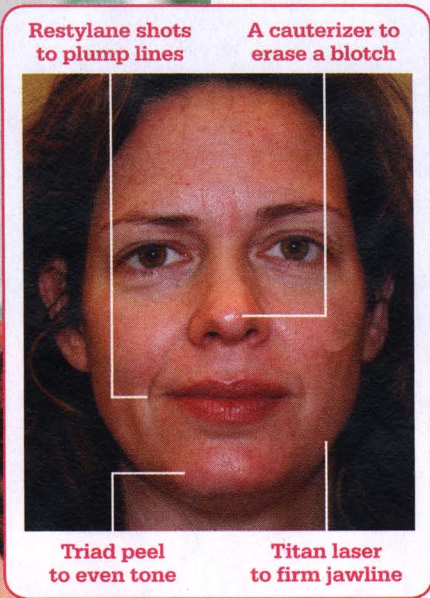




Fresh-faced
The author enjoys her new, youthful glow. Below, her face before the transformation.



Restylane shots to plump lines

A cauterizer to erase a blotch

Triad peel to even tone

Titan laser to firm jawline

How I took 10 years off my face

When an ex-sun worshipper and major beauty skeptic sees a dermatologist for the first time, the results are dramatic. **By Allison Glock**

I have always looked older than my age. There are reasons for this. I grew up in Florida at a time when people used baby oil instead of sunscreen. A nice burn was the goal, because it looked “healthy.” My being of Celtic descent, with onion-pale skin, achieving said burn took only about 10 minutes. Envious girlfriends would drop their tinfoil chin reflectors, look at me and cry, “You’re so pink, I hate you!”

I spent my youth looking very “healthy.” Like a pomegranate, with hair. And I have to admit, not much has changed now that I’m 37. I know the value of sunscreen, but I just can’t bring myself to use it regularly (I hate the scent, it feels icky and I cringe at the mud-sucking sound it makes when I smear it on). Years back, I read that 90 percent of all skin damage occurs in your youth. I decided that if that is true, then why bother? I’m toast, having been toast since I was 18. Plus, I’m a beauty cynic. I pass on antiaging lotions and potions. (Isn’t today’s kelp mask yesterday’s vibrating jaw jigglers, and a facial a way

to pay someone else to pop your pimples?) And I never entertained the thought of cosmetic surgery.

That is, until this year, when I gazed in the mirror and realized that I looked a little too much like Keith Richards. I had frown lines, brow furrows, sunspots and droop—lots of it. When I imagined my skin talking, it sounded like *Winnie the Pooh’s* Eeyore: “I’m sorry, I don’t mean to obscure your vision. I’m just so droooopee.” I also began to notice how often I heard the words “After you, ma’am.” And for the first time, I felt as though maybe, as far as my skin went, I had been a wee bit imprudent. We all want to be our best, truest self. And I knew that my best, truest self had to look a lot better than a haggard rock star.

I decided to schedule an appointment with David Colbert, M.D., dermatologist and founder of the New York Dermatology Group in New York City, who has a chic celebrity clientele (he’s responsible for Rachel Weisz’s inexorable luminosity). Dr. Colbert has a reputation for turning back the clock gracefully. His promise: no inflatable lips, no frozen forehead.

“I don’t want to look like Nicole Kidman,” I say by way of introduction as he shakes my hand in a sleek treatment room. “I need to be able to scowl. It’s my trademark.”

Dr. Colbert laughs. “Let’s see what we’re dealing with here,” he says, holding my chin as he examines my face under a klieg light. Wearing jeans and Merrell clogs, he resembles a younger, blonder, far more handsome David Sedaris.

I tell him my shameful history: No sunscreen. No skin products. A tendency to pick at any zit with demonic ferocity.

He tilts my head, squints his eyes and exhales.

“Hmmm,” he says, finally. “I think we’re going to need more than one appointment.”

And then I get more bad news. According to Dr. Colbert, the most important thing a woman can do at any age to preserve her skin is to wear sunblock every day. Even during the gray days of January, skin still remains vulnerable to damaging UV rays, which can penetrate the windshield of a car and desiccate youthful skin like a peach in a microwave. I mention the 90-percent-damage-in-childhood stat to Dr. Colbert, and he scoffs. “I have yet to see research that backs up that claim,” he says. “And I don’t like the message of helplessness it fosters.”

Then, a glimmer of hope. “It’s never too late to start treatments,” he explains. “Even at age 90, you can do chemical peels to reduce the red, scaly, sagging effects of sun damage.”

I’m not 90. But I have major sun damage. Dr. Colbert calls it a constellation effect, except instead of stars, I have russet-colored spots, which I’m told can be eradicated with a Triad

beauty true story

peel. Basically a medical facial (read: more powerful and expensive—\$400 per treatment—than a spa version), the Triad is a combination of microdermabrasion, a laser and a chemical peel that produces newer, glowing, more even-toned skin.

“You remember I have never even used moisturizer,” I whine. The truth is, I am afraid. You have only one face. What if the laser burns a hole in my cheek? What if the peel strips my skin and leaves me oozing like the Crypt Keeper?

Reluctantly, I follow Dr. Colbert into the treatment room, where he introduces me to Kim Sevy, the medical aesthetician who will be wielding the laser. (She acts like the head nurse in a delivery room.) She calms me by testing it on my hand. There’s no sensation, not even a measly sting. I feel like a baby for whining.

During the next half hour, I relax into a cushy leather chair while Sevy conducts the Triad, running various tools across my skin. The microdermabrasion is administered with what looks like a toy sandblaster; the friction between it and my skin causes a warm sensation that feels, ironically, like sitting in the sun (if, while you were in the sun, a cat hopped on your chest and began licking your face). Next, Sevy passes a laser pointer-like device across my skin. Except for the faint smell of burning facial hair (which I am none too sorry to lose), it’s also benign. A thin layer of glycolic acid is then swabbed over my face (it stings, but only for about 20 seconds), followed by a neutralizing agent. Sevy smiles, signaling the finale.

I emerge with instant results: fewer spots and shiny cheeks. My skin feels a lot like the way it does after a day at the beach. A little gritty, tighter, with a hint of pink. This is confirmed later at lunch when a friend says I look “glowy.”

Glowy is good. But I want fewer “Hello, ma’ams,” and more “Hot damns!” I decide to book another appointment.

Two weeks later, Dr. Colbert begins my skin transformation’s second stage, which focuses on wrinkle reduction.

“You could benefit from a little Restylane in your nasolabial folds,” he says. Restylane, a solution made of hyaluronic acid (the same stuff that naturally keeps your skin plump), makes wrinkles less severe and noticeable by filling them in. And that means needles—which necessitates an entirely new level of commitment. I mentally backpedal. Do I really need to plump my still-kind-of-charming fine lines? Dr. Colbert tells me that when it comes to nonsurgical treatments, injectables are the most effective way to smooth deep lines and that Restylane, which lasts about six months, will make a big difference.

“It will take 10 years off,” he says firmly.

Ten is a big number. I consent, squeamishly.

As he injects the creases around my mouth, I become terribly annoyed. Perhaps it’s because I am in pain. Needles in your face hurt, even after you’ve been numbed with novocaine, which, unfortunately, is also administered with needles.

As he pokes and surveys, Dr. Colbert explains that most everyone you see on TV has had Restylane or Botox (often, both)—which is why he says women should give themselves a

break in the aspirational beauty department. That he says this as he’s sticking my face with a needle transcends irony.

“I really can’t see much of a difference,” I say when he finishes. And I can’t, minus the pink swelling in and around the injected area, which makes me look like a chimp with a rash.

Then, as an afterthought, I point out a tiny, but bothersome, red mole on the tip of my nose.

“It’s not a mole, it’s a broken blood vessel,” Dr. Colbert says. At my request, he zaps it with a Hyfrecator, also known as a cauterizing wand. The process hurts like a match to the eyeball. But presto! The mark is completely gone in just seconds.

“That’s the first time you’ve smiled all day,” he says. What can I say? Sometimes, it’s the little things.

I go home and fight the urge to stare at my face in the mirror. I’ve spent about \$2,000 on my skin so far—quite an upgrade from soap and water. Will anyone know but me?

Then it happens. I am at my kitchen table, and my babysitter arrives to watch my girls.

“Wow, you look...younger,” she says unprompted, eyeing up my face.

“Really?” I ask, blushing.

You never think you care about turning back the clock until somebody tells you that you look younger. And then your vanity smacks you in the face like Naomi Campbell’s cell phone.

I look younger—like, not as old. I decide to make a third appointment with Dr. Colbert.

My final procedure takes place a month after the Restylane. I am booked for a Titan laser treatment. The Titan, in fact, tightens slack skin by stimulating collagen, which stretches like a sweater as we age (no one wants a face that looks like last fall’s twinset). The rebuilding takes place gradually, so results get more dramatic over a period of two months. If you have three Titans, the net result can be like an invisible face-lift. It can also be used on your stomach, neck, even your bum—if it sags, it can be Titaned. Today the laser will target my jawline.

Before Sevy begins, she warns that each laser pulse will feel like a rubber band’s snap and that if I jerk my head from the table, I could get burned. Point taken. For 90 minutes I lie perfectly still on a flat massage table in a dimly lit room as Sevy works the laser gun inch by inch across my jawline.

And then, I’m done. I can’t say I enjoyed the Titan experience. But I enjoyed the idea of it. Anything that can eliminate a flaccid jawline without slicing and dicing is magic worth believing. I saw a slight difference, but nothing dramatic, as I did only one of the recommended three sessions (so far, that is).

At about \$3,000, my experience with Dr. Colbert was far from cheap, but it was certainly enlightening. It turned me, the total beauty skeptic, into a bit more of a believer, plus I emerged with healthier skin and a younger-looking complexion, as well as a revamped beauty philosophy: We women are far more than the sum of our parts. But maybe we should forgive ourselves for wanting some of those parts to look good.

“ I go home and fight the urge to stare at my face in the mirror. ”