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BEAUTY

EDITOR: SARAH BROWN

SPOT-ON

SMOOTH-SKINNED ARIZONA MUSE IN A GIVENCHY BY RICCARDO TISCI CAP AND A PETER PILOTTO SILK TOP. DETAILS, SEE IN THIS ISSUE. PHOTOGRAPHED BY PETER LINDBERGH. FASHION EDITOR: MARIE-AMÉLIE SAUVÉ.

ALL CLEAR

WHAT'S MORE AGING THAN WRINKLES? UNEVEN SKIN. CALL THEM FRECKLES, CALL THEM SUNSPOTS—THANKS TO THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY, MAURA EGAN CALLS THEM ALMOST GONE.

I am speckled and freckled, my skin dotted with clover-like clusters of little brown bursts. Some came naturally, as I'm a fair-skinned, auburn-haired girl. Others have popped up recently on my chest and the backs of my hands like unexpected guests—reminders of too many summers in the sun, waiting for the day that I would feel the glow instead of the burn, even though I knew better.

While I wouldn't want to erase my sun-dappled skin entirely (I've come to like the cascade of freckles across the

bridge of my nose), I do long for a more splotch-free complexion. With even-toned skin, says Manhattan dermatologist Debra Jaliman, M.D., "you don't even need to wear makeup. That's a sign of youth." As I enter my fourth decade, signs of youth are welcome things.

My grandmother—an unabashed sun worshipper in her day, and the woman from whom I've inherited my pale skin—may have had to live with her spots, but today, I have a whole slew of options to get rid of mine. At the dermatologist's office, the stars are

the Fraxel Dual Laser, which targets dark spots with pinpoint beams of energy, and the Clear + Brilliant, a gentle laser ideal for those with less severe sun damage. The most encouraging news, though, may be at the cosmetics counter, where a wave of innovations is making it possible to launch a successful counterattack against blotches at home, too.

"The hardest thing we treat in dermatology is pigmentation," said Anne Chapas, M.D., when I visited her Union Square Laser *beauty* >146

Dermatology office. She was explaining “how we turn on and off melanocytes,” the mechanisms in our cells that produce melanin—pigment—and can produce too much (resulting in irregularities) when stimulated by UV exposure and free radicals. “Lasers dissolve the melanin right away, but creams can certainly lighten the skin,” she said. “You just have to keep at it.”

I decided I would see Chapas for Fraxel on my décolletage—the part of my body that has seen the most damage simply because I routinely forget to apply sunscreen to it. “I wish I had invented the thing,” the Upper East Side dermatologist Michele Green, M.D., said approvingly when I told her of my plans. “It erases sun damage so evenly,

been running through volcanic rock in Iceland for 400 years as a brightening agent in its Diorsnow DNA Reverse White Reveal Night Concentrate, and Kiehl’s is gung-ho for the activated vitamin C (said to physically break down melanin clusters) in its Clearly Corrective Dark Spot Solution. L’Oréal Paris’ Youth Code Dark Spot Correcting & Illuminating Serum promises to stop lurking spots from ever surfacing; Chanel is launching Le Blanc, the range that has been a blockbuster since its debut in Asia last year.

As a plan of attack, I mapped out my body like a cattle chart. I dabbed Elure’s Advanced Skin Lightening Lotion on my face, and Origins’ Mega-Mushroom on the back of my left hand. My right hand I reserved for Shiseido’s White Lucent Intensive Spot Targeting Serum, enriched with a Japanese daisy-flower extract (yomogi),

As she rolled the Fraxel Dual 1727 over my skin (the number refers to the energy wavelength: 1727 is used for pigmentation, while 1550 is used for fine lines and wrinkles), there were tiny crackling sounds and subtle pricking, but in about fifteen minutes, we were done. When I looked in the mirror, I had what resembled a mild sunburn—which seemed fair enough since a sunburn was what got me here in the first place.

As my chest healed, I began to see results from the home regimen. The bigger spots where I had applied StriVectin were fading. A prominent brown spot on my wrist was losing its color, first around the edges—similar to when you start rubbing out a stain on fabric. “Sun-damaged cells get old and inefficient—they just kind of dump pigment here and there, no longer in an even, efficient way,” StriVectin’s vice president of product development, Kristine Cryer, explained. Though my skin seemed to be sloughing off the color from the outside, the niacin was stimulating DNA repair in these lethargic cells from within.

From the first dab of Estée Lauder, my shoulders had a youthful, iridescent glow (thanks to the soft focus and color-correcting optics), and within a few weeks, I could detect that the serum’s combination of glucosamine and vitamin C was slicing away at my dead pigmented skin cells, fading the excess color. Weil’s mushroom potion seemed to have turned down the volume on the smattering of spots on my left hand, and on my right hand, Shiseido’s White Lucent had given my skin a noticeable glow. But it was my face I was most excited about. Slathering on the Elure night and day, I was reminded of Jan Brady furiously rubbing lemon all over her face to get rid of her freckles so she could be as pretty as her sister Marcia. After three weeks or so, my freckles had not vanished, but they certainly seemed lighter.

As for my chest, after about ten days of the requisite scaly, pixelated skin, the damage flaked off to reveal a smoother, brighter surface. It seems possible that with one or two more laser sessions, those freckles will be a faint memory. As for my cream routine, I will do as Chapas encouraged and “keep at it.” I will also honor the request she made when I left her office after my first treatment: “Will you promise me you’ll always wear sunscreen from now on?” □ beauty >148



FRECKLE FIGHTERS FROM LEFT: DR. ANDREW WEIL FOR ORIGINS MEGA-MUSHROOM SKIN RELIEF, STRIVECTIN-EV GET EVEN SPOT REPAIR, CHANEL LE BLANC BRIGHTENING CONCENTRATE, CLARINS VITAL LIGHT SERUM, ESTÉE LAUDER IDEALIST EVEN SKINTONE ILLUMINATOR, ELURE ADVANCED SKIN LIGHTENING NIGHT CREAM.

so elegantly. And there’s so little downtime. It’s perfect for New Yorkers.”

I would test the latest spot lightening creams on the rest of my neglected parts. While hydroquinone used to be the hyperpigmentation-fighting It ingredient, questions about its safety and usage led to a ban in the EU, Japan, and Australia in 2001. It is currently considered safe in the United States (though the FDA is conducting studies of its own), but the result has been an onslaught of new research and technology.

Elure, a line dedicated to stamping out dark spots, contains a pigment-dissolving mushroom enzyme that turned dark tree bark several shades lighter in clinical studies. Origins, under the guidance of Andrew Weil, M.D., is going the mushroom route, too, with its Mega-Mushroom Skin Relief serum. Dior has tapped glacial water that had

which promised to enhance clarity and slow melanin production. To my shoulders I applied Estée Lauder Idealist Even Skintone Illuminator, which targets everything from age spots to the shadowy discoloration acne marks can leave. For a few bigger spots on my forearms, I put StriVectin’s Get Even Spot Repair to the test. With ingredients niacin and vitamin C, it slows down the production of melanin and normalizes the transfer of pigment to the cells so you get a nice, even complexion. Twice a day I slathered them all on.

“You are a perfect candidate for laser treatment,” remarked Chapas as her eyes ping-ponged over the constellation of spots on my upper chest. Fraxel, she explained, works by stimulating zones beneath the skin, causing excess pigmentation to gravitate toward the surface, and eventually dry and flake off.