

## P&G Pro's Fabio Sementilli empowers new visionaries

**B**eauty Industry Report (BIR) recently attended **Wella's North American Trend Vision Awards** in Hollywood. A run up to the brand's big international showdown last month in New York City, this event combined artistry, professionalism, show biz and sincere emotion. We were so impressed that we decided to get to know the man behind the event, **Fabio Sementilli, P&G Salon Professional's** technical and creative director of education.

Toronto-born, Fabio has won multiple hair competitions, including the **North American Hairstyling Awards (NAHA)**, the **Contessas** and the **World Championships**. During his 25-year career, he has owned several salons while steadily working on film and television sets. In 2008, he turned a new page in his career, moving to P&G Salon Pro's headquarters in California with his wife, **Monica**, and daughters **Gessica** and **Isabella**, to head up the educational outreach for the **Wella, Sebastian, Nioxin** and **Clairol Pro** brands.

"My goal for the second half of my career is to empower young visionaries to grow and prosper in a very competitive industry," he says. "There's no secret to success. Instead, there are ingredients: hard work, discipline, integrity and most critical, a positive attitude of servant leadership." We caught up with Fabio at his office in Woodland Hills, CA, and are pleased to share his insights.

### **BIR: How did you get your start in the business?**

**Fabio Sementilli (FS):** My father immigrated to Toronto from Italy in the 1950s, my mother in 1960 and in those days in our community, men did construction and women ran beauty salons. My mom and her sisters worked together and they would babysit my cousins and me, so we grew up around women and glamour. I really didn't care about it—I'd much rather play hockey—until after high school graduation. I took a trip to Rome to visit a cousin and his wife who owned a salon. They were stylish, eloquent and worldly. They had the kind of relationship and the type of lifestyle I admired.

When I got back home, I gave the University of Toronto a try for a few months for the sake

of my family, but it wasn't for me. So I went to hairdressing school, and the minute I walked through the doors as a student, I loved it all. I felt free to discover my own creativity and to grow my own social skills.

It was the 1980s, and there was a real change going on. We had just been doing little old ladies, and the rest of the students and I started bringing our friends in from school and from the clubs. We completely changed the culture of the school. We got together and did a show to raise \$12,500 to replace old equipment in the school. It was amazing.

Around that time, **Joan Harrison of Canadian Hairdresser** and other people like **Frank Cairo** decided that Canada should enter a student team in the World Championships of Hairdressing. My older sister, **Mirella (Sementilli-Rota)**, was a real up-and-comer in Canadian hairdressing; I respected her so much, and when she told me, "Go ahead, compete. You're all about competition," I went for it. Through city, provincial and national finals, I ended up being one of the five kids selected and at the competition, I placed fourth in the world.

### **BIR: How did you become a salon owner?**

**FS:** In Ontario at the time, you had to go through 1,200 hours of apprenticeship after beauty school, and I learned a lot about how not to run a business and motivate a staff. I remember one guy wanted me to leave the salon to go clean his apartment before he had a party! Mirella and I thought we could do it better, so we saved up to bankroll our own salon, which we called **Modelli**.

I was 20, I was a salon owner, and from day one, I never sat down. It was an exciting time in hair—the second British invasion, with those

long-front, short-back styles and the androgynous looks. Our staff was all under 25 years old, and our clients were young. And we knew the importance of building the salon.

We did everything. A lot of Hollywood productions were shooting in Toronto in the 1990s, and I worked on set. I was a regular on the "Stephen and Chris" morning show in Toronto. Every chance I got, I competed and won NAHA Hair Colorist of the Year, Contemporary Hairstylist of the Year and Makeover Colorist of the Year. But even though I pushed myself doing hair shows as a top stylist for Wella, competitions, film work and photo shoots, I never worked fewer than four days a week in the salon. My clients came first. Over the next 15 years, we were so successful that we expanded to 25 chairs and were able to open two more salons, **Salon Shampoo**, with more than 50 employees.

### **BIR: How did you get involved with Wella on the corporate side?**

**FS:** By 2000, I was struggling to balance my life. I knew I had to focus and choose. I felt I had proven myself behind the chair, and I was eager to test myself in other ways. So when **Joe Iannuzzi**, who was then the general manager of Wella Canada, asked me if I wanted to

work closely with the company on education, shows and artistic direction, I was ready for the challenge.

We drove all over Canada, talking to salon owners. It was tough, but an incredible experience. When P&G purchased Wella in 2004, we started to get to know the other brands and the people. Our CEO, **Reuben Carranza**, invited me to take a larger role in education, and in 2009, my family and I moved to the States to be part of his corporate team.

It's been great; P&G seems like such a large organization, but we show up like a family business, ready to serve our client. Just recently at our North American Trend Vision Awards,



*P&G's Fabio Sementilli leads the company's educational team on stage and in the salon.*

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one of the editors said, “I can’t believe how warm and inviting this event is.” That makes me proud. Reuben encourages all of us to own our business and be accountable to the stylists, whom we consider our “bosses.” This culture has enabled us to feel confident in our ability to think big but always protect our core business: the success of our stylist partners.

**BIR: What role does education play in**

**today’s salon marketplace? Is there time for education?**

**FS:** Education is time, and it’s more important now than ever. To be considered truly professional, you must continue to grow your skills. Clients expect us to have mastery in our craft. Our goal in PGSP Education is to help stylists develop skills that maximize their time behind the chair and offer a level of service that clients today are searching for.

The single most important benefit professional education can offer is mentorship—a true belief in supporting our brothers and sisters in the industry who are working hard every day to make a better life, raise families and build a life with a loved one. We need to create a customized blueprint for a salon professional that instills a deep confidence in him or her.

I would like to reset the current perception of being a hairdresser. A career as a beauty professional can change your life and the hundreds of thousands of clients you will delight throughout your career. Every day I measure our success based on, first, have we enabled the future generation? Next, are we coaching our upcoming visionaries? Third, are we relevant to today’s beauty and fashion influencers in the media and in the culture? And finally, does our ongoing education ensure both creative and business success?

**BIR: What type of educational support should a salon demand from its manufacturers?**

**FS:** Great question. Each salon has very unique needs and might require different types of education: highly technical, color-only; up-dos, some specific hands-on work; for some, what might be needed is business-driven education, which is why we at PGSP do joint business and education planning with our salons. Our motto is “no stylist left uninspired.”

In practical terms, every salon has to choose its own educational guidelines to be able to continue to serve clients at the highest level. For some salons and some stylists, face-to-face education makes sense; for others, education needs to be experienced in a collective format. We believe it’s important to deliver education as flexibly and completely as possible. We’ve been developing digital education on our brands and have been doing live webcasts of

our major events—in fact, if you want to see the Wella North American Trend Vision Awards, just go to [www.northamericantrendvisionawards.com](http://www.northamericantrendvisionawards.com) and you can get some of the inspiration and the excitement.

**BIR: I understand that it was your vision to bring the Student Stylist Competition to P&G Salon Pro. Why are you so interested in students?**

**FS:** I felt very strongly that the industry at large needed to be exposed to some of the incredible young talent that is out there, so we built the competition so that the students’ work would be seen—and awarded—right on the show floor during **America’s Beauty Show** and **Premiere Orlando**. Sharing your work with your peers is beyond motivating; it can change the entire arc of your career.

My passion is personal. Competition has been the vehicle through which my career prospered, and it’s one of the key reasons I am where I am today. I grew up in a wonderful loving family, but tragedy hit us when I was nine and my dad died unexpectedly. The need to survive took hold right away. When I entered beauty school, I knew in my heart that to stand out, I had to work harder and use all available opportunities to their fullest.

Yet if it weren’t for my sister and others who mentored me, I would never have made that first student team and had the opportunity to experience the world as a future salon professional. So I know there are cosmetology students out there who need the opportunity to shine and can use competition as a means to discover their creativity and their competitive spirit.

And I can’t tell you what a life-changing event working with the students has been for me and for all of my colleagues at PGSP. My boss, **Sally Schoen**, was so moved by the competitors at ABS, she decided to personally

sponsor and mentor one of the students we met in Chicago. I am inspired by this to continue to build a platform for tomorrow’s professionals.

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*Fabio Sementilli*