

And Now, A Facial For the Other End

by ANNA BAHNEY

"Hey slim," a man called out to Rhonda Walker at a party last week, "you looking really good tonight."

And why wouldn't she?

Ms. Walker, 27, heads to the gym five times a week and has gone from a size 22 to a size 12 since last Thanksgiving, losing almost 60 pounds.

"I had a little miniskirt on, some little boots and I felt really confident," she said.

Still, she didn't think the attention was a result of her workout regimen or the cut of her skirt. Rather it was because of a regular facial she gets that she says lifts, tones and tightens a part of her that is -well, not her face.

"I don't want to tell my friends my secret," Ms. Walker said. "I feel like they might laugh at me."

Call it what you will - backside, bum or booty - there is skin down there, and in today's heated spa market, where there is skin, there is treatment.

With the recent fixation on the junk in the trunk, spas are promoting special "facials" for the posterior in Miami, Los Angeles, Minneapolis and Boston, as well as in New York

The treatments are part of a wave of non-invasive services that spas have developed to capitalize on clients who have income to spare, a desire to repair body parts they don't like and a compulsion to buff, tighten and pamper every bit of skin.

Including there, on the derrière.

They remain largely a novelty, more seasonal spring and summer, when more skin is showing

than year-round, and more of a marketing tactic to bring clients into spas, said Susie Ellis of Spa Finder Inc., a travel and marketing company.

Some treatments for the buttocks concentrate on cleansing and detoxifying, just as with a regular facial. Others use microcurrent therapy or microdermabrasion in more involved treatments, aiming to reshape the silhouette, reduce cellulite and even lift and tone the backside.

Or so the spa owners claim. Some dermatologists said any tightening and lifting that clients believe they feel from the treatments are probably caused by swelling of the underlying tissue.

"You could take a rolling pin and roll your legs; you would see that your legs look better," said Dr. Debra Jaliman, a dermatologist and spokeswoman for the American Academy of Dermatology. "It is just swelling. There are less expensive ways to do it."

The facial that Ms. Walker gets at **Smooth Synergy**, a spa in Midtown Manhattan, begins with a massage of the backside by an aesthetician using an exfoliating papaya-and-mint scrub. Once the area, from about the lower back to the upper thigh, is clean, eight black Post-it-size adhesive pads are placed at points

on and around each buttock cheek, and two are placed on each alter thigh then wires from the bulky pink Diamond Dynamic Waveform therapy machine are plugged into the pads. When the currents are turned on, adjustments in intensity can be made by turning silver dials. (Sorry, it doesn't go toll.)

For 45 minutes, the machine pulses wave patterns that resemble the body's muscle messages. That is followed by a full-body organic spray tan, which includes the face. The 90-minute treatment is \$160. Spa professionals say the effects - tighter and totted buttocks - last for two days, while the tan remains for five to seven days. Packages of 12 and 20 treatments are available; the owners, of course, say the treatment has to be repeated several times for maximum benefit.

New treatments feed a compulsion to buff, tighten and pamper every bit of skin.

Ms. Walker, an administrative assistant for a financial company, used a bonus to buy a microcurrent treatment package in July. The cost was \$1,200 for 10 sessions, including some for her abdomen, too.

"My friend, she didn't know I was getting this done," Ms. Walker said. When the friend complimented the way she looked in a particular patrol pants, Ms. Walker said, "I thought, 'This is working.'"

For some people it isn't as much about the reshaping as it is about resurfacing and relaxing.

Leah Simon-Clarke, owner of Extrados Spa, in Minneapolis, has been offering buttocks facials for two years. Her spa's treatment includes cleaning and exfoliation and a massage of the gluteal muscles and lower back.

While such treatments may be part of the professional regimen for the few who actually show off their ruses, like swimsuit models or strippers, our own backsides suffer their own occupational stress and strain. "When people are sitting all day, they may be sweating or collecting oil and can get clogged pores in that area," Ms. Simon-Clarke said. "The treatment is great for cellulite and acne. But even if you don't have issues, it is relaxing."

That is why Aleksa Montpetit 28, has been going to Ms. Simon-Clarke's salon to get a rear facial every two months for the past year, she said. She has less interest in any cosmetic benefits than in attaining a deep state of relaxation, which is especially important to her now that she is four months pregnant

with her second child, she said.

Still, she can't quite persuade her friends to try it.

"I think people may be hesitant, because they may feel uncomfortable about it," Ms. Montpetit said, "but all my friends get Brazilian waxes, which is way more involved."

Kristin Panariello, who runs a spa boutique in the Reed Center in Manhattan, has been doing a buttocks microdermabrasion service for about two and a half years. After microdermabrasion the area, she calms any redness using a vitamin C lotion, and then applies elastin to tighten the skin. Then she applies a thermal mask that heats up the skin and hardens like a cast.

"I do have models. I have the stay-at-home mom," Ms. Panariello said of the regulars who come in for these treatments. "I have the person who is sitting at their desk. I have lawyers. It is women who want to take care of themselves." (She said she also treats men, particularly those who are athletic; sweating often, they tend to break out in that area.)

Marie Simm, 44, an accountant in Manhattan who is one of Ms. Panariello's clients, said it is all about feeling good. "It is like when you have pretty lingerie, and only you know it," Ms. Simm said. "That's what this gives me."

For more info on **Smooth Synergy**, visit on the web at www.smoothsynergy.com

