

The nail files

They're the only part of the body where you're judged by fractions of a millimetre as to whether you're super-chic or a total tramp. Nails, says Gemma Burgess, are a minefield

F

ull caveat: I had 6mm-long French-manicured acrylics once. It was my Sixth Form Ball. My own nails were quick-bitten thanks to exam stress and after

years of uniforms, rules and restrictions the urge to dive into a vat of trappy glamour was too much – Kneejerk Strumpet Syndrome. I spent three hours in a dreadful Salon de Beauté getting my draggy talons, spackled on foundation and brown eyeshadow, matched my scarlet lipstick to my dress and added fake-diamond earrings, bracelet and necklace. I looked like a vampire hooker. Worse, the acrylics destroyed my nails for months.

The point is that I know, first hand, the judge-not-lest-ye-be-judged edict. And we all make mistakes. But

I now have, I'd like to think, a more discerning eye when it comes to the dos and don'ts of nail trends. Of course, I would think that. Personal grooming is a competitive sport and judging burns calories. That's why we all do it, even if we pretend we don't. For example, acrylics make me feel slightly ill and my inner bitch snarls when I see a French pedicure. When it comes to the modern politics of nails, I am full of opinions on what's chic – not quirky, not cute, not fashionable... just chic – what's vulgar and what's completely unacceptable. See if you agree.

Gimmicks are vulgar. OPI Shatter, WAH, Minx, diamante, nail art, the reverse French, you name it – they're all bad. Unless you're wearing a training bra, your nails shouldn't shout louder than you can. The ▷

Shellacs, acrylics and gels are weird and unnatural-looking, like permanent hair extensions, inch-long caterpillar false eyelashes and boob jobs

◁ different-colour-on-every-nail trend reeks of mutton. If in doubt, remember – chic always looks effortless, or nigh-effortless, no matter how long it takes.

Fake is vulgar. Shellac, acrylics and gels all get a derisive nose-wrinkle. They're weird, unnatural-looking and smack of trying a bit too hard, like permanent hair extensions, inch-long caterpillar false eyelashes and boob jobs. Real women have real fingernails. See – nigh-effortless chic.

Downright offensive is the French manicure or – shriek of horror – pedicure. The French manicure – aside from being ridiculous (does anyone think it really looks like her real nails, but cleaner?) – screams Page 3 model. And not the kind of perky innocent-looking Page 3 model you just feel sorry for, but the scary kind with over-plucked eyebrows and over-whitened teeth who you know has a long hard life ahead of her.

And now, the dos.

Short is chic. Fashion might admire the super-long pointy nail. Rihanna might sport crow-like claws. But if you have a job that involves a laptop and a brain, your nails are never longer than 2mm.

Squoval is chic, but with a whisper on the 'squ' and a shout on the 'oval'. No pointy almonds (remember the witch from *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*) or totally round nails (fat fingers, case closed).

Simplicity is chic. Nudes, nearly blacks and grey-greiges are by far the chicest choice. Other colours are judged on a case-by-case basis, but stay away from brights unless your age ends in 'teen'. Any red worn with gold jewellery screams ageing lady-boy. Barbie pink is ugly, even if worn ironically – irony is, in general, hard to pull off, when it comes to nails. The creative or casual workplace offers more leeway for

colour experimentation, but if your boss wouldn't wear the same shade on her nails – or, a man, his tie – then think twice. (Unless she's naitarded. Then do what you want. And get her a birthday voucher for the nearest nail salon.)

Yellow is never chic, despite the hysteria over Chanel Mimosa. We love you, Chanel. But we're not convinced on this one.

In case this sounds like the lament of the high-maintenance bitch, or the kind of subject only someone with too much time on their hands, literally, needs to worry about, here's the landslide verdict that even your mother would agree with – ragged or chipped nails are unacceptable. Lack of interest in, access to or finances for a professional manicure is no excuse. Buy a 49p nail file at Boots and sort yourself out. You wouldn't go out with unbrushed hair or buttons missing on your shirt, would you? If you would, I'm not sure what you're doing reading *Tatler*.

In fact, bare nails might be the chicest choice of all. Of course, not bare bare, but Bastien Gonzalez buffed-to-a-mirrored-shine-and-newborn-clean bare. Think angels' toes in Botticelli paintings. Perversely, this look takes the biggest upkeep of all.

Naturally, I have nail idiosyncrasies of my own, some of which are diabolically un-chic. I like my nails baby short: less than 1mm. I'm partial to experimenting with colour, even though I'm (gasp) over 30. I like Illamasqua's sludgy-green Hectic when it's raining and Essie's coral-orange Vermillionaire when it's hot. I like Essie's Jazz, a corpse-like taupe, when I'm in a bad mood. And when it's snowing, I love OPI's Royal Rajah Ruby, a dark, dark red with – oh knuckle-bite of shame – a metallic shimmer. Lastly, perhaps my biggest confession of all – sometimes I spend longer

choosing a nail colour than the manicure actually takes.

I'm sure I'm judged for my nail choices, just as I judge others for

their two-inch reverse-French acrylic monstrosities. But who cares? They're only nails. So let's not take them too seriously, hmm?

HOW TO NAIL IT

The perfect shiny nude

One-coat **Essie Sold Out** Show over one-coat **Essie Sugar Daddy**

The perfect shape

1.5mm, squoval

Brands to know

Leighton Denny, Chanel, Butter London, Nails Inc, Deborah Lippman, Rescue Beauty Lounge and, for the widest choice of colours, **Essie** and **OPI**

Colours to know

Pinky-nudes

Essie, Mademoiselle and Vanity Fairest. **OPI** Bubble Bath, Passion and I Pink I Love You. **Butter London** Yummy Mummy. **Leighton Denny** Crème de la Crème

Nearly blacks

Chanel Rouge Noir and Black Pearl. **Essie** Wicked and Velvet Voyeur. **OPI** Lincoln Park After Dark.

Rescue Beauty Lounge

Film Noir. **Deborah Lippman** Fade to Black

Greys and greiges

Essie Chinchilly and Mink Muffs. **Chanel** Particulière and Paradoxal. **OPI** You Don't Know Jacques and Over the Taupe. **Dior** Gris Montaigne

Chic colour choices

OPI Here Today... Aragon Tomorrow. **Essie** Sew Psyched. **Chanel** Khaki Brun and Khaki Vert. **Dior** Red Royalty

WHERE TO NAIL IT

Bare and buffed

Bastien Gonzalez

The Cadogan Hotel, 75 Sloane Street, SW1 bastiengonzalez.com or 07766 663271

Margaret Dabbs

7 New Cavendish Street, W1 margaretdabbs.co.uk or 020 7487 5510

White Room

46 Walton Street, SW3 whiteroom.com or 020 7584 3881

Polished perfection

Tillie's Nail Lounge

5 Formosa Street, W9 tilliesnailounge.com or 020 7266 2620

The OPI Nail Bar

Selfridges, 400 Oxford Street, W1 selfridges.com or 0870 737 7377

Coco Nail Bar

267 Portobello Road, W11 coconailbar.com or 020 7243 1113

At the hairdresser

Holly Gunn

at **Aldo Coppola** 70 Sloane Avenue, SW3 aldocoppola.co.uk or 020 7052 0709

David Barton

at **Percy & Reed** 157c Great Portland Street, W1 percyandreed.com or 020 7637 4634

Alex Sudar at Neville's Hair & Beauty

5 Pont St, SW1 nevillehairandbeauty.net or 020 7235 3654