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PEACH BUZZ

Raw deal

*The current fashion in shaved chests
rubs this writer the wrong way*

by Kevin Isom

I have so few chest hairs that I've named them. They're blond, so you can't really see them, but I know they're there. There's Dominique, Laurent, Pascal, Tom, Steve and Clint. (You didn't think I'd have uninteresting names for them, did you?)

As a member of the non-hairy clan, I've always wondered what it must be like to have hair covering all or part of one's chest. Technically, I guess you could say I have a certain empathy for lesbians' chests, because, with rare exceptions, they tend to be on the smooth side, too. And though my lesbian friends are less fascinated by chest hair than I am, they join me in certain questions that I have about members of the hair-bearing clan.

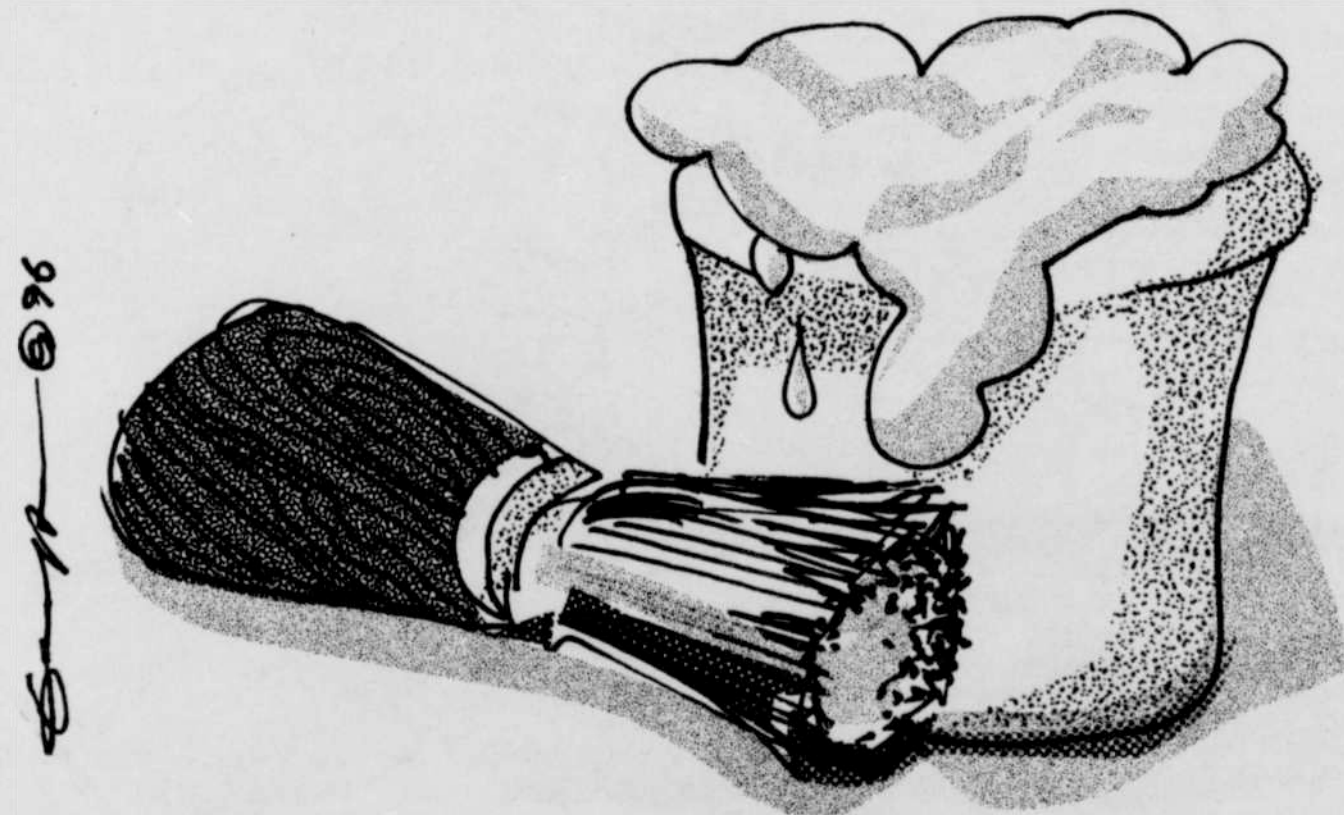
Like, why do so many of them want to be bare of hair? I just don't understand the tendency of the past few years for hairy-chested men to shave their chests. While I realize that a shaven chest shows off muscular definition better than an unshaven one, there are some patently obvious disadvantages to shaving.

group—more commonly known as the split hairs. (That pun hurt me just as much as it hurt you.) While there is nothing quite as unattractive as the wildly hairy chest—the kind that is so furry that its tendrils poke out at the top of a shirt, waving gaily to passers-by—a trimmed chest by comparison is really quite appealing.

And there are other advantages to the trimmed look. Think friction again. Visualize two naturally smooth chests pressed against each other, and you get the idea. Smooth chests have the slipperiness of latex. Nobody goes anywhere. It's like becoming half of a Siamese twin.

Enter a trimmed hairy chest, however, and suddenly there is movement. The hairy chest, once allowed to regain its stature as more than mere stubble, glides gently against the smooth chest. Or any other chest, for that matter, and the whole matter of intimacy proceeds, pardon me again, smoothly.

I suppose then, ultimately, that I am assuming a position. Having combed through the relative merits of the case, I'm going to have to go against



Think friction. On the day of shaving, a hairy chest is akin to a naturally smooth chest. For about three minutes. Then, suddenly, there you are with an ostensibly smooth chest that feels a lot like high-grade sandpaper.

The shaven chest looks lovely as it presses gently against the naturally smooth one. Until it moves, and the stubble rips the surface layer of skin off the unshaven one. True, it is a cost-effective method of dermabrasion, but if I really wanted to roll around on sandpaper, I'd simply pay a visit to the back corner of the nearest hardware store. It's a raw deal for the naturally smooth-chested man.

But what happens when you have not one stubbly shaven chest, but two? Do you become permanently locked into place, like when you had braces on your teeth in high school, and you kissed someone else with braces? Do they sell a special lubricant for the stubble-impaired? Do you begin intimacy by slathering up with a can of WD 40? Or does shaving become a ritual of intimacy? Picture it: after a while, seeing a can of shaving cream must bring to mind thoughts of foreplay.

What most shaven-chested men don't seem to understand is that there is room for both the hairy and non-hairy clans in our culture. In addition, of course, to the partly hairy, partly non-hairy

the grain of current gay culture: I am generally opposed to chest-shaving.

Perhaps it's not an issue on the level of, say, gay marriage, but it's one on which I'm taking a stand. A shaven chest can be lovely to look at, but the appearance is deceiving. What you see is not what you get. I like stubble on a face (my lesbian friends disagree with me on this one), but not on a chest (here the Sapphists and I are in accord). Chest hair is one of those comforting, masculine things, like the scent of aftershave (maybe that wasn't the best choice of comparisons), and it shouldn't be banished to stubbledom.

I realize that the chest-shaving rage, like all fashions, may be cyclical, and the trend could go back the other way. I hope it doesn't, because I really don't plan to fertilize Dominique, Laurent, Pascal, Tom, Steve and Clint any time soon.

But until the trend reverses itself, on behalf of smooth chests everywhere, I will continue to be an outspoken advocate and supporter of trimmed, not shaved.

Kevin Isom is an attorney and writer in Atlanta.

His columns appear in newspapers and magazines throughout the United States and Canada. Other work has appeared in the Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review and Paris Transcontinental.