

THE ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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Cooking the looks

You are what you eat, finds Brigit Bailey-Grant, and the leftovers make a great facial

Beauticians are a curious breed. While some are as sweet as the strawberry masks they apply, others can be as abrasive as a salt scrub. Enter the snooty scented domain of the latter, and you'll wish you'd buffed, primed and put on make-up before your appointment. So how does one avoid the aesthetician with attitude and find a facialist that fits?

With an ever increasing number of spas and salons to choose from this is no small task, but the calibre of the clients and condition of their skin is a big clue. Alternatively, take the beautician to lunch and grill her about both.

That was how I came to be sharing crab cakes with New York spa owner Susan Ciminel who has the clients - Jennifer Lopez, Naomi Campbell, Tommy Hilfiger - and the glowing skin. Put it this way, I've yet to see a beautician - privy to all the tricks of the trade - with a more enviable epidermis. I could hardly wait for my transforming facial. But first we had to eat and Susan, unlike most annoying beauty biz types, considers leucine

She is also knowledgeable about nutrition and is in the process of writing a book, *Cooking for Beauty*, that will be full of healthy recipes to keep women looking tasty. "If you want great skin in later life eat lots of greens, particularly the mustard variety," advises Susan. "That's why African women look so good. Pasta on the other hand is a disaster. They might as well call it paste because it really does stick to your gut and does nothing for the complexion. Now, Russian women, for instance, have great skin because they eat a lot of Omega 3s which you find in fish oils." The nutritional nuggets keep coming, culminating with her seaweed recipe which evidently turns you into Superwoman.

"Seaweed is full of calcium and magnesium, so it's good for the brain, the skin and the nails," says Susan. "It also gives you energy and cleans out the body. So every morning, take a small portion of dried seaweed and drizzle, which is a radish, reconstitute both in cold water and then sauté them in a pan with sesame oil, a little

be eating it myself every morning, but I hate the smell."

Susan has been mixing ingredients for recipes and facials since she was 15 and growing up in Buffalo. "The weather was very harsh and destroyed my skin, so I'd make up my own concoctions of vitamins and aloe which seemed to work."

Others, too, benefited from Susan's talents as a natural healer, and her bedroom became a beauty salon where she gave facials to acne-ridden friends, along with hair tips, pedicures... anything that would turn them from pimply pupils into high school honeys. It was a sign of things to come for when she moved to New York, Susan simply transferred her beauty business to a small one-bedroom apartment, where she steamed pores on her coffee table and waxed legs on the sofa.

"But I always had lots of flowers and candles to create a healing atmosphere," she adds. Into that apartment came Jerry Hall, Linda Evangelista and Sophie Dahl's mum, Tessa, to name but a few of the glossy patrons who spread the word, enabling her to move to proper premises on Madison Avenue.

Today, those same beauties, along with many others, visit her at her spa in the luxury store Bergdorf Goodman on Fifth Avenue. Granted it's a fancy address, but the atmosphere is anything but intimidating. Susan doesn't do snooty, but she does bake her own organic cookies which are on sale at reception. The real reason to visit, however, is for that much sought after J Lo glow. And that was how, after feeding and grilling Susan over lunch, I happened to be lying on a bed in her spa receiving an aromatherapy deep pore cleansing facial.

"Steam your pores with rosemary to kill bacteria," whispers Susan, who also advises against grainy exfoliants that scratch the skin or expensive creams that contain paraffin wax.

The Oxy-Mist treatment - a big helping of micronised vitamin E and amino acids - is one of the glow providers. But it's the pumpkin and prune enzyme peel that is guaranteed to brighten the duller complexion. I was lucky enough to get both, and boy did I glow. Sadly I missed a lot of the other tips Susan proffered during my facial, as I was too relaxed and well fed to stay awake.

I've not seen Susan since, but having been presented with a selection of her custom made products, my skin is still in her capable hands. So the rule of thumb for a great beautician has to be a cool client list, a giveaway glow and a bit of time for a girlsie lunch. Better still, just go and see Susan.

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