

# Facial photoshop

The breakthrough Fraxel laser treatment works pixel-by-pixel on the skin to rejuvenate your face, reports **CHEAH UI-HOON**

**W**OMEN come with a 'shopping list' of what they want done, with prices next to the items, men aren't as knowledgeable or well-read. But what they want is something that will show results, and doesn't require repeat trips to the clinic," says Low Chai Ling of The Sloane Clinic.

Forget the skin-deep, temporary, pampering facial. Asian men aren't shy to go for the "real" age-erasing thing today — the laser treatment that "re-upholsters" the face with visible results and minimal therapy time.

"Men who come to us just know they're looking aged, and they want something done, although they may not know what. When men age, their skin just looks older — probably a cumulative effect of years of neglect," Dr Low explains.

While women have the same ageing process, their "mitigation" procedures — ie, creams and lotions, and regular facials — start much earlier so that the onslaught of age is less visible and delayed, she explains.

"We're seeing a number of men from their 30s upwards who want to keep looking good come for laser treatments. Surprisingly, older men — those in their 50s — too have gotten past the stigma, and are seeking laser treatments," says Dr Low.

Compared to women, men want something fast, effective and quick. "They're not quite keen to do a course of treatments which will require them to come to the clinic regularly," says Dr Low.

For the fast, effective and quick, she recommends the latest Fraxel laser treatment — a hybrid treatment which combines earlier generation laser treatment practices, but does away with the side effects of traditional laser treatments. Other laser treatments currently available in the mar-



**Modernistic:** The Sloane Clinic brings a flavour of Beverly Hills into Chip Bee Garden, with its designer look and three TV screens installed on its glass wall to catch the attention of passers-by

ket, are like Erbium laser, Erbium Lite, Long Pulse, Infra Red (Titan), and LED Photodynamic Therapy.

Up till now, there have been two primary categories of laser skin rejuvenation: ablative laser resurfacing and non-ablative laser or light-based therapy, each with their pros and cons, explains Dr Low.

"Ablative techniques remove all layers of the skin, from the top to the deepest layer and stimulates collagen growth — and that's the one you'll see in programmes like Extreme Makeover. It's painful and you'll have redness for weeks, and even up to three months, but you'll definitely see re-

sults." Examples of ablative lasers are CO<sub>2</sub> lasers and Erbium:Yag lasers, which basically deep-burn off the layers of skin and generate superior cosmetic results, but carry with them high risks and have prolonged healing and recovery times.

Non-ablative techniques, on the other hand, were introduced to the market about five years ago, and generally carry fewer risks but produce only limited clinical results of cosmetic improvement, hence needing numerous treatments over several months because the top layer of the skin is left intact.

Examples of non-ablative treat-

ments includes cooltouch lasers, long-pulsed Nd:YAG lasers, IPL and Titan.

Dr Low explains how the Fraxel laser treatment (FLT) is a hybrid of ablative and non-ablative methods — as it treats the deep layers of the skin and leaves the top layer intact. The breakthrough treatment gives the positive results of ablative resurfacing with the low-impact benefits of non-ablative therapies.

FLT procedures works by making corrections to small patterns of cells on the skin, leaving some zones of the skin untouched. "Like photoshop — it works pixel-by-pixel on the skin — similar to the way a computer artist might manipulate a digital photo-

graph," says Dr Low.

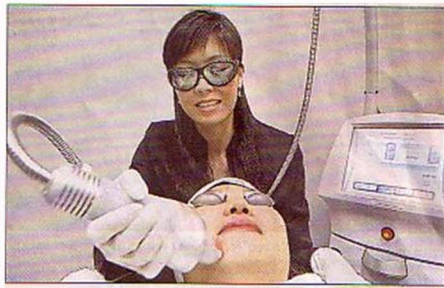
This "fractional" resurfacing treats between 12 and 20 per cent of the skin at any one time, permitting the surrounding tissue to assist in the rapid healing of treated cells. FLT also reaches deep into the dermis to stimulate collagen growth. A major benefit of the FLT is that with an 80 per cent "reservoir" of normal skin to help the healing, this cuts down on the redness and side effects.

What can be corrected with FLT? Acne scarring, cites Dr Low, as well as wrinkles, fine lines and skin discoloration caused by ageing and sun exposure.

Patients who come in first have a mask of anaesthetic cream put on their face for 30 to 45 minutes. Then the cream is removed, and a blue gel is applied (think of the smurfs) which is a safety feature as the laser only works on the area which is blue.

The doctor guides the laser over the patient's face, which takes about 30 minutes, and the sensation would be one of a lot of tiny pin pricks. Like shaving or a light massage, says Dr Low, as the skin is already numbed by the anaesthetic cream.

After the treatment, a cold mask is put on the patient's face, and the main side effect the patient will have is a slight sunburn look. "After the treatment, your skin will change over time as collagen growth will be stimulated," Dr Low says. You could call it "re-upholstering" the face — where it's made smoother and fresher. And men, like women, aren't afraid to go to the therapy table for it.



**Re-upholstering:** Dr Low (top) administering the Fraxel treatment; and a supplied picture (above) of a woman before and after the procedure

## Guys find no stigma to seeking cosmetic help

By **CHEAH UI-HOON**

A HAIR stylist, a businessman and a medical student, who had the same issue in common? If the three got together, they could start comparing notes about their complexions and experiences with cosmetic surgery.

"I've never gone for a facial in my life because my skin is sensitive. But I had a really bad acne-scared complexion," says Leslie Yap, 34, a hair stylist. "As a businessman, it's important to maintain your image and try to look youthful," says Wee Cheng Lim, in his 50s.

A third-year medical student in Australia, Joshua Wong, 29, thinks he's normal — not vain — to want to have a good complexion. "There's definitely less stigma to guys getting cosmetic 'help' nowadays."

Mr Wee and Mr Yap are new converts to laser therapy — all three went for Fraxel Laser Treatment at The Sloane Clinic — and are enthusiastic about it to their friends.

"A lot of my male friends — who're golfers with wrinkles and uneven tans on their faces — are interested in this treatment now that I look younger and fresher, with smoother skin," says Mr Wee, an Indonesian who's in the textile industry. "I'm not shy about it, because I think maintaining image is important."

Despite the \$1,250 price tag per treatment (\$5,000 for a course of five treatments), Mr Wee thinks it's worth it. "Because I can see the results," he says. "Even my wife is keen to go for it now. I'd say it has made me look 10 years younger."

Mr Yap, despite being a hair stylist, wasn't about to do anything to his skin, until he met his friend, Dr Low Chai Ling, who was his customer. "She convinced me that the treatment would give me back my "true" look — without the acne scarring." He developed bad acne after contracting chicken pox at the age of 22.

"My customers have noticed the difference now that I've done the treatment, so I've been telling them why. I'm not just out to tell people, especially those who've known me for years," he says.

He recounted how his face felt and looked like it was sunburnt right after the two-hour-plus treatment, and then the skin started peeling like it would after a normal sunburn. After three or four days, he had his "new" look.

For medical student Joshua, he also went for Fraxel because he wanted to get rid of the bad scars on his face, from acne. Was leaving his complexion as it is an option? "Well, the reason most people can't go for a treatment is because it's expensive. If they have money, I think they'll do it."

His parents didn't pay for his treatment, he clarifies, as he paid for it out of his own savings, working at a cyber cafe. "My scars made me feel bad, but I wouldn't have asked my parents to fork out the money either."

There is a shift in guys' views towards cosmetic surgery today, he feels, although some do still think about it as make-up. "Guys are definitely more conscious about their looks today. I guess it's media."