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ME TIME | MARISA MELTZER

Is a Salon Facial Worth the Fuss?



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANNY GHITIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above and insert, Ilana Spitalnick getting a facial at Heyday. Below left, Ellie Benuska at CAP Beauty, and below right, getting a facial there.

FOR THE BEAUTY do-it-yourselfer, we live in boom times. Between masks and eye strips and deep-cleaning products and YouTube videos on face massage, you can do a pretty good approximation of a spa facial in the confines of your home for a fraction of the price.

I have a drawer in my kitchen — my teeny New York City bathroom lacks amenities like drawers — almost entirely filled with tubs and tubes of goop that are supposed to clear my skin, or brighten it, or even its tone, or calm it down, or do everything all at once. In the vegetable crisper of my refrigerator, I keep a 20-pack of sheet masks I bought on a layover at the airport in Seoul, South Korea. I have no idea their intended purpose, but it has an illustration of a shark on the front, and I've never seen a shark with wrinkles. They're great to put on at the end of a flight even if sheet masks make everyone look like a serial killer in a 1980s slasher film.

Some of the masks I find myself returning to are Biologique Recherche Masque Vivant, which is identical in both yeasty smell and brown sludgy appearance to Vegemite but leaves my skin glowing; Glossier Mega Greens Galaxy Pack with cress sprout extract, which I like to think is a good alternative to imbibing green juice; and Omorovicza Ultramoor Mud Mask, which goes on vividly blue and conquers my oily T-zone.

So why, if we can do a decent facial ourselves, would we pay for one? Or perhaps the question is: Are they worth it?

Heyday: Facials Without Fuss

Consider your pores. Performing extractions, as squeezing your blackheads is euphemistically referred to in the world of beauty, is something best done by a professional — you can leave yourself scarred if you don't do it right. And facials are easily as relaxing as getting a massage, but with the fringe benefit that people may compliment your skin afterward.

Heyday is a New York minichain that has adopted the Drybar business model of providing one service of consistent quality and reasonable price. I appreciate that the company uses multiple brands so there is no

Face Places

HEYDAY TRIBECA

92 Reade Street, 646-922-7576;
thinkheyday.com.

VIBE Spotless, white and inoffensive, like a well-appointed Airbnb.

GOAL Fast facials with add-on services (peels, light treatments) using under-the-radar lines like Grown Alchemist and Herbivore Botanicals.

COST 30-minute facial, \$60.

CAP BEAUTY

238 West 10th Street, 212-227-1088; capbeauty.com.

VIBE Someone with a lot of money and exquisite taste just returned from a winter in Los Angeles.

GOAL Thorough facials tailored to what your skin needs using products free of synthetics and heavy on custom masks and massages.

COST 60-minute facial, \$200.

hard sell about how one beauty line is going to have the best products for your skin, which seems like a bit of an old-fashioned idea these days.

I visited the TriBeCa location, which is clean and bright but no frills. Instead of individual treatment rooms, clients are separated into large cubicles. It's comfortable, but I hope you don't suffer, as I did, through a half-hour of hearing a woman nearby talk about her recent safari vacation in Namibia.

Ramnit, my aesthetician, took one look at my skin and judged it clogged. My shorter session didn't come with extractions, so she suggested a peel, but it cost extra, so I

passed. Her hands were quick and gentle as she massaged in a cleanser, then a calming cream, a mask, a serum and finally a sunscreen.

As I left, she gave me samples of two products she recommended: Alchimie Forever Pigment Lightening Serum and Kantic Brightening Moisture Mask. By the time I got home, there was an email recapping what she did ("we focused on restoring healthy balance for your skin's basic needs, boosting your skin's hydration and healthy glow, calming and managing breakouts"), the products she used and a suggestion to get a 50-minute treatment with a peel next time.

My skin looked pretty good that evening and for the next few days. It was less red than usual and more hydrated, but not as if I had just returned from, say, a monthlong yoga retreat where I had eaten nothing but leafy greens.

CAP Beauty: It's All About You

The spa in the back of CAP Beauty in the West Village also takes a multibrand approach to its facials, but it focuses solely on natural products (that is, nothing syn-

thetic). The vibe is rich hippie, with blush-colored duvets and feral-looking bouquets of seasonal flowers and female acoustic covers of Bruce Springsteen songs.

Cara, who was treating me, asked what I felt like my skin needed. "A really deep cleaning," I told her.

She got to work cleansing my skin, getting rid of all my clogged pores ("These extractions are easy — I'm having a lot of fun," she noted) and applied a few products from a line called Julisis, a biodynamic line that is influenced by the 16th-century alchemist Paracelsus. If it sounds esoteric, you're right, but the products smelled like jasmine and orchid and melted into my skin.

Then the magic happened in the form of a protracted massage of my face, neck and shoulders. When she was done with me, I looked as if I had lost 10 pounds just in my face, or maybe had gotten some very subtle and expensive plastic surgery. Cheekbones emerged! Fine lines vanished! If I ever go to the Oscars or get to meet Oprah, I intend to get this facial first.

I sipped a vitamin E latte with Tocos (a rice bran), coconut butter, He Shou Wu (herbs) and hot water that Cara brought me with a sample of a moisturizer she recommended, Max and Me Sweet Serenity Rescue Balm. I bought some CAP Beauty house line bath salts and a mask from Wildcare made with coconut milk, clay and pineapple.

At \$200 for the most basic facial (tip included, which eases the sting a little), it was an expensive afternoon, as indulgent as it was relaxing, but I left with a better face than I had come in with. If I could afford to get one of these each month, I gladly would, but for now I'll save it for a special occasion.

Besides, I can accomplish a lot at home. In a follow-up email, Cara sent all of the products she used, others she thought I might like and a recipe for a face mask that I could blend at home with water or yogurt or apple cider vinegar. It seems that the salon facial and the at-home facial can — and should — peacefully coexist.

