

Road test/

HOLISTIC BEAUTY

Call me vain, but I challenge any woman over a certain age to say she hasn't looked in the mirror at least once and considered a little nip and tuck. Going under the surgeon's knife or injecting a paralysing virus like Botox is not what I would call *health smart*, however, so when I heard about 'holistic beauty' treatments, I leapt at the possibility of an alternative route to achieving youthful good looks.

But is the 'holistic' tag - where we look to the East for inspiration and indulge the way of Chinese facial acupuncture, Indian face yoga and Japanese reiki, not to mention the accompanying 'organic' vitamin creams - just the latest spin from a beauty industry adept at reinventing itself? I decided to put forward my tired face and test three practitioners who claimed they could help me look and feel my best, naturally.

1 so zen. Fumi Yakamoto runs a practice called Zen Facial. Barefoot and beaming, Fumi invites me into her apartment overlooking Bronte beach - a long way from her former life as a corporate powerhouse in Singapore. "I've always been interested in the bridge

between east and west," Fumi says. The diminutive practitioner has diplomas in Ki yoga, Zen shiatsu, reiki, aromatherapy and reflexology as well as a practice called 'facial harmony' sometimes used by actors to convey a fuller range of emotions.

"A person's physical, mental and spiritual health is reflected in the face," Fumi says. I lie on the table as Fumi waves a few bottles of aromatic oils under my nose and asks me to choose one. "How would you like to look when you leave here today?"

"Relaxed and ten years younger."

Placing a hand on my tummy, Fumi diagnoses my 'hara' or abdominal energy. She detects my weak spots. "How's your digestion?"

"Not the same since Morocco 1992!"

"And your energy level?"

Now there's a sore point; I have a pocket rocket 5-year-old daughter and a 16-month baby who is still breastfed and waking at night.

Fumi holds my feet and says, "Focus on your breath." The warmth from the reiki spreads through my body. I listen to crashing waves and a clarinet concerto on the CD player, and begin to unwind.

Moving to my face, Fumi's fingertips knead the muscles like dough, working my acupressure points to stimulate the connective tissues and elastin fibres. This boosts blood and lymphatic flow and collagen production and helps to flush out waste products. "It's a facelift for the body and soul," says Fumi.

I try to follow her chatter but fall into a doze. When I open my eyes I feel like I've been asleep for hours. Fumi's smiling face bends over mine. "When you're ready, come to the mirror."

My cheeks glow and the furrow between my eyebrows has softened. My skin feels smoother and I'm more relaxed than I've been in ages.

Unfortunately, when I get home, my husband doesn't notice anything different, but that's not unusual. However, I do manage to stay calm all evening, even when the children fight and the baby throws her dinner at me.

Fumi recommends six treatments, once a week, for a noticeable difference, and then a 'top-up' every few months. Regular clients report improved muscle tone, skin texture and colour and a reduction in fine lines as well as an overall feeling of rejuvenation. Fumi gives me homework: eat slowly, meditate and be nice to yourself. If only I had the time (and budget) to regularly indulge her therapy, the years might start dropping off me!

Zen Facial

- Initial consultation – 90 minutes – \$150
- Six week program \$880
- www.zenfacial.com

2 Best face forward. The next week I see facial acupuncturist Darren Spowart at his stylish inner city flat. Darren is smooth-faced and softly spoken

and glides across the room like the professional ballet dancer he once was. On the wall is a striking photo of him in full flight with the Australian Ballet.

"While I was dancing, I used acupuncture for my injuries rather than anti-inflammatories," Darren says. "I was so impressed that when I retired, I studied Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and acupuncture." More recently, Darren trained in Canada in the art of facial acupuncture.

"I'm interested in people looking the best they possibly can, without surgery." Darren says. "The demand for cosmetic acupuncture is definitely on the rise, although some people are nervous about having 60 to 90 needles in their face and body".

Darren takes my pulse and looks at my tongue. According to Chinese medicine, my puffy eyes and slightly saggy jowls are due to an underactive stomach and spleen. "The face is a billboard for what is going on in the body," Darren says. "By using tiny needles on strategic points on the body, acupuncture aims to restore a person's health by balancing their Chi or life force. Disease and illness can occur when the energy is blocked."

In cosmetic acupuncture, needles are placed on the body to treat the underlying condition and dozens of tiny hair like needles inserted in the face to stimulate blood flow, enhance skin tone and reduce wrinkles.

I lie a little nervously on the treatment table as Darren inserts needles in my legs, ankles, and forearms and in the webbing between my thumb and index finger. "Ouch, that one in my hand really hurts," I say.

"Just relax. That's for your large intestine. And try not to frown."

Darren gently smooths my brow before turning my face into a pin cushion. It's particularly uncomfortable when he rolls the skin from my jaw line toward my head and inserts a series of pins to 'tonify' the area. Once the needles are in though, it feels surprisingly relaxing.

Acupuncture however is not for everyone; there are contraindications for epileptics, haemophiliacs, pregnant women and hepatitis sufferers. Most practitioners recommend a series of 12 to 15 sessions. One happy customer is 46-year-old Helen who's had 12 sessions with Darren. "I'm really pleased. My frown lines and the bags under my eyes have lessened dramatically and the scar on my cheek has faded," she reports. "My beauty therapist says my skin is tauter and friends say I'm looking really well." Since the treatment Helen has gained confidence and feels less self-conscious, especially when having her photo taken.

Facial Acupuncture

- Darren Spowart charges \$130 per session
- Some private health funds provide partial cover.

3 organic beauty. My final appointment is with Sharon McGlinchy from MV Radiance. She ushers me into a warm and dimly lit room. In her lilting northern English accent she tells me how MV (my vision) Radiance was born. "I was a mainstream beauty therapist and quiet snooty about cosmetic brands. Then about ten years ago, I had a client who reacted severely to the petrochemicals in commercial creams. To help her, I did a weekend workshop on organic beauty products and it really changed my way of thinking."

Using a combination of essential oils, Sharon created a cleanser that has become the flagship of her own organic skin care range, now exported overseas and sold locally through her website.

"The cleanser not only gave clients with sensitive skin great results, other clients also began to ask for facials using my own products."

MV skin care is manufactured in Queensland. "I've developed a unique process to preserve the life force of the ingredients," Sharon claims.

"Really? How do you do that?" I ask.

Sharon smiles. "Now, I'm not going to tell you that, am I?"

Sharon has also studied yoga, mediation and reiki. "MV radiance is the bridge between beauty and

complementary medicine," she says. "My treatments are not procedures – they are rituals."

Eager to experience the treatment for myself, I slide under the blankets and Sharon softly talks me through a guided mediation. At first I resist. My mind is jittery; I have a headache from skipping my coffee and am flustered from running late.

Sharon gently cleanses my face with a divine smelling cream and then applies a mineral rich masque. Using slow, rhythmic strokes and the healing power of reiki, she unknots my ropey neck, shoulders and face. The technique stretches and releases the fascia, also known as the fine gossamer tissue connected to the muscles.

"People don't realise how tightly they hold their facial muscles, usually because of stress, unhappiness or just working on the computer. They are pleasantly surprised how much better they look after a treatment. Their skin glows – and there's none of that redness or blotchiness from aggressive commercial peels or masks," Sharon says.

I sink into a reverie. At one point, I have the feeling someone else is in the room, helping Sharon to massage my feet. When I come to, I cautiously tell Sharon my thoughts. Without so much as blinking, she says: "Oh yes, that happens all the time with energetic healing."

As for me, I'm not sure if the treatment made me look younger or more beautiful, but my skin certainly

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smelt heavenly and I was beatifically serene all day and slept deeply that night.

MV Radiance

- 90 minute treatment \$185.00
- www.mvskincare.com.au

So, am I sold on holistic beauty? The results were not at all what I expected. Rather than changing my looks, I've changed my perspective on beauty. I am tempted to go back for more acupuncture to boost my energy, and I'm certainly more wary of putting chemicals and synthetic creams on my skin. But it was Fumi's quote from Audrey Hepburn that sticks in my mind.

"For attractive lips, speak words of kindness.
For lovely eyes, seek out the good in people.
For a slim figure, share your food with the hungry.
For beautiful hair, let a child run his/her fingers through it once a day. For poise, walk with the knowledge that you never walk alone. The beauty of a woman with passing years only grows!"*

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*An extract from Sam Levenson's "Time Tested Beauty Tips" - one of Audrey's favourite poems which was read at her funeral.

Break Out Box

DIY organic beauty treatments

Avoid absorbing nasty petrochemicals; instead look after your skin with the sort of sumptuous, homemade beauty treatments our grandmothers used. According to Carla Oates, author of 'Feeding your Skin', our biggest organ needs to be nourished with a variety of natural nutrients to thrive. Carla is a big fan of pure oils - such as olive, almond, apricot, soybean and sunflower - to cleanse and moisturise skin and hair. "Unlike mineral oils, they won't block your pores and the natural lipids and humectants seal in the moisture," Carla says.

"Macadamia oil is great for mature skins, while jojoba is good for normalising oily skin. I use coconut oil instead of soap in the shower and then wipe it off with a wet flannel. Just be careful you don't slip, though! "

For replenishing masks, Carla recommends oatmeal, honey and yoghurt, while fruit juices with citrus pectin make superior hydrating gels. "Since using natural treatments my skin and hair have a vitality and radiance they didn't have when I used synthetic products."