

# Doc Hollywood

How David Colbert, MD, really became the dermatologist to the stars

By Denise Mann

The rest of the world will have to wait until May to see Academy Award-winning actress Jennifer Lawrence barely clad (save for a coat of royal blue paint) as she reprises her role of "Mystique" in the much-anticipated *X-Men* sequel, *X-Men: Days of Future Past*.

Not New York City dermatologist David Colbert, MD. He's already been there and seen that.

In addition to maintaining busy practices in Manhattan and Los Angeles and promoting a luxury skin care line that bears his name, Colbert is the go-to, on-set dermatologist to the stars. Yes, many movies also offer skin care services, including patch and lab testing of makeup and blemish control for actors and production crews, along with craft services and other amenities.

Colbert recently joined the *X-Men* cast in Montreal to make sure that Lawrence's painted-on costume did not irritate her otherwise alabaster skin. In this same capacity, he has helped actor Jim Carrey's "Grinch" go green, and saw to it that Angelina Jolie's skin stayed soft and supple

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD ADLER





Even celebrities get wrinkles.



"I have never had a dermatological problem that he hasn't had an immediate fix for. He has caught things in screenings that I'm sure others would have missed, and that same attention to detail is what makes his cosmetic care so fantastic. I consider myself very fortunate to be one of his countless devoted followers!"

— Christina Ricci

while she filmed the 2010 thriller, *Salt*. In fact, the products he developed for Jolie on the *Salt* set were the initial inspirations for ColbertMD Skincare Daily Nutrition. "It's my job to promote safety and make sure that makeup artists are using gentle cleansers, not overstripping skin," he says. "We make sure the actors look good and help them avoid any skin problems."

An avid surfer, Colbert was recently sidelined after hip resurfacing surgery to repair a labral tear sustained while ripping in the Dominican Republic, and this mandated time out gave him time to reflect on a somewhat atypical career trajectory.

#### A MODEL CAREER

"On-set skin care guru" is a pretty cool gig, and Colbert is clearly grateful, but he admits that happenstance (he has a brother in the biz) and banter among makeup artists are really what started him down this road. It wasn't long before his name started appearing in the see-and-be-seen society columns alongside the stars that he was treating.

He remains modest and humble about his celebrity clientele, which is rumored to include such A-listers as Sienna Miller, Brad Pitt, Michele Williams, Renée Zellweger, Daniel Craig, Naomi Watts, Russel Crowe, Christina Ricci, Rachel Weisz, and a host of top models—many of whom revere him. Colbert's name is mentioned on the red carpet in both hushed and haughty tones as often as Alexander Wang and Oscar de La Renta.

"I have never had a dermatological problem that he hasn't had an immediate fix for. He has caught things in screenings that I'm sure others would have missed, and that same attention to detail is what makes his cosmetic care so fantastic. I consider myself very fortunate to be one of his countless devoted followers!" actress Christina Ricci tells *Plastic Surgery Practice*.

Colbert keeps it real. "Just because we have a celebrity clientele doesn't make us a big deal. It's just part and parcel of who we are. Everybody is human and can get skin cancer or a wrinkle."

So how exactly did he end up as one of Manhattan's premier dermatologists and a favorite among Hollywood's elite? It's a circuitous path, he admits. He studied zoology and romance languages at the University of Iowa before heading off to France to do 2 years of medical school at La Faculte Libre de Medecine in Lille (and yes, he is fluent in French).

Colbert received his medical degree from New York Medical College and completed his dermatology residency at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital in New York. There was also a stint in Boston, where he did a fellowship in acne and wound healing under such luminaries as

Barbara A. Gilchrist, MD, and he served as a consultant for Chanel of Paris.

"I knew I wanted to be a surgeon, a dermatologist, or both. Those are kind of hard decisions to make, so I thought that internal medicine would be a good base," he says.

Today, Colbert is board certified in dermatology and board eligible in internal medicine and emergency medicine. With

dermatologists, internists, and a psychiatrist on staff, Colbert's NYC practice—New York Dermatology Group—reflects his multidisciplinary leanings. Colbert credits much of the success of the practice and product line to his business partner and CEO, JP Van Laere.

"Most doctors don't have good business skills or even any training," he says. "One of the keys to success is realizing that a

## Unique Engler Retractor For Breast Augmentation

Provides Maximum Exposure and Vision for Small Incisions.



Periareolar incision, showing teeth of retractor



Periareolar incision, retractor in place



- Ideal for the Periareolar, Inframammary and Trans-axillary incisions
- Narrow width of blade makes it ideal for use with the smallest incisions
- Long length of blade delivers light and retraction much farther from the incision than standard retractors
- Blade provides exposure for both dissection and hemostasis
- Compatible with all standard, existing light sources and fiber optic cables



ASSI-ABR 54426  
65mmx12mm wide  
blade with teeth,  
Fiber Optic and  
Adapter

ASSI-ABR 54326  
65mmx12mm wide  
blade with Fiber Optic  
and Adapter

Designed by Alan Engler, M.D.  
Patented

**assi**  
ACCURATE SURGICAL & SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS  
For diamond perfect performance®

accurate surgical & scientific instruments corporation  
300 Shames Drive, Westbury, NY 11590  
800.645.3569 516.333.2570 fax: 516.997.4948 west coast: 800.255.9378  
www accuratesurgical.com

© 2011 ASSI





CEO JP Van Laere (left) helps run the show.

doctor should be just that—a doctor—and hire a CEO with business skills. It's crucial for growth."

Still, Colbert's *parache*, skill set, and a little edge, compliments of his time in France, certainly helped the practice become what it is today.

#### VIVE LE FRANCE

The French recognized dermatology as a specialty well ahead of the Americans, which put Colbert ahead of the curve from the get-go.

"David was a trainee in my department at a very exciting time. He contributed importantly to ongoing wound studies then, and I am pleased to see how far he has risen in his field," says Gilchrist, now professor and Chair-Emeritus of the Department of Dermatology at Boston University School of Medicine.

He began practicing in the US during a time when cosmetic dermatology was first taking root. "We had the first inkling that lasers would treat broken blood vessel and pigment disorders, and we knew that the list of potential applications can go on forever," he says, admitting that he had a gigantic head start over colleagues who were terrified of lasers.

And this head start was needed, as soon thereafter dermatologists were almost forced to embrace the aesthetic side of the field or risk losing it all. "Insurance companies went from paying thousands of dollars to treat a melanoma to a couple of hundred, so how were dermatologists expected to pay their bills without embracing the aesthetic side of the business?" he says.

And embrace it they did, along with numerous other specialists looking to cash in on the non-reimbursable side of the business. But it was first-come, first-serve,

and Colbert was there from the beginning and able to stake a claim.

On the cosmetic front, Colbert is known as a mixologist with a light touch.

"David Colbert has an excellent aesthetic eye and unique expertise in cosmetic dermatology. We have many patients in common, and they look natural and youthful, without being over the top," says Sam Rizk, MD, a New York City-based facial plastic surgeon.

"I use a little filler, a little Botox Cosmetic, and some lasers to bring back that youthful glow," Colbert says. "A lot of people are afraid to do a peel and microdermabrasion in the same day, but we have slowly but surely learned that it's not a difficult thing to do."

Colbert groupies (and he definitely has some) clamor for another combination procedure—the Triad. It's a three-step, no-downtime procedure involving

microdermabrasion, laser toning, and exfoliation with lavender flower acids. This procedure is so popular during awards season that Colbert temporarily relocates to Los Angeles to tend to the red carpet sect.

#### MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

With a background in internal medicine, Colbert knows that beauty is not just skin deep. He recently wrote the *High School Reunion Diet*, a book based in part on conversations about food and life with patients, some famous and some not. "You are what you eat," he says.

Of course, this can be very good or very bad depending on your diet.

Raised in Dubuque, Iowa, Colbert has very specific ideas on what is good. "Everything went from my grandmother's garden to the table," he says. But that was then. With the advent of food processing and packaging, "Americans went from lean and mean to more marshmallowy," he says. In his book, his practice, and his home, Colbert advocates for a return to his grandmother's table and encourages a low-glycemic, locally-sourced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, beans, legumes, fish, poultry, lean meat, low-fat dairy, and whole grains.

Despite the tagline "Lose 20 years in 30 days," there's really no gimmick in the *High School Reunion Diet*—just sound advice that is proven to help patients lose weight and reignite their inner glow in time for a special event—say, a high school reunion.

#### A LITTLE HELP FROM HIS FRIENDS

A quick Google search will tell you all about the weight-loss success stories this book inspired, but you will also learn that Colbert is very involved in charity—with a little help from his many celebrity friends. Jolie invited Colbert and his team to accompany her on a mission to Cambodia shortly after *Salt* wrapped. The Academy Award-winning actress is well known for her humanitarian efforts in Cambodia, where she adopted an abandoned boy. While there, Colbert founded a teledermatology clinic through a local hospital and spent several weeks training local nurses on how to perform biopsies, and diagnose cutaneous infections and other maladies. The clinic is thriving today.

Over in Haiti, where 6,000 to 8,000 people lost limbs after the 2010 earthquake that killed more than 220,000

people, Colbert established the not-for-profit NYDG Foundation to raise money for prosthetics and related medical supplies to help the amputees. Rolling Stones front man and icon Mick Jagger served as the guest of honor at its main fund-raising event, and it brought in "\$500,000 in 2 hours," Colbert says. An auction featuring signed guitars from all of the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen clearly sweetened the pot for donors.

He's also involved in charitable efforts in the US, where he serves on the board and as the head physician of up Zus, a sports mentoring charity for inner-city kids.

There's clearly more to Colbert than his cult-like celebrity following, but as his power fund-raising activities attest, it doesn't hurt to have a few famous friends. He rarely gets starstruck anymore, but Colbert admits that there are a few celebrities who—if they walked through his office door—might give him pause. "Bill Clinton, [surfer] Laird Hamilton, and [violinist] Itzhak Perlman," he says. ■

*Denise Mann is the editor of Plastic Surgery Practice. She can be reached at [dmann@allied360.com](mailto:dmann@allied360.com).*

# Leeches

When arterial inflow exceeds venous outflow.

When venous return is a problem, the Hirudo Medicinalis can help provide the solution. Call Leeches U.S.A. and get an immediate, Door to Door, delivery of leeches.

#### Efficacy, too

- Provide the **strongest anticoagulant** known to man.
- Provide **temporary outflow of blood** until the body restores venous ingrowth to the affected tissue.

**Immediate/Overnight Shipment**  
Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. (EST)  
**1.800.645.3569**  
*Immediate shipping on the next available flight.*

**Emergency Delivery Service**  
After hours, weekends, holidays.  
**1.800.473.4673**  
*Immediate shipping on the next available flight.*

**In Canada, call 1.877.373.9222**  
*Immediate shipping on the next available flight.*

**LEECHES U.S.A. LTD.**

**Fax: 516.997.4948 • [www.leechesusa.com](http://www.leechesusa.com)**