

VOGUE

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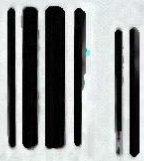
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needle nation

The most potent new beauty fixes are increasingly delivered with a swift—and sometimes painful—prick. Julia Jones reflects on how she became a human pincushion.

a

cluster of immaculately groomed, designer-decked media types—manicured nails clutching Perrier and lime—is huddled around a stunning, pencil-skirted woman at a late-summer Manhattan rooftop soirée. Heads bowed in concentration, the group hangs intently upon her every syllable. “I’m telling you,” she mouths, barely audible, as if imparting a nugget of well-guarded wisdom, “it’s all about mesotherapy.”

Mesowhat? I’ve heard distinct rumblings of this fabled weight-loss wonder recently among the city’s cocktail-party cognoscenti. Surreptitiously I make inquiries about the intriguing character who holds the throne enthralled. “Oh, she used to be much heavier,” whispers a nearby guest discreetly. “Just lost about fifteen pounds and apparently doesn’t have an ounce of cellulite. She looks fantastic, doesn’t she?”

From body contouring to antiaging, some of the most avant-garde advances in results-right-now beauty are being delivered by a series of injections. Yesterday’s scalpel is today’s syringe, and to look youthful these days requires getting over an aversion to needles, fast. I would know. In my fearless—no, *shameless*—quest for eternal youth, I’ve tried it all and come back, happily, for more.

Mesotherapy

Spicing up the tried-and-trusted, decidedly tedious routine of diet and exercise,

mesotherapy, a nonsurgical “fat melting” technique, is the latest miracle cure. Like so many popular near-instant beauty transformations, it is a needle-based treatment, during which a cocktail of vitamins, minerals, plant extracts, and FDA-approved pharmaceutical drugs is injected into the mesoderm, or middle layer of the skin, to “liquefy” the body’s fat cells, which will then be either burned as energy or excreted from the body.

Despite my boundless enthusiasm, I’m curious to know if a few pricks of a needle—or, to be precise, around 500 injections per \$500 session—can really improve the appearance of my squidgy lower limbs. And if mesotherapy is truly the Holy Grail for skinny, dimple-free thighs, then why, in a country obsessed with quick fixes, is there no Manolo-shod stampede?

Though developed in 1952 by the French doctor Michel Pistor, the meso-

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movement is just getting started in the United States. “*Everyone* here does it,” swears a Parisian girlfriend. Indeed, in Europe and South America (where it is practiced by approximately 15,000 doctors), it’s about as shocking as a nose job.

According to Leroy Young, M.D., a St. Louis-based plastic surgeon and the chairman of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons’ Emerging Trends Task Force, since there have been no formal studies conducted in this country (though extensive medical literature has been written in French, Spanish, and Italian), the official jury is still out on mesotherapy’s actual efficacy. But, he says reassuringly, it’s not dangerous, so there’s no harm in trying.

Buoyed by the convincing example of the svelter former chubster at the party, and my friend’s ringing endorsement, I find

myself in the Upper West Side offices of osteopath Lionel Bissoon, D.O., to try the tantalizing procedure for myself.

Bissoon, the president of the American Board of Mesotherapy, is the man credited with kick-starting the meso trend Stateside when he began practicing it five years ago. His self-published book, *The Cellulite Cure*, is due out this month. He studies my legs and backside. “You have half-grade cellulite on the front of your legs and Grade 2 on the back and sides,” he says calmly. Grade 2? “You have to look to see it, and it disappears when you lie down,” explains the doctor, which makes me wonder if I should go everywhere horizontal, on a stretcher. “Grade 3 is what I call terminal,” he adds. “Getting women down to a Grade 1 is my goal.” I feel marginally smug that I’m already a 2.

The next thing I know I am lying face-down on a treatment table, anesthetic cream spread all over my body, watching Bissoon fill an alarmingly large syringe with a concoction of liquids that he then jabs diligently, repeatedly, at my naked flesh, creating a series of scarlet dots that resemble a nasty case of the measles. Even with the numbing cream, this is way more painful than I expected—a swarm of bees stinging springs to mind. He promises it will be over in less than ten minutes. So, clenching my toes, I grit my teeth, the occasional sharp intake of breath interrupting a grim determination to prance, sarongless, along a beach one day.

What can I expect from the ten-week roster of torture treatments I so rashly signed on for? “Two inches from your abs and back,” Bissoon assures me. “And the cottage-cheese effect on your legs will practically disappear.” Sold.

How It All Started: The Injectibles

The man I credit for my addiction to syringe-induced beauty is Fredric Brandt, M.D., the wildly charismatic celebrity dermatologist and so-called king of Botox, whom I met several years ago when he wiped a decade off my face with a few vials of the just-emerging toxin. Wielding his needle like a magician, he used it to instantly smooth my crow’s-feet, forehead, and frown lines, firm my neck, elevate my brow, and even raise the tip of my nose (yes, Botox can do that). Quickly hooked, I began to dabble (*continued on page 598*)

in upstate New York. (David says he sees no more than five woodcocks in an entire season.) And there are so many recipes I now must try. Michel Guérard roasts the birds, then removes the meat and the innards and prepares a complicated sauce with port and foie gras. My next chance will come in October, when the season opens in New Jersey and England simultaneously. I can drive with George Faison to the Delaware Water Gap and stand endlessly in a cold bog in my new Chateau boots, praying for luck, or go to the butchers in London, snag a dozen woodcocks, and cook them in a friend's toasty kitchen in a dozen cunning ways. □

NEEDLE NATION

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In other cutting-edge injectibles from Brandt's bag of tricks. Soon there were regular Restylane injections (a new wrinkle filler, then used by Brandt in clinical trials and officially approved this past December by the FDA) to impart cut-glass cheekbones and to add height to the sagging midportion of my face. I signed on for collagen injections, too, which gave me a Bardotesque sex kitten pout and plumped the lines from my mouth to my chin, which had made me look like a marionette.

Soon I was a veritable injection junkie, and yet I still looked like me, albeit an airbrushed, well-rested, unabashedly soft-focus kind of me. Maintenance, I called it. All part of staving off a major overhaul somewhere down the road.

The Acupuncture Facial

My needle obsession didn't stop there. During a surprising Zen moment, and upon hearing that even acupuncture—the centuries-old alternative medicine rooted in Chinese philosophy and prescribed for everything from allergies to migraines—had gotten in on the wrinkle-fighting act, I found myself in the SoHo offices of acupuncturist Mitchell Wolf.

"Acupuncture works from the inside out," said Wolf as he carefully unwrapped a frightening number of slender prepackaged needles. "It's only by becoming truly healthy internally that we can improve our appearance externally." Right. Whatever. So how does it actually work? "Imagine underground subway lines running through your body. These are the meridians," he explained. "I'll stimulate them to release the block-

ages of *qi*, or energy flow, by placing needles into various acupoints."

He began by inserting a tiny needle just below my knee. I wasn't quite sure how something that far from my face could produce a tangible result, but moments later I felt a surge—a distinct, dull heaviness and a tingling around the insertion point—so something had to be happening. Next, Wolf placed a neat row of needles from my forehead into my hairline. "Think of it as if I'm pulling up and tightening the skin, pinning it into place," he whispered softly. I relaxed with my eyes closed for 20 minutes, occasionally conjuring up nightmares of accidentally falling asleep, rolling over, and impaling myself in the name of extreme vanity.

That evening, I peered intently at my face. Was there a difference? Tough to say. Yes, I looked more alert, definitely rested, possibly firmer, but time would tell. "Everyone's skin is different. With weekly sessions, you'll see a real difference in as little as five weeks," Wolf had told me.

Hopeful, I added *weekly acupuncture* to my ever-growing must-do list.

The Roller Ball

When I heard of a new skin-pricking device (this one for use at home) that everyone on the West Coast was raving about, I wasted no time in placing a call to Rand Rusher, R.N., at Solutions Skincare Medical Clinic, to get the scoop. "Ah, yes, the Environ Cosmetic ROLL-CIT," said Rusher, who shares an office with celebrity plastic surgeon Norman Leaf, M.D., and is known among the Hollywood glitterati as a complexion miracle worker. "But you can only have one if you *promise* to use it every day," he said solemnly. "And that means adding another fifteen minutes to your beauty routine." I was baffled. Did he not realize that I was a woman obsessed with her beauty routine?

The principle behind my new \$550 toy was this: The spiky contraption, not unlike a Barbic-size paint roller, is covered with tiny, fine needles that create little channels in the skin's surface. Clinical data (provided by Environ, using its own product) show that this allows the active ingredients in skin care to penetrate further into the skin's deeper layers. Rusher also offers a more intensive in-office skin-puncturing treatment that stimulates collagen

production—during which your face is essentially tenderized like a piece of meat—but that requires local anesthetic with sedation and a week's recovery time.

I ripped open the box and unwrapped the tiny roller curiously. "Apply it carefully up, down, and across the face," instructed Rusher over the phone from Beverly Hills. He said that followed up with the right cream—something formulated with proven antiaging properties such as potent, fat-soluble antioxidants vitamins A, C, and E—my skin-care routine would become "5,000 times more efficacious."

"Does it hurt?" I asked, running my fingers over the roller. "Kind of feels like a cat's licking you," he replied. For someone who'd been routinely stuck with meso needles, this felt like spun silk.

That night, I perch in front of my bathroom mirror studiously rolling my new toy up and down my face. My boyfriend calls from the bedroom. "What are you doing? You've been in there for *hours*."

Perfection, Nearly

Now, after seven mesotherapy sessions, the cellulite that's plagued me for most of my adult life has practically vanished. However, I spend several days between visits black-and-blue and popping arnica tablets (an herbal remedy prescribed to reduce bruising). When questioned by my unsuspecting boyfriend, I tell him the marks are the result of deep-tissue massage. He believes me. "Your progress is even better than I had expected!" Bissoon says when I return for my eighth session, reminding me that after this, I have only two more appointments before the end result—official status as a Grade 1. Though not nearly as supple as it was ten years ago, my backside is showing dramatic improvement. The promise of an as-perfect-as-I-can-be body has inspired me to really get it together: Now, due in part to consciously altering my eating habits (less carbs and fatty foods, more fruits, veggies, and proteins) and twice-weekly workouts with a trainer, I've lost six pounds. I find myself at Barneys considering spring's short skirts and audaciously planning mini-vacations to Miami and Anguilla.

My complexion—even-toned, and line-free thanks to Dr. Brandt—also appears slightly firmer, as a result, I logically deduce, of the acupuncture and roller ball.