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Spa gives fading faces a lift – a \$140 bio-lift



MICHAEL S. WIRTZ / Inquirer Staff Photographer

Turning from the sin of soap on skin: Danuta Mieloch applies a collagen mask to Nicole Litterer at Rescue Rittenhouse Spa Lounge on South 17th.

By Karen Heller
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

At a certain age, as the French philosopher Catherine Deneuve observed, a woman must choose between her face and her *derrière*.

Deneuve, like most European women, chose her face. (Wouldn't we all?) Besides, on the Continent, exercise is something one does tottering on heels from boutique to bistro, or by lifting fork to mouth.

American women, being greedy, want a fabulous physique and luminous skin. They want results now.

Day spas have exploded in this country — up 20 percent in the last two years, and 36 percent in the Northeast, where there are now 2,800, according to an International Spa Association survey.

Americans have made up for paltry skin care in record time, jettisoning the bar of Neutrogena and drugstore creams for regimens that resemble research labs.

There are women in New York who spend \$15,000 annually on their face. That's a car.

There are half-ounce eye treatments, basically a pat of butter, that sell for more than round-trip airfare to Boston.

There are creams that cost \$500 and won't last six weeks.

"Basically," one Main Line woman with impeccable skin recently acknowledged, "I had to make the decision between my face

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MICHAEL S. WIRTZ / Inquirer Staff Photographer

At Rescue Rittenhouse, Danuta Mieloch gives Nicole Litterer a bio-lift facial. Low-level electrical currents are administered. The idea: Slow down, pretend you're in Europe.

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and redoing the master bath."

Skin is the new fur.

Actually, it is our fur.

Still, "many women go directly from the bar of soap to a face-lift," says Danuta Mieloch. "In Poland, if you give a woman \$100, she would spend it on her skin before she would spend it on clothes."

Mieloch's mission is to provide a safe harbor, where women can avoid the catastrophe of soap, and perhaps bypass the knife altogether. Last month, she opened Rescue Rittenhouse Spa Lounge at 255 S. 17th St. in Center City with her business partner, Mina Gough.

Mieloch, known as Dana, is Polish. Gough is Swedish.

They're neck-injury-inducingly beautiful, towering blondes who admit to being in their 40s, with gorgeous skin that looks half that, the best possible advertisement for their services.

It's like the deli scene in *When Harry Met Sally* You look at them and think: "I'll do whatever they're doing."

The third partner is Aga, a Yorkshire terrier the size of a sandwich.

Dana, Mina and Aga travel everywhere together. Aga is not blond.

Mieloch and Gough studied civil engineering but always had an interest in wellness. Mieloch was a nurse before training in Europe as an aesthetician. Thirteen years ago, she moved to New York to work at several top spas. Gough, whose father's family was from Philadelphia, came to New York in 1984 and managed several businesses, including spas.

Mieloch had clients who would come in weekly for treatments and products.

"They were skin-care junkies," Gough says.

"We're kind of done with the New York hustle," says Mieloch. "We're looking for more quality of life," Gough echoes. "We find Philadelphia very European."

The 4,000-square-foot Rescue Rittenhouse, with cherry floors and white furnishings, includes six treatment rooms, a dramatic space occupying the Medical Tower Building's entire second floor, a surprising though comforting sight for patients on their way to the periodontist.

In recent years, skin care has become so sophisticated yet wondrously foreign.

To visit a cutting-edge aesthetician with her arsenal of strange elixirs, tonics, waters, vapors and potions seems like a brief, restful sojourn to another country, possibly another planet.

Rescue Rittenhouse's bio-lift facial is billed as producing "effects so dramatic, your friends may think you've had a face-lift," which sounds promising and less painful.

During the \$140 treatment, Mieloch administered an oxygen blast, magnificently scented goo billed as created by NASA, another as being perfected by a Nobel Prize-winning chemist.

There was talk of RNA and DNA, lactic acid. There was the introduction of natural ingredients such as yeast, mimosa bark, algae, and other matter one might scrape from food or foot that was being slathered over the face. There was also salmon milt.

Don't ask what salmon milt is.

The spa's aim: Avoid the catastrophe of soap, perhaps bypass the knife altogether.

Mieloch's skin is so incandescent, and her technique so soothing, including 15 minutes of massage, that the client surrenders. So, milt away.

The cornerstone of the bio-lift, de rigueur in New York and Los Angeles, is low-level electrical currents administered to the face from a machine resembling a defibrillator with sponges.

The things one does for beauty. And, yes, afterward the skin looked and felt better than it had in years.

Other Rescue Rittenhouse treatments include placenta masks, collagen, caviar-enhanced enhancements, head-to-toe facials, neck and décolleté revival, jet-lag massage, and the "Zoom Groom," eight services done in record time for busy people, including a facial, manicure and pedicure in one hour.

Mieloch and Gough's intent, though, is to have clients slow life down and relax, as one might in Europe. "People are so busy jet-lagging and exuberating," Gough says. "You need to make time for yourself and create a nice lifestyle."

Yes, you do.

Contact staff writer Karen Heller at 215-854-2586 or kheller@phillynews.com.

Rescue Rittenhouse Spa Lounge
255 S. 17th St., second floor
Phone: 215-772-2766