

Last year I went on about becoming part of the Normandie and Portia set. You know, driving an oversized 4x4, 'doing' lunch and dropping casually that I visit a dermatologist, before hopping and skipping off in a flurry of Jimmy Choo clatter.

The operative word in that sentence being 'dermatologist' – those elusive skin doctors that supposedly only the super-rich and celebrity orientated can only afford. However, after discovering the delights of one last year, I swore that along with my quarterly dentist and GP check-ups, I would also add my dermatologist to the list. It was, after all, like getting a tailor-made suit, an investment well worth its money.

After two months my skin was radiating like never before and those pesky open pores and blackheads seemed to

ILLUSTRATION: T. PRASADAN



have taken a long vacation off to neverland. I had the healthiest skin I had ever experienced in my life – I was totally smitten and my love affair with dermatology had begun. It seemed like a match made in heaven.

But now a year on, like many modern-day relationships, has the novelty worn off? Is the honeymoon period over? Are we now living streets apart and avoiding each other at all costs?

The thing is, we all know how great a product or therapy can seem initially, but once the effects wear off, that new jar of anti-wrinkle-wrestling, spot-me-no-more, freckle-busting, fresh-faced-forever lotion is not the same wonderment we experienced before. The test of time steps in and worms begin to creep out of the woodwork. It's a sad fact, but perfection rarely lasts, does it?

The temptation, as a cynical journalist, is to declare war and scandal onto this page, I can't help it, like my incessant urge to ask anyone 50 questions before they can formally introduce themselves, cynicism runs thick and fast within my blood. I love to uncover a disaster but truth be known, if I'm entirely honest, I'm still utterly and undeniably smitten. In fact, I can't live without my monthly check-up.

My savvy dermatologist is Mona Merhej. She's a no-nonsense skin genius and knows exactly what to prescribe, and how to deal with any skin ailment before it arises. She is, in a word, a total skin guru. A year on, with Mona's sumptuous facials and skscription of products, I frequently get comments on what great skin I have, never wear foundation and hardly ever get spots. I've even visited other facialists, who BM (Before Mona), would wax lyrical on the list of problems my skin was suffering, and now rave about what a firm and luminous complexion I have.

In fact, I now enjoy my skin routine. Where I used to dread the twice-daily cleansing-toning-moisturising chore, because it used to remind me of how many blackheads, pimples and fine lines I needed to blast, I actually look forward to it. When you look in the mirror and like what you see, maintaining it becomes a fun and fruitful experience.

So what exactly is Mona's secret? How is that dermatology can reap such great rewards? Each and every skin is different and you need an expert to tell you exactly how to treat it. Just like you wouldn't go into a pharmacy without a doctor's prescription, you shouldn't put anything on your face without an expert's opinion.

A dermatologist will look at your skin in detail and only prescribe the right products for you. They also know what the market best has to offer and can find you a line which doesn't contain too many chemicals or damaging ingredients. I used to be of the ilk whereby I'd change my products every month, just to ensure optimum results. This made my skin spotty and irritated. I've now been using the same products for a year (with some changes in moisturisers to deal with the fluctuating climate) and I am 100 per cent convinced my skin is happier. A dermatologist will also give you tailor-made facials to target specific problems your skin may be suffering. There's a lot to be said about having the right facial for your complexion. I've since gone in for various different facials, other than Mona's, and after a couple of weeks my skin was not responding in a positive manner. Mona's facials, however, leave my skin super-soft and glowing for weeks and I can definitely feel the difference. So what's my verdict a year on? Just like your GP and dentist, find a dermatologist and stick to your check-ups. It's a beauty must and one thing you'll never go back on. ●

QUICK-FIX ADDRESS BOOK

● Mona Merhej at EuroAmerician Clinic (04) 3485575

Vanity Fair

It's been a year since *Faye Marchant* first visited a dermatologist – and she raved about the results. The question is, is she still head over heels in love?