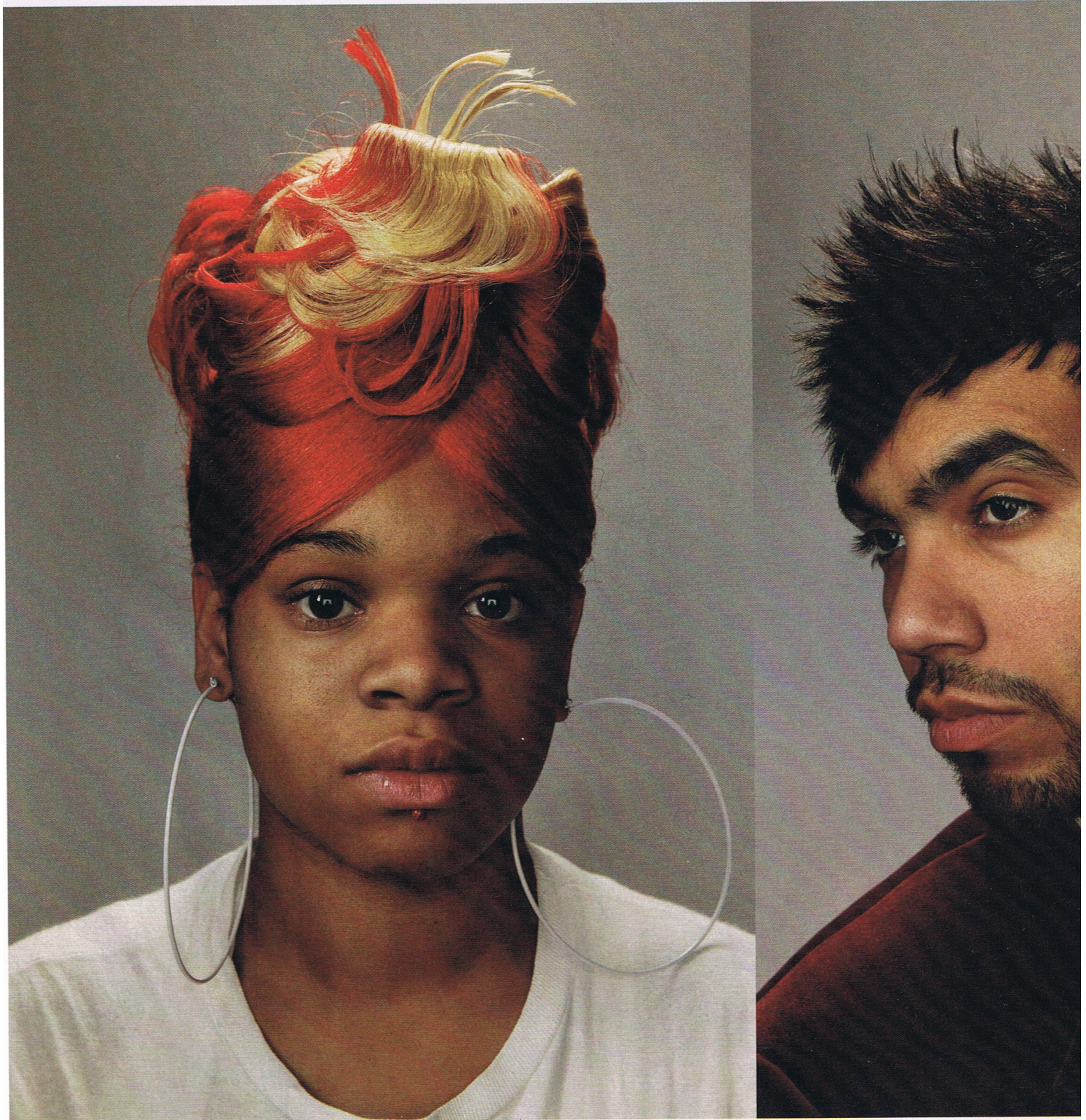


# cuttingedge

SIXTY YEARS AGO, THE BRONNER BROS. FAMILY FOUNDED A HAIR PRODUCT EMPIRE AND PIONEERED THE OUTRAGEOUS HAIR SHOW. TEXT BY CHANDRA R. THOMAS PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER YANG







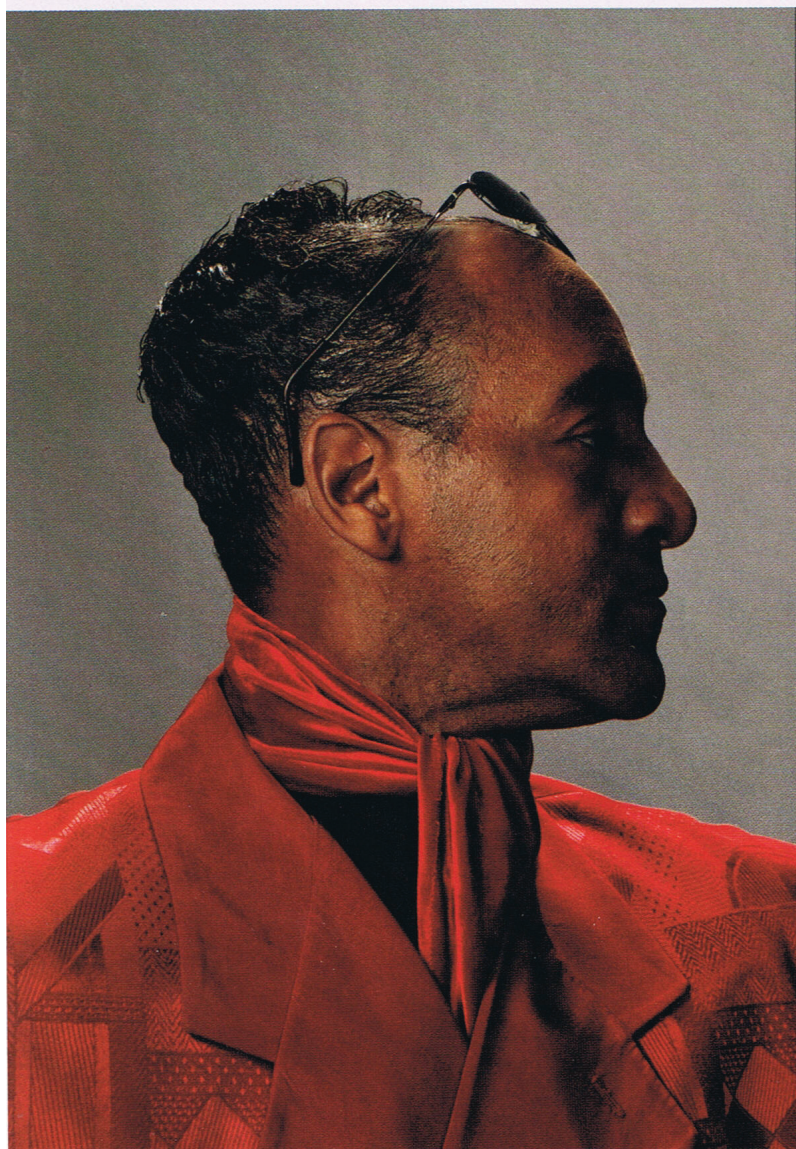
From left to right: Kori White, Tyrik Jackson, Wanda Hines







From left to right: Fredrico International, Tierra Smith, Marvin Young, Gerica Harris



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he Ford family does cars. The Kennedys, politics. Atlanta's Bronner family legacy is hair. Grooming products are the source of their fortune, but their fame comes as inventors of the hair show. For those involved in the various facets of the African American hair industry, the Bronner

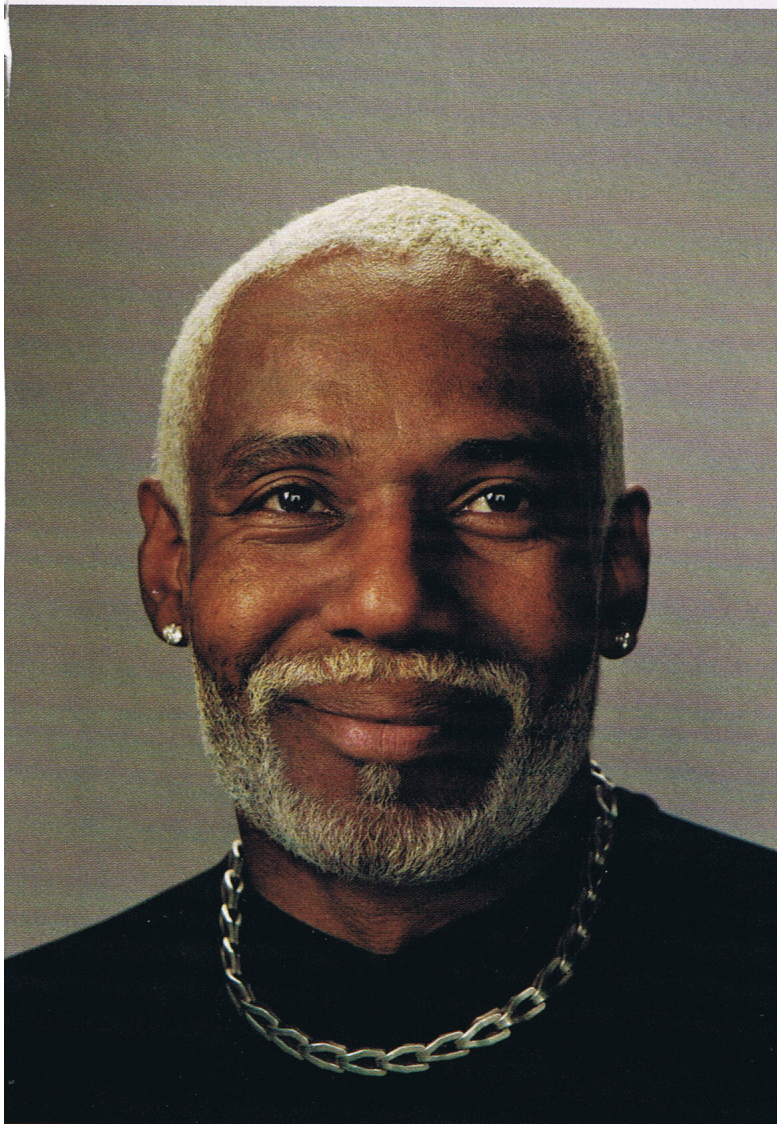
Bros. International Hair Show—the world's largest African American beauty industry event—is the Grammys, Oscars, and Super Bowl all rolled into one. Picture a fashion show, talent competition, reality TV challenge, cosmetology class, and variety show all happening at once—with hair, of course, taking center stage. And whether it's a model prancing down the catwalk or an attendee strolling through the exhibit hall, the more outrageous the hairstyle, the better. Held twice a year, Bronner shows draw more than

60,000 hairstylists, barbers, exhibitors, and manufacturers to the Georgia World Congress Center and pump an estimated \$56 million a year into the Atlanta economy.

The high-energy hybrid of hair and hype might be hard to imagine for some, but for the industry professionals who flock to the three-day affair from around the globe, it's the ultimate networking event and the quintessential opportunity to learn more about everything from new hairweaving and barbering techniques to tricks for makeup and highlights. The show celebrates its sixtieth anniversary this year, a milestone for the family that continues to build the \$30 million hair product empire that started out with \$200 borrowed against the family's South Georgia farm.

The hair show concept was born in 1947 when brothers Nathaniel H. Bronner Sr. and Arthur E. Bronner began teaching cosmetologists at the historic Butler Street YMCA in Downtown Atlanta.





About 300 people attended that first event. The brothers eventually moved the show to the famous Royal Peacock Social Club on Auburn Avenue and later to the now-defunct Auburn Avenue Casino. As its popularity grew, the show attracted celebrities such as baseball great Jackie Robinson, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and actor/comedian Redd Foxx. Through the years, the show migrated to the City Auditorium, Marriott Marquis, Atlanta Merchandise Mart, and the Hyatt Regency, where it remained for twenty years before landing at its current venue, the Congress Center. The show still draws the famous—comedian Chris Rock is featuring it in a documentary.

Today the Bronner Bros. company, headed by Bernard Bronner, is headquartered in Marietta. It employs more than 300 full- and part-time staffers and operates two manufacturing facilities (producing the African Royale and NuExpressions lines and its

signature “BB” label brand), a shipping center, a beauty store, a hairweaving studio, and a public relations office. The company holds “Seminar by the Sea,” an annual Caribbean cruise/cosmetology training course. The Bronners also own and operate *Upscale*, a national African American lifestyles magazine. In addition to style, the family is known for spirituality—Bishop Dale Bronner heads the 9,000-member Word of Faith Family Worship Cathedral in Austell. Nathaniel Jr., Charles, and James Bronner are ministers at the Ark of Salvation Church in Grant Park.

Late cofounder Nathaniel Bronner said that the “pursuit of excellence is a journey that we will unceasingly travel.” Well, if the first sixty years are any indication, it’s a voyage that this pioneering family has successfully navigated. ■

HIGHLIGHTS: GO TO [ATLANTAMAGAZINE.COM](http://ATLANTAMAGAZINE.COM) TO SEE PHOTOS OF HISTORIC BRONNER BROS. HAIR EXTRAVAGANZAS.