



ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

Top men's hairdresser Richard Anthony tells *Matthew Batham* about his years in the business

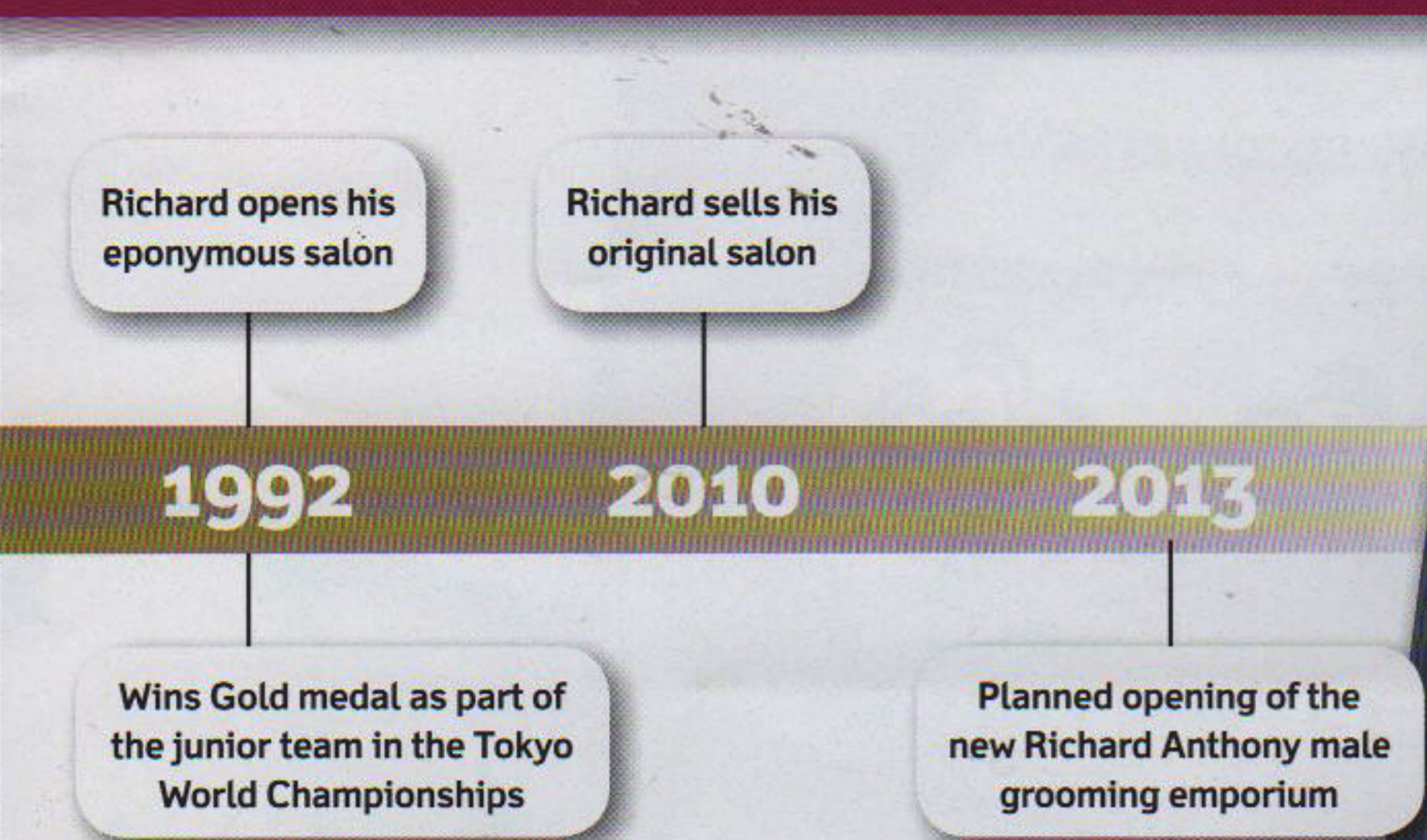
Countless appearances on TV and radio, featuring in men's lifestyle magazines and acting as a consultant to the film *Blowdry*, starring Alan Rickman and Bill Nighy, have all added to hairdresser Richard Anthony's reputation. As well as being part of the British Men's Hairdressing World Cup Team for a decade, winning 30 championship awards, including the gold medal in the World Hairdressing Championships in Japan, he also ran a successful salon for nearly two decades, a business he recently sold to focus on an even bigger project.

Richard's interest in hairdressing began at an early

age. "I come from a family of hairdressers and have been exposed to hairdressing all my life," he says. "My mother, Iris Evans, had half-a-dozen salons in the 6 in South Derbyshire. She was a brilliant hairdresser, famous for her skills. People would come from far and wide for her beehive updo.

"As a toddler, the salon was my playground. Mum says I used to playfully throw rollers at the staff and chat to the clients before I could walk," says Richard. "As I became older, I would help out in the holidays and on weekends."

But despite his early attraction to the salon environment, a career in the craft was furthest from his mind. "I went to boarding school where you are conditioned to have different aspirations. I was very good at athletics, thought about a career in the milit and ended up securing a place at university to study business and finance," he says.



However, a Summer stint helping out in his mother's busy salons confirmed his love for the job and ended any thoughts of alternative careers.

"It was amazing and the last thing I expected," he says. "Working with hair was as instinctive as writing with a pen, and I loved it. I enrolled at a local college and passed my NVQs." At college, part-time lecturer John Borrington spotted Richard's talents.

"John was an ex-British hairdressing champion, the daddy of competition work, and a bit of a local celebrity barber," says Richard. "He encouraged me to compete; he mentored me, and on top of being at college and working in the salon, I spent every spare minute training and getting as much experience as possible."

Richard's dedication led to him joining the British Junior Championship Team and heading for Japan, where winning Gold kick-started a decade of worldwide competition success.

Armed with plenty of barbering experience and the confidence of youth, in 1992, aged 22, Richard persuaded his mother to open a business with him under his own name. It was based in an empty doctor's surgery in Swadlincote, Derbyshire.

"I wanted to alter people's perceptions about male grooming," says Richard. "People said it would be a struggle to move a man from paying £5 to £15 for a haircut, but we did it – and that was nearly 20 years ago and in a mining community too.

"We looked after men, but not in a namby-pamby way. We took them seriously, gave great standards of service, complimentary refreshments and manicures, and started wet shaves – none of which was the norm 20 years ago. And it worked. Men began to respond, coming into the salon fresh from the pits or straight off the pipe yard to have a shave, have their nails done, keen to look and feel better."

But what made alpha-males feel so comfortable about going into a salon environment? "I took the job above and beyond just being a barber," says Richard. "I don't believe in volume hairdressing, but in totally looking after your client. You can't just go through the motions with a client; you have to get to know them."

Acutely aware of the nationwide demise of the barbershop and all the skills involved, Richard planned to celebrate old-fashioned barbering by creating a 1920s-style barbershop, at a time when men's grooming was at its zenith.

One of his clients, Trevor Howsam – a supplier of props to major TV and film productions, and who still travels 180 miles for his regular appointment with Richard – helped him create an authentic-looking 1920s-style barbers, complete with original chairs, basins, professional paraphernalia and an American shoeshine chair, loaned for the filming of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and sat on by Johnny Depp.

Determined to continue his mission for better standards of male grooming, Richard recently sold the salon and is now concentrating on an education package for fellow professionals to make his successful services available to a wider audience in salons and spas.

He believes his bespoke wet shave and face treatment service is pivotal to attracting male clients, and many of the businesses where Richard has trained the staff report increased turnover and profit, he claims.

He's also busy constructing a new Richard Anthony venture: a 4,500sq ft natural and organic emporium to be built beside a trout lake within Derbyshire's National Forest.

"It's an idyllic location; a beautiful environment that will be home to an upmarket male grooming spa, a farm shop, tea rooms and a delicatessen," says Richard. "I'm also putting up six luxury log cabins for holiday lets and to use for my training courses.

"I'm really enjoying the job of teaching others how to move male-grooming services forward," he says. "By sharing my methods, and how to tap into the male psyche and gain their trust, you can create clients for life – which is great for business and great for the industry as a whole." [E]

