

Beauty—it's harder than it looks, our author discovers



A Strange Encounter

When **Michael Stusser** visits the Nordstrom cosmetics counter, he finds beauty comes at a price

MY PERSONAL HYGIENE HABITS ARE EXCELLENT (for a guy). I occasionally floss, use leave-in-conditioner and cut as much of the hair out of my nostrils as I can reach. That said, I can look better. Weather has taken its toll on my face, I have dark circles under my eyes and my elbows are as rough as a wool couch on an outdoor patio. I'd sign up for a facelift, but the sight of my own blood makes me as queasy as Courtney Love on a bender. Then I realized that a fountain-of-youth cream might be the perfect solution—a way to shave off the years without resorting to stitches and scalpels.

I decided to consult with the experts at the Nordstrom cosmetics counter, hitting the flagship store on a Wednesday afternoon in hopes I wouldn't run into anyone I knew.

While I expected the calm ambience of a Zen day spa, the floor at Nordy's more closely resembled a mad scientist's laboratory: Dozens of practitioners toiled beneath bright lights and microscopic mirrors, gently placing piles of chemical powders in Petri-like dishes as they probed, blotted and swabbed seated patients.

The only man within a two-floor radius, I was clearly a fish out of water (and had the calloused gills to prove it). Attempting to orient, I tiptoed around the various departments, stumbling from blush to polish to perfume without a clue; customers and saleswomen glared at me as though I was a street person looking for a place to pee. I searched for an area that looked "manly" and found myself tossed ashore in one of the many mirrored lipstick sections.

"Can I help you, sir?"

A woman in need of a new hairstylist and a bathroom with better lighting approached in her white lab coat. Her face was muddied with a thick tan base; it would have taken weeks to uncover her true coloring. Suddenly my blemish problem seemed easy to solve.

"I'm just wondering what things I might do to look...more fabulous," I replied, sounding surprisingly *Queer Eye*. She led me—thankfully—away from the lipstick, and toward a counter laden with sleek bottles and jars of potions.

"Forever young would be nice," I mentioned, while staring at something labeled "PEEL & REVEAL." It came equipped with a "resurfacing tool" that made my razor look like a Q-tip.

"But I'd like to keep my face on."

"First I'd suggest we do some exfoliating."

"Um, ouch?"

"It's not like we're doing an extreme makeover," she replied, giving me that "you've obviously never given birth" look.

My transformation into a would-be Dick Clark began when she handed me a pink tube of Christian Dior's Extra Vital Restoring Serum. "This will remove dead cells and slow the appearance of aging."

"My main concern," I whispered, "is getting rid of the purple slugs under my eyes."

Sliding me a thimble-size vial of Vibrant—touted as an elixir for dark circles and puffiness—Ms. (too much) Covergirl slunk off to a more beautiful customer.

Exhausted from my 15-minute shopping spree, I hit the chair at Lancôme, assisted by a woman who exuded a Sophia Loren-like ageless quality. I wanted what she had.

She showed me products for "first signs of aging" (too late), wrinkles and dermo-creases (closer), loss of firmness (hey!) and signs of stress (you betcha). I wound up with a mini-urn of Résolution Eye D-Contraxol (\$49, but the accents were free) and a gentle suggestion that "under-eye concealer might help in your case." For guys out there, that's makeup, plain and simple—and until I'm performing with Wayne Newton or Liza in the geriatric road show, I'll steer clear of the greasepaint, thankyouverymuch.

Figuring a little local wisdom might go a long way, I ended up at the Kiehl's counter. A fair-haired plain Jane gave me the bad news.

"To be honest, there's really no treatment that will eliminate the puffiness. A lot of it's hereditary. Genetics."

"Yes, but that woman said aging is optional..."

"She's on commission. Putting watery lotion over blue puff-bags won't help. You're going to want to reduce caffeine, drink lots of water, maybe change your diet and get some sleep."

It figures that to change my face I've got to alter my whole lifestyle. In hopes of staving off age and rejuvenating my mug, I left with four items totaling \$300 and a vow to make some changes. (Maybe plastic surgery wasn't such a bad idea after all.) I'll be giving up laughing (wrinkles), cocktails (dehydration), sunlight, fatty foods and anything that keeps me awake, just for starters. My life will be hell, but I'll look like a million bucks! **S**