay because I never had a college background.

Winn: So what does that training look like for you, ongoing?

Sharon: Okay, so for me, I mentioned to you earlier, for 30 solid years I fly from Australia to London every year to go to Salon International.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: I book into every class, I go from one to the other, to the other, to the other, and I never miss a class. I go to every class I can go to. I'm taking video, I'm taking photos, I'm sitting there typing notes.

Winn: Strictly as a student?

Sharon: Only ever as a student.

Winn: But people know you so they're thinking, *Oh, Sharon's teaching a class here.* And you're like, "No, I'm a student."

Sharon: No, I'm always going to be the student.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: Yeah, and I like to go there. I find out I actually get a lot of inspiration from going to Salon International. To me, wherever I can get some inspiration, I'm going to be sourcing that.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: You know, I'm always going to be following certain people on Instagram.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: I'm going to be checking out what they're doing. I'm constantly focused on checking out the runway shows. I'm always sort of trying to research what's happening. I was saying to the class yesterday, "I can't wait for my Italian *Vogue*, my copy to be delivered in my hand every month." That's the one magazine that I still have a subscription to that gets sent to me at home because that's like my Bible.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: For me, that's my source of inspiration.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: Looking at the photo shoots, looking at the hair, seeing where the fashion's going, seeing what the makeup's doing. So I'm trying constantly to always keep myself in tune with what's happening out there globally every single day of the week.

Winn: I apologize if I'm all over the map here because, as you're talking, I'm like writing down more stuff so I'm a bit ADD, so hopefully our listeners can keep up with me *[laughs]* 'cause I'm from here to there. You are an award-winning business owner.

Sharon: Yes. Yeah.

Winn: But that's not really your passion. Your passion—

Sharon: It was.

Winn: It was at one point. And now—

Sharon: Oh, it was my focus.

Winn: Did you feel guilty that that was no longer your passion and you're letting people down?

Sharon: Um.

Winn: Or was it easy for you to say, "You know what? I don't really want to focus on that."

Sharon: Do you know who—

Winn: "Let me hire brilliant people to take care of it."

Sharon: That's exactly how I went with that.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: That's exactly how I roll.

Winn: Can you talk about that because I—

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: —'cause I've gone through that where I feel guilty where I used to love teaching about a certain thing. I used to love doing certain aspects of keeping my business alive—

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: —and now I don't love it anymore.

Sharon: Yes.

Winn: And I want to let it go.

Sharon: Yeah. And you know it's tough to let it go because you feel you're letting yourself down. But I think what you have to do is surround yourself with great people that will keep that going for you. You know, I have so many young people in Australia that just love to be around me. They want to work for me.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: So I attract some great, great people. They're young. They're in their 20s, early 30s. They just want to be in my—

Winn: Tribe.

Sharon: —in my tribe.

Winn: You called that a tribe.

Sharon: Let's call it a tribe.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: Fabulous. So when I'm doing shows, when I'm doing seminars, when I'm doing photo shoots they're the ones that get trotted out. They're always there to help me.

Winn: Mm-hm.



Sharon: And they love being part of me creating sort of avant-garde hairstyles. I'll give them a task and say, "Can you go and make this?"

Winn: Right.

Sharon: So they love being part of that. And it's wonderful to have those people around me. But for me to stand on the floor at this age, I am so done with whinging clients and the big—

Winn: With what?

Sharon: Whinging, whining clients.

Winn: Oh, whinging. *[laughs]* Is that an Australian term?

Sharon: Whinges.

Winn: I've never heard of a whinger. *[laughs]*

Sharon: Now we try to explain that to—

Winn: What does that mean?

Sharon: So it's someone that whines—

Winn: Okay. *[laughs]*

Sharon: —that complains, that's never happy, that, you know, life has—

Winn: A whinger.

Sharon: —done them in. Life's done them in because, you know, maybe their husband has run off with his secretary. I don't know.

Winn: Okay. A whinger.

Sharon: I'm done with that.

Winn: Got it.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: And, you know, I think YouTube has done us a disservice as stylists. Being that they are able to see how to cut hair. Like everyday people can see how to put a color on, how to do a foil, how to do this, and how to do that. Now they come in and they try to tell you how to do your job.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: So I'm thinking—

Winn: 'Cause they watched a YouTube video.

Sharon: —*Don't tell me how to do my job.*

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: Like, you either let me do it my way or, you know, find someone else.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: And like, you know, I feel I'm a professional. I'm happy to hear, I want to know what you want. I want to guide you with what you need but don't tell me how to suck eggs.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: So for—my thing is—so I'm not happy with that, it's best that I'm not there anymore.

Winn: Okay. How important do you feel that it is for your brand and for your future to continue owning these salons? Granted that you've hired and surrounded yourself by great people who are taking care of those.

Sharon: Yeah. So what I've just done 12 months ago, I actually have gone into a business relationship with a master franchiser in Australia who's taken my salons and rebranded them under their name. So they come in as managers.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: They look after the HR, the marketing, the branding, everything that's to be done.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: So they now run my businesses as their own and they look after everything. So that means I can be removed from the business. I can go and look after my three clients every six weeks and cut their hair and now they are running the businesses on my behalf.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: So that's the way I've been able to move on from that.

Winn: You said—*[laughs]* you said you have three clients. Who are the three clients? Why do you name three clients?

Sharon: Ah. They just don't—they won't let me not cut their hair.

Winn: *[laughs]* Okay.

Sharon: So I'm just stuck with them.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: And so they sort of say, "Can you practice cutting in a Zimmer frame because when you get to the stage, you're going to need a Zimmer frame. You're going to have to learn how to cut in a Zimmer frame."

Winn: That's hilarious.

Sharon: This is just a standard joke.

Winn: That's is great. That's great.

Sharon: But yeah, they're going to come to the nursing home when I get to—

Winn: Oh, that is great.

Sharon: —the nursing home.

Winn: We'll all be there together.

Sharon: They're not giving up. *[laughs]*

Winn: So again, I'm all over the map here and I apologize for that. But in your trainings—so you have seasoned hairdressers, you have brand-new hairdressers come into your boot camp and into your other courses—

Sharon: Mm-hm. We have makeup artists that have never picked up a comb.

Winn: Oh, wow.

Sharon: I've got people in that class—one of them—all the hairdressers are watching this girl that has never done one thing with hair in this class over the last two days—

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: —and they were all standing back, looking at what she had achieved. I love those people.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: 'Cause they don't come with any bad habits.

Winn: Is there a—like if you could name what people are lacking—so they're 30 years in the industry and they just—they're just not good at that. Is there—

Sharon: Yeah, it's not that they don't—

Winn: Is there a common theme—

Sharon: It's not—

Winn: —that you're seeing? 'Cause I ask salon owners all the time, "You're hiring my graduates, what are they lacking?" "Well, Winn, they're lacking this. They need to be better at—"

Sharon: Something else.

Winn: "—styling hair."

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: "They need to be better at blow-drys. They need to be better at whatever."

Sharon: Retailing or—

Winn: Okay, yeah.

Sharon: Yeah. Okay. So the mixture of people I get are people who are seasoned educators from brands that look to me for some new direction. So that's one lot of the people that come. Last week we had the First Lady's hairdresser who'd come to New York. He's been looking after the First Lady's hair for nine years.

Winn: Really?

Sharon: He was looking for just some motivation, something new, new direction. We have people that are just out of college. Now I have a young boy, three weeks ago finished at the Sassoon's Academy. He's done his whole cosmetology course there. He didn't learn to do styling there because they're more cut and color.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: He's now invested his next slot of his money into learning styling from me. We have, as I said, makeup artists that have never done anything. We have 30-year-old seasoned hairdressers who just feel they've lost some direction.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: And want a shot in the arm of something new.

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: I've got a guy who has won the NAHA a couple of years in a row in my class at the moment.

Winn: Hm. Wow.

Sharon: And he just feels that he never learned to do good, strong, classic training.

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: He never got that in his class and he's looking to me for that. So lots of people come for different reasons. I've had one guy who came to the same boot camp last year. He showed up again this year and I said, "Why are you coming back? I haven't changed the class content."

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: "It's still the same." He said, "You know what? I was so overwhelmed with the content that I took on board last year that I know I missed half of it."

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: "I've come back to get the other half."

Winn: Wow. *[laughs]* Isn't that great?

Sharon: So there you go.

Winn: There's—that's great. It's almost like when you go to a concert with your favorite band and they don't sing your favorite song.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: It's like, "No!" But you've heard it a thousand times but sing it—so people are coming back, they want the classic—

Sharon: Yeah. They want—

Winn: —education from you.

Sharon: They want the classic. And I have focused—boot camp is absolute basic, classic hairdressing.

Winn: So that's—

Sharon: It's—

Winn: You mentioned that that curriculum—well, you told this guy—

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: —it didn't change from last year and it probably won't change in 20 years from now.

Sharon: McDonald's don't change the way they do their—

Winn: Right, right.

Sharon: —hamburgers.

Winn: Okay. Well, then talk about the difference or the importance of classics versus trends.

Sharon: Yes. So what we do is we do a trends class as well. So I do a three-day trends class, which we'll come back to New York to do in October. And that is what I am currently teach—what I am currently teaching is the images that I created this year for this current year. So at the beginning of every year, I'll create my trends and then I will teach that for the whole 12 months.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: Then my head's already thinking now, *What are the trends going to be for next year?* And that will be part of my new class. What changes in boot camp is not the skillset but the finished looks. So they've got to be more on-trend each year. They'll change up but the skills—how to do a pin curl—will never change.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: How to do a directional blow-dry will never change. How to do a finger wave will always be the same. That's how it goes.

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: But how you incorporate that will be what the trends are coming through now. So we'll introduce—once they've learned those basic skills, we'll put them into what's current in trends and how to actually incorporate them into looks now.

Winn: I think I already know the answer but, I mean, you're a cutter, you're a colorist. Why have you focused exclusively on—

Sharon: Dressing hair?

Winn: —dressing hair?

Sharon: Because everybody's a colorist and everybody's a cutter and I knew I'd get more market share—

Winn: *[laughs]* Oh my gosh.

Sharon: —if I just stayed as a lowly hairdresser. *[laughs]* Now that's pretty honest, isn't it?

Winn: That's brilliant.

Sharon: *[laughs]*

Winn: Okay, so you talk about how you create your trends. How do you do that? Where does that inspiration come from?

Sharon: Well, I—

Winn: Especially—I mean, no offense, but after 51 years in the industry, how do you remain current? Not current, but ahead!

Sharon: Well, you've got to get—

Winn: Because you're creating the trends.

Sharon: You've got to be ahead. I've got to be a motivator. I've got to be a trendsetter. I've got to be constantly coming up with new ideas and new techniques so people will think, *Oh my God, I have to go to Sharon Blain to learn that.* So I've got to come up with something new all the time.

Winn: And how are you doing that?

Sharon: Sometimes I sit there with a mannequin head and nothing's happening. Like there's just nothing happening. And I spoke to an artist recently who paints and I said, "Do you ever have like artist block? Do you ever get to a stage where you're actually sitting in front of a canvas but you don't know what to put on it?" She said, "It happens all the time." And I analyzed what was happening for me when I was trying to come up with new ideas, and you know what happens? You have so much in your head that you don't open the space up for new stuff to come in.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: So I say it's like a computer. You have to defrag some of the stuff in your head. Get rid of everything, complete the tasks, complete the jobs, finish the emails, complete that. That's done, now you've got a gap in your head.

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: You're free to think.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: And when you're free to think, everything opens up.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: Well, you mentioned Italian *Vogue*. Is that part of the—

Sharon: Hm.

Winn: In addition to turning off all the apps on your phone—

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: —to clear your mind and clear your computer—

Sharon: Yeah, get rid of everything.

Winn: —to get rid of all of that to then just open up—

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: —a space, like you said?

Sharon: Yeah. So open up a space so there's nothing that hasn't been completed.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: Because while you've got jobs to do and things to respond to, phone calls to make, things to do like the—get rid of the to-do list basically.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: And then you're free. Sometimes, you know, I find just walking on the beach. But when I'm free, I'm going to start flipping through the magazines.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: You know, we still say that, you know, there's no—magazines are nearly gone, and they probably are because they're online now.

Winn: I hope not. I hope not.

Sharon: But there's nothing better for me than the feel of a magazine.

Winn: Yeah. That's how I am.

Sharon: And I've got books and books and books on my coffee table and everyone buys me a beautiful coffee table book, whether it's the Valentino, the Dior,



whether it's a photographer's magazine. These are all the things I get for Christmas.

Winn: You would love to visit my home then. *[laughs]*

Sharon: So you've got all of them, as well?

Winn: Oh my gosh, yes.

Sharon: Yeah. I've just got stacks and stacks and stacks.

Winn: One of our favorite things to collect, yeah.

Sharon: So I'm just going to flip—I'm going to flip through. I'm going to sketch a little bit. I'm not a good sketcher but I always like to do a bit of sketching. People might say to me, "Go and check out this movie." So one of my greatest movie inspirations was *Elizabeth*.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: The movie.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: And I created a collection based on that movie and it is one of my iconic collections that people most identify me with today.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: And it's probably nine years ago I created that.

Winn: Really?

Sharon: And it was all about just looking at the movie and then me spending time researching. So I love to research. I love to go, you know, Google: "What was hair like in this era?" And understand what were the key things? What was the makeup, what was the fashion? And once I get—like I take notes. So I write a whole story about it. I've got it on my iPad. I have stories and stories. That's how I set myself up to create a collection.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: So I'm going to write all about it. I'm going to pull out key things that inspired me. So, for example, in *Elizabeth*, I don't know if you know, but they plucked their temples to create a widow's peak.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: And the higher it was, the more regal they were considered.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: And I thought, *That was an interesting point*. So I thought I could take that and use that to create my six hairstyles.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: So I didn't put everything like a widow's peak but when you look at each image, you can see there's this point of reference. It moves around the forehead and then moves to the side profile that people can pick that—

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: —in this collection when I point that out to them. Another thing, they were very about coloring hair. They colored with henna. They colored with different spices and teasions and things like that. And the more vibrant the hair color was, that's how wonderful it was. So I made sure this collection had all vibrant colors that were matching the colors of that era. So I spent a lot of time researching. Once I've got that, then it just flows from there.

Winn: So once you have your concept for the collection, then what does it take? Then you have to—

Sharon: So I—

Winn: Do you bring on your team?

Sharon: I do a bit of—

Winn: Or you have to go into a studio?

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: You have to like—what is that like?

Sharon: I try to work a little bit with false hair. So I like to create hairpieces because if I'm going to shoot six images in a day, I want to have been so rehearsed—

Winn: How are you shooting six images in a day?

Sharon: Always. Always. Because I would spend six weeks prior—

Winn: Okay. You were ready. By the time you—

Sharon: And I am ready.

Winn: —went to the studio.

Sharon: I know. I've tested it. I've photographed it. I know the angle it shoots best at. I know exactly what profile looks best with the hair that I've created. I stick them all on the wall at the studio and I say to my photographer, "These looks—these are the angles that look best for this particular hairstyle."

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: I'm also very mindful when I'm doing a collection for an award that they're all going to sit on a wall.

Winn: Together.

Sharon: And I want to have two bookends.

Winn: Ahh.

Sharon: So one on either end will face into the middle.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: The one in the very middle, they're going to face the camera.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: And the other ones, I'm going to have slightly off-centered and so they all face towards the judge.

Winn: Interesting. Not that I'm an expert, 'cause I'm certainly not, but most people would walk into the studio and then the photographer would make those decisions. You've made those decisions and are dictating to the photographer.

Sharon: The photographer used to dictate.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: But the more I've become comfortable with my thoughts and feelings, the more I'm able to collaborate and they fulfill my—they fulfill my—

Winn: Are you a photographer yourself?

Sharon: I wished I was. No, not at all.

Winn: Do you photograph anything yourself? Like even—

Sharon: No.

Winn: —just to experiment yourself?

Sharon: No. I don't even take a photo on my iPhone because—

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: —I don't really know how to very much. *[laughs]*

Winn: Huh. So if we—

Sharon: I take the grandkids.

Winn: If we visited your home or your studio, wherever you work, what would we see? Are we going to see a bunch of mannequins set up?

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: What are we going to see?

Sharon: You'll see my garage—

Winn: Are we going to see a bunch of magazine tear-outs—

Sharon: Loose—

Winn: —pinned to the wall?

Sharon: No.

Winn: What are we going to see?

Sharon: No, 'cause I love clean.

Winn: Okay. *[laughs]*

Sharon: I'm a clean freak.

Winn: Okay, okay.

Sharon: So I don't like anything lying around.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: So when I'm about to commence something, I'll bring in a massive big table and I will make a mess 'til it's completed.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: And then I'll pack it up and move it all out. So my garage has shelves and shelves and shelves of wigs and wigs and wigs and hairpieces all packed in boxes, all labeled. They go back for years and years and years. You'll find

tubs of every single shoot, every runway show, every TV show I've ever been directing. You'll find every book all done and I could open up and show you—

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: —the models, the hair, the step-by-step, the practice work, and then I put it and archive it. So.

Winn: And this is your whole career or just since the 50 mark?

Sharon: Probably for the last 15 years.

Winn: So after you turned 50.

Sharon: After I turned 50. For the last 15 years I've done it.

Winn: God, I love this so much.

Sharon: *[laughs]*

Winn: Okay, again, sorry to jump around here. In your classes, how would you describe your style? Are you kind of like a tough-love?

Sharon: No, I'm not tough with them.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: I think I'm pretty in-tune with the students.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: I want them to feel comfortable with me. A lot of them are a bit overwhelmed that I'm there because it's been a goal for a lot of them to come to my class.

Winn: 'Cause they're star-struck like I am today.

Sharon: Yeah, I know. You know, they wanted to have a selfie with me and, you know, it's all a bit funny, really.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: But anyhow, I want to be just a normal person to them. I want to make them feel comfortable and relaxed straight away. I have a great assistant and we're a bit like a comedy routine. So we try to lighten it up because it is a long day but I'm focused on every step. I'm very much about how it's done, how you do it, I want you to do it this way, that—and do it my way and you'll get the result.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: Then I'll walk around and I will hold their hand. I will take the comb. I will help them. I will stand there. I will encourage them.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: I think that's a really important thing. I never say, "Here's a hairstyle. This is how I've done it. Off you go and do it." Go and have a cigarette and come back half an hour and say, "How'd you go? Yeah, that looks good. Okay, come and sit down, we'll do the next one."

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: No. I'm going to stand beside them until they get it right.

Winn: Okay, now maybe I can get into some of these questions—

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: —that I have for you.

Sharon: What are the questions?

Winn: I haven't even talked—I haven't even touched them. The importance of innovation and how do you innovate?

Sharon: I think you have to surround yourself with really great people. Like innovation, I see, particularly for us in our industry at the moment, is definitely social media, and keeping current with what's happening and making use of that is absolutely vital. So to keep current for me creatively, you know, Pinterest is a great thing. And I love going through Pinterest and finding great images and things like that. But from innovation for our industry has definitely been social media. I think it's really, really important. So, you know, I'm loving Facebook Live, for example. So we try to dedicate every Tuesday morning to do our look and learn demonstration on Facebook Live. Now, I have two reasons to do that. One is I want to share with my audience a new hairstyle but also it's my opportunity to tell them about where I'm going to next. So they get to understand where I'm traveling to, when I'm doing another course. So it's not like doing an ad but it's giving them some information but also being able to introduce them to what's going on. From innovation, you know, we just have to move with the times. We just can't stand still. We can't say, "I don't do that." If you don't know how to run your iPad—which I don't—get someone that can help you do that.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: So surround yourself with people that are innovative, that can offer you suggestions to drive you forward.

Winn: I think you already answered it but the people that you have to surround yourself by, to inspire you, don't have to be your next-door neighbor. It can be people from on the other side of the planet.

Sharon: Oh absolutely.

Winn: That you're following.

Sharon: Oh absolutely. And that's—

Winn: So who are you following? 'Cause millions of people are following you and you're doing—

Sharon: Oh, I know!

Winn: —your Facebook chat every—

Sharon: It's pretty crazy, isn't it?

Winn: So who do you follow?

Sharon: Well, you know, I'm always going to follow couture fashion designers.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: I'm always going to be in tune with—as soon as there is fashion week happening, I'm going to be checking out every opportunity. So I'm always going to be looking at the runway shows, trying to get behind-the-scene images, see what's happening with hair. I'm going to do a screen grab if there's something that I think is interesting. I'm going to put it on my iPad then I'm going to look at that 'cause I think, you know, that's interesting. Then Pinterest.

Winn: I think you're a little more savvy than what you're leading us to believe when it comes to navigating your way through social media and all this stuff.

Sharon: Oh well!

Winn: I think you're playing us a little bit here.

Sharon: Oh, I try to be.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: I try to be but I can't attach yet.

Winn: All right.

Sharon: I can do the email but I don't attach.

Winn: Yeah, okay, okay, okay.

Sharon: But yeah, so I'm going to look at all of that. There's some great hairdressers I look at. There's some great avant-garde hairdressers from Toni&Guy in London. I love Peter Gray. Peter Gray is a great guy. I hung out with him in Canada the other day. Who else am I looking at? Usually great photographers.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: Pat McGrath, the makeup artist. Love to see what she's doing.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: So I'm always looking at the makeup, always looking at the fashion, always looking at all of those things.

Winn: I'm kind of surprised that you're not a photographer, you know, because your eye is just so—

Sharon: I've got a really good eye.

Winn: —developed.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: I would think that—

Sharon: I really have. I—

Winn: —you would be behind that camera.

Sharon: —never thought about that. You know what? I think taking a picture is one thing but you know I think the skill of the photographer is the lighting.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: And I think a lot of people can snap but they've got to get the light right.

Winn: Well, I've talked to famous hairdressers and makeup artists who have won Emmys and even Academy Awards, and they said that what took them to the next level in their skillset as a hairdresser or makeup artist was in learning lighting.

Sharon: Yes.

Winn: Where they would like ask the cameramen or the—

Sharon: Hm.



Winn: —director or whatever, like—

Sharon: Hm.

Winn: —what are you doing? Why are you doing that?

Sharon: Yes. And I do that.

Winn: And that's what actually made them more successful.

Sharon: I do have a very inquisitive mind when it comes to that. I love now that we're doing photographs where they're going straight onto the computer. So I'm sitting there and I'm never leaving that computer. My eye is constantly looking at every shot that's coming through the can.

Winn: Really?

Sharon: And I'm sort of saying, "Can we move her slightly this way? Can we move it? Can we get a bit more light?" So in a way, I'm sort of directing—

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: —but I'm not shooting. I'm not taking that final picture.

Winn: Well, maybe that's the next career.

Sharon: Yeah. Maybe when I get tired.

Winn: Sharon Blain, in your spare time.

Sharon: Yeah, when—in my spare time.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: When you're not globetrotting for six months of the year.

Sharon: I'm not sure what spare time is but anyhow.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: In my spare time.

Winn: Right. So, we've talked about this a little bit already but how has education changed in the way it's delivered and how have you adapted? So on one hand you're saying, "Oh these, you know, people who think that they can watch a YouTube video over and over again and now they have the skillset."

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: But that's not enough. But you're huge on YouTube.

Sharon: Just because that was the thing to do at the time.

Winn: That's a marketing thing, then. That's—

Sharon: It's all about marketing.

Winn: —just to keep people—

Sharon: Yes.

Winn: —engaged.

Sharon: For people to get to know me.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: It's a get-to-know-you sort of thing, nothing more. I'm not giving—

Winn: But it's not to replace training.

Sharon: I'm not giving that much away there.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: I'm not giving anything away compared to what I give away in my class.

Winn: Oh, obviously.

Sharon: I think the innovation with education is moving to an online presence. I think there's definitely some—my app, for example. I have an app.

Winn: Called LongHairHow—

Sharon: How2.

Winn: —How2.

Sharon: The number two.

Winn: Number two. LongHairHow2. That was actually my next question, so.

Sharon: Yeah. So it's on Android and it's an Apple product. We have 70 videos on that but they're not on YouTube.

Winn: Okay.

Sharon: And it's a free download with a pay-to-view and it's \$2.99. It's very cheap.

Winn: Ah.

Sharon: In America, with the exchange rate, I think you only pay 20 cents now.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: You know? That's how it rolls with the exchange rate. But anyhow, so I have that there. So people can go on at any time. So my—what I did was I always started with videos. So a niche—I have 17 videos that I've produced and I think I've written five books now.

Winn: All on what?

Sharon: All on dressing hair.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: Okay?

Winn: Are any of them like coffee table books? That would fit well in my collection?  
[laughs]

Sharon: I think the nicest coffee table book was the one I created for Pivot Point last year.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: And I did their *Long Hair Salonability* and it's a lovely book that we did with those guys. And, yes, I put them on my coffee table. I'm very proud of what I've done.

Winn: [laughs]

Sharon: But the 17 videos—I realized probably 18 months ago that videos were probably dying in a sense that my guy said to me, "Sharon, we probably won't be able to buy a video recorder in 18 months' time."

Winn: Right.

Sharon: "They're going to be a thing of the past."

Winn: Right.

Sharon: "So you need to do something innovative with your material and get it going somewhere else."

Winn: Hence, you created this app.

Sharon: So, hence, we've gone to—

Winn: Got it.

Sharon: We've put all those videos on the app now.

Winn: Got it.

Sharon: What I really want to do is put boot camp as a live offering for people who can't afford to fly, take up the accommodation, they can't travel from Russia to do this. They don't have that sort of funds. I'd love to be able to do that. And hopefully in time that will happen. So I'm working towards that for the future.

Winn: Have you successfully done that yet, where you felt like you successfully trained somebody over a period of time and you weren't face to face with them?

Sharon: I'm not sure—

Winn: Okay. *[laughs]*

Sharon: —'cause I probably haven't met them yet. *[laughs]*

Winn: Okay. *[laughs]* Okay.

Sharon: But I've got to tell you—I want to tell you, the people that have bought my videos that show up at class, I can tell they've been doing my videos.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: I can tell they've got my action. They've got the way I move.

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: They've got the whole thing going on. So they come fairly sort of, you know, switched on because—

Winn: Huh.

Sharon: —they've been watching a lot of them.

Winn: We've talked a lot about what's changed in the beauty industry. You have 50 years in the industry?

Sharon: Mm-hm.

Winn: So what are some of the biggest changes that you've experienced?

Sharon: Okay. So I get asked this a lot. For me, initially, I started in the shampoo and set days where every person had a shampoo and a set, sat under the dryer, and were brushed out and came back a week later. That's when we really made some money because they also had perms and they also had retouches. We moved then into—for me, I moved into—thank you, Vidal Sassoon, an absolute, you know, amazing man who I believe changed the way we cut hair. And he—I'm sure he knows but I don't know if he realized just how many people—this world—he changed by what he did. So we have him and I saw that amazing change to go to precision haircutting. Leo Passage, another man, an amazing man who I just love where he went with dressing hair and the way he made dressing hair simple. And I follow what he does. So those two changes, I think, were very strong and instrumental. We moved into perming. I think perming become very, very strong in part of my time. We then flipped perming and we went into more coloring. So we don't perm so much, although a lot of people say it's coming back. It will be interesting to see how that evolves. I think blow-drying changed the setting world forever. So we took people out of putting rollers and we blow-dry their hair with a round brush and that's how we dress their hair more today. I remember the first blow dryer. I remember seeing the first one in the salon when we got it. We didn't know what to do with it. So, you know, that was a really interesting learning. Straightening irons, I think, have changed our industry and I don't think it's been for the best.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: I think it's made us very lazy.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: And I think the young people today that believe that all they need in their kit is a straightening iron need to think again.

Winn: Hm. Wow.

Sharon: And the reason why I say that is because just to blast a head of hair dry with a dryer and think now you can correct it with a pair of straightening irons, so you can make it straight or bend it with a curl and think that that's okay, or good enough, is not good enough.

Winn: Good for you.

Sharon: And the reason why is because all those consumers out there also own a straightening iron.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: And they can blast their hair and they can straighten it and they can bend it, as well. So you're doing nothing new for that consumer when they walk into

the salon. And yet, you're expecting them to pay money for you doing what they can do at home.

Winn: Wow. Great, great.

Sharon: So my challenge is to all hairdressers out there is forget about the straightening irons and go back to the Marcel, go back to your tongs, go back to doing things that are more technical, that your clients can't do at home.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: And then you will grow a nice, big, client base that they think you're fabulous because you're doing something that they can't do. So I am not a mad fan of straightening irons. I use them in my class for various things but if you think you're going to be a world-beater with just a pair of straightening irons, you have to really think again.

Winn: Wow. Great advice.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: See this is the stuff that we need that only comes with having—

Sharon: Pearls of wisdom.

Winn: Yeah. Fifty-plus years in the beauty industry.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: You know, you can't grow a client base in a salon. Young professional hairdressers can't—must forget that—you know, realize that these clients can do exactly what you can do, at home.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: They're getting all that off YouTube. They can braid their hair at home.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: Why think you can charge them to do that when they come into the salon?

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: You've got to do more. You've got to be more professional.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: You've got to step up and be more skillful.

Winn: And I love the message that you've already sent out of what it takes to stay current with that.

Sharon: Hm.

Winn: Ongoing, ongoing education.

Sharon: Yeah. At least two good classes a year.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: Minimum. And that's not on YouTube.

Winn: To me there's just something so attractive about somebody who has this passion for learning. I know 18-year-olds who already know it all.

Sharon: Uh, no.

Winn: And that's so—but that's—

Sharon: Sadly enough—

Winn: I know. Which is so unattractive. "I already know it all."

Sharon: I had a girl in my class a couple of weeks ago in Perth, and she has been hairdressing for two years.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: And I had her boss next to me and I said to her I wanted her to use the tong and she basically sat down—now, she wasn't paying for this class, her boss was.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: And she sat down and I said, "Are you going to do that?" She says, "I don't actually believe that that's going to be useful for me."

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: Two years.

Winn: Wow, yeah.

Sharon: Two years. And I looked at her boss and I said to her, "Well, if you don't think there's anything more you need to learn, then I might just take your doll and I'll just pack it away now and you can just sit there and wait 'til five o'clock."

Winn: Did you say that to her?

Sharon: Yes, I did.

Winn: Good for you. Good for you. *[laughs]*

Sharon: Because this girl was an embarrassment to her boss—

Winn: Oh, how—

Sharon: —and an embarrassment to our industry.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: If you think after two years—

Winn: You know it all.

Sharon: —you’ve caught it, you just may as well find another job.

Winn: My good friend James Morrison tells the joke, “How many hairdressers does it take to teach a haircut? A hundred. One to do the cut and 99 to stand there and say, ‘Oh, I could do that.’”

Sharon: Yeah. *[laughs]*

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: That’s exactly right.

Winn: That’s great.

Sharon: Do you know someone said to me, “You can tell someone’s age by their makeup.”

Winn: What does that mean?

Sharon: It means that if someone who’s a mature woman is still wearing blue—no, it’s not her age, when she stopped learning about putting makeup on.

Winn: Oh.

Sharon: So if she’s still wearing blue, you knew she stopped learning 20 years ago.

Winn: Right. Interesting. *[laughs]*

Sharon: She never changed from 20 years. So if you’re still doing the same tricks that you learned 20 years ago and you haven’t introduced anything new, you stopped learning 20 years ago.



Winn: What do they say? That's the other thing they say, "Well, I have ten years of experience." No, you don't. You have one year, you just repeated it ten times.

Sharon: That's right.

Winn: There you go.

Sharon: So if you think that you're okay for a class you did five years ago, you stopped five years ago learning.

Winn: Wow, wow. Brilliant. Brilliant advice. Can you believe that we have to start wrapping this up already? I can't believe it.

Sharon: Wow, we've been talking a bit.

Winn: Seventy minutes we've been talking.

Sharon: Yeah. We could talk for hours.

Winn: Apparently. Thankfully I get to have dinner with you tonight. Yeah, everybody, you heard it: I get to have dinner with Sharon Blain tonight. Okay, so two more questions. Number one, what's your hope for the industry?

Sharon: I feel concerned about our industry. I feel passionate about it so much but I don't feel a lot of people are probably coming into our industry and staying a long time.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Sharon: I feel they think that that's all there is and now they need to go somewhere else. In Australia, I don't think they're even starting in our industry. They all want to be makeup artists at the moment.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: So we're not even getting new people coming through. They're getting in there and they don't want to pick up the broom. They think they should know it in 12 months' time and after 12 months, if that's the best I get, I'm going to move on.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: So, sadly for us, as salon owners and as people that we're taking under our umbrella, we are not inspiring these people to stay in our industry. So we have a responsibility for anyone that we bring into our fold to make sure that every day is a great day. So as a salon owner, we have to step up and not be miserable, not be angry. We need to be creative, inspiring, and be a leader. When the train stops, they want to get off.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: So if you're driving the train and you're not keeping them all inspired and excited and young kids are leaving our industry, the buck stops with you.

Winn: Got it.

Sharon: It's not the young kids, it's you. You, the person that brought them into the fold in the first place. So I think everybody that runs a business has to be inspiring or get out.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: Leave.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: Don't stay there because you're not doing yourself a favor and you're not doing any favors for those people.

Winn: And I love your example of that: that after 50, how you reinvented yourself and now you're an inspiration to millions.

Sharon: I'm on—I am like more on fire today than I was when I was 15.

Winn: *[laughs]* Wow.

Sharon: Yeah. So I think as—we have to keep the inspiration going. We can't expect that YouTube's going to be that key for us.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: Education is always going to be the thing that I think is the key to success.

Winn: Right.

Sharon: But if it's not working for you, change. Don't stay there. Don't be miserable. Don't bring the people around you down.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: If you're going to walk into that salon every day, leave your bag at the front door with all your anger and all your angst and all your home problems, and walk in there and be on stage and perform and do the job you're paid for. Don't expect people to pay you a buck when you're not giving out what the best you can possibly be.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: And the best you can possibly do.

Winn: Beautiful. I remember asking the question—and I've asked it a lot. I asked it of Vidal Sassoon. I asked Beth Minardi. When you feel burnout, what's the solution to burnout? And they all said education.

Sharon: Yeah.

Winn: Education is the solution for burnout.

Sharon: That's exactly right.

Winn: Yeah.

Sharon: That's—and a holiday.

Winn: And a holiday. *[laughs]*

Sharon: Just two weeks and you're usually back on track.

Winn: So what's your legacy? Leaving a legacy, what do you want to be known for?

Sharon: I want to be able to be the person that championed mature people to believe they still have a role in the industry.

Winn: Wow.

Sharon: I want everybody to think, *She's 65 and she's still trotting out there. She's still got the energy. She's still doing it.* Age: it's just a number.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: It's not about the age. It's about you continually driving and striving.

Winn: Sharon, you're adorable. Oh my God, you are so adorable. Do you have a final message for our listeners?

Sharon: Yeah. Look, I think—just repeat what I've just said. I think it's really important to set goals. Goal setting is vital for my success. So write them down and just write all the things that you want to be. You might get 20 and go through that 20 and find your top five. Put them at the top of the list and just work one at a time, ticking them off.

Winn: Hm.

Sharon: And then when you've done that, go through and maybe add a few more. Definitely get five key things that you want to achieve, particularly in this year when you kick off. You know, I always want to lose weight on the first of

January; I'm always going to give up drinking. I never lose weight. I never give up drinking.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Sharon: But I definitely set my goals for my career.

Winn: Beautiful. Sharon, thank you so, so much.

Sharon: Absolute pleasure.

Winn: I'm—

Sharon: It's been great chatting.

Winn: I'm not a hairdresser and I'm so inspired by you.

Sharon: I thought you were a hairdresser.

Winn: I've never been a hairdresser.

Sharon: Oh my God. Now—

Winn: But I love hairdressers.

Sharon: —I've learned something new.

Winn: So, yeah.

Sharon: Yeah, we're a pretty crazy bunch.

Winn: Thanks, Sharon.

Sharon: I think you've got to be very crazy to be in this industry.

Winn: Well, that I am so that's why I fit in. Thanks, sweetheart.

Sharon: Thank you for having me. It's been my pleasure.