

The Barber Pole

The symbol of the **barber pole** evolved from the technical procedures of bloodletting performed by the barber-surgeons. The pole is thought to symbolize the staff that the patient would hold tightly in order for the veins in the arm to stand out during bloodletting. The bottom end-cap of modern barber poles represents the basin that was used as a vessel to catch the blood during bloodletting. The white stripes on the pole stand for the bandages that were used to stop the bleeding and were hung on the staff to dry. The stained bandages would then twist around the pole in the breeze, forming a red-and-white pattern (Figure 1-12).

Figure 1-12



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The iconic colors of the barber pole have been drawn from the days of bloodletting.

One interpretation of the colors of the barber pole is that red represented the blood, blue the veins, and white the bandages. Later, when the Company of Barber-Surgeons was formed in England, barbers were required to use blue-and-white poles and surgeons red-and-white poles.

It is also thought that the red, white, and blue poles displayed in the United States originated in deference to the nation's flag. Modern barbers have retained the barber pole as the foremost symbol of the business and profession of barbing. In fact, display of a barber pole at an establishment that is not a licensed barbershop employing licensed barbers is prohibited in some states (Figure 1-13).

Figure 1-13



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A modern barber pole, the foremost symbol of professional barbing.