

CAN A FACIAL CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

Amy Starr
meets the
woman quietly
revolutionising
skincare
forever

"I'M OBSESSED WITH SKINNY NECKS," says Valli Shubere during my first appointment for her unique detox facial. "Because I don't want the neck to have to take on all the stress in your life." Me neither. I thought my neck was just... fat, and I tell her as much. She laughs a conspiratorial giggle while she gently pats me on the shoulder. Unlike a lot of the experts I get to consult in this line of work, I came upon Shubere's Melbourne clinic, Herbario, in the most organic of ways. Someone told me about her – and not someone whose job it is to tell people like me how great people like her are. It was a friend of a friend, who'd had a treatment with Shubere and found cheekbones she didn't know she was in possession of. In a world where social media is often at the wheel, it's becoming less and less common to get a referral that I haven't first screen-grabbed.

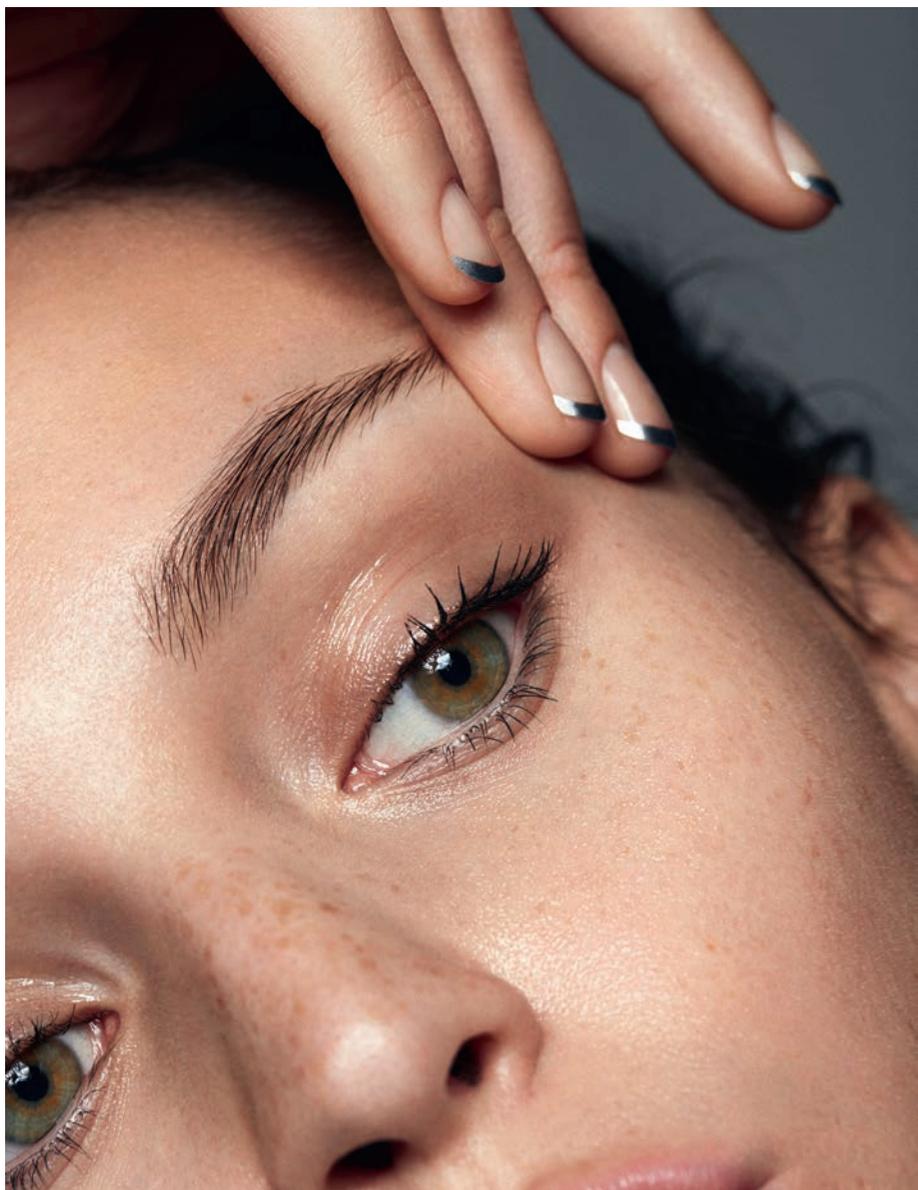
Shubere, who for the past 30 years has operated out of the same Chapel Street clinic with her partner, "fully fledged botanical medicine man" Vito Cozza, started her professional career in fashion design in her native Italy. When she became pregnant, she thought it made more sense to work as a team with Cozza, so began studying nutrition. "I became

specialised in the field of dietetics, which obviates or prevents diseases through the means of keeping your system cleansed, detoxifying your metabolic processes as much as one possibly can," she explains.

How then do I find myself de-robed and lying on a table to receive a skin treatment at the hands of this nutritionist? "One day I was having a facial and the therapist was just putting creams on, one after the other – and the penny dropped. A voice was screaming inside me saying, 'What am I doing here?'" she recalls. "I couldn't take it anymore. I apologised profusely, made up that I had an appointment and I just walked out." Frustrated with the lack of real expertise on offer in the aesthetic skin space, Shubere crafted techniques of her own, starting to treat the skin holistically decades before it was a beauty buzzword. "I just thought

there had to be another way," she says. "I started applying what I knew about detoxifying the metabolic processes to the skin. The skin is the largest organ we have. It is so misunderstood and neglected."

Shubere's treatments centre around the concept of detoxification ("I treat the cause, not the symptom. If you don't address the nature of the problem, the symptom is forever," she explains), though she spends a generous amount of time diagnosing, too. Within seconds of meeting, she's been able to tell me my chin is double the size it should be (yikes!), that I grind, favouring one side over the other (I do), that my blood pressure is prone to being high (she's right) and that I have a sinus filled with fluid that is making one whole side of my face puffy (though I've never known exactly why, it's the side of my face I never favour in photos). "The sinuses



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take up about two-thirds of the face, so clearing them makes a big impact," she says, pointing at the illustrations of the human body posted around her treatment room. She also reveals I don't have sensitive skin like I've always thought. "It's chemical reactivity," she says with a wise smile that tells me she already knows the volume of products, plus the stress, I put on my skin daily, without me having to tell her what I do for a living (test out innumerable beauty products: some good, others not so much). I have had quite literally more facials than most people have had hot dinners, and no-one has ever pinpointed this collection of "issues" with as much speed and accuracy.

Shubere uses a combination of massage and botanicals, carefully blended by Cozza (the formulas for Herbario's Antioxidant Cleansing Powder and Antioxidant Cleansing Oil have remained unchanged for three decades), which she tailors to the skin she's treating throughout the appointment. Her goal is healthy skin function while she also works to remove congestion in the sinuses, muscles, lymphatic and circulatory systems. "Postural stress, the epidemic we call skin sensitivity, the physical and emotional stress impacting the facial muscles and distorting facial contours – it's a cocktail of common things that create what I call dermal fatigue syndrome," she explains. She means the effect your life is having on your face. And she fixes it in a way that can't be replicated by rubbing on a cream.

"Valli's facial massage is world-class," says Jocelyn Petroni, a woman who herself is responsible for a world-class facial massage. "Her knowledge of the skin and theory behind her facial movements changed the way I think about skin and the benefits of deep facial massage. Whenever I'm in Melbourne, I book a treatment with her and walk out with my skin feeling fresh and alive. The experience is very firm – it digs deep into the contours of the face and relaxes the tendons. It's an eye-opening experience that is not for the faint-hearted."

When my treatment with Shubere is over, she hands me a mirror. "You might recognise this face from 10 years ago," she laughs. While I don't think I would have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, she is right.

When I get back to the office, I regale *ELLE's* editor-in-chief (a woman who, as a former beauty editor, taught me most of what I know about this job and, well, life) with the story of my treatment. In a testament to the power of a personal recommendation in this day and age, she quickly books in to see for herself. "Did you love it?" I text her afterwards. "OBSESSED. I look 10 years younger and she fixed all my problems. I feel like I've had a spiritual experience," she replies.

Once you have had a facial capable of changing the structure and shape of your face, the obvious next question is: now what? Shubere says the key is maintaining a regimen of skin hygiene at home. Now, every morning, I spend three minutes giving my face a vigorous massage, using circular motions and working from the centre outwards, to better fire up the skin's natural circulation and to aid function of the lymphatic system. I've also started experimenting with various massage tools. And when someone asks who looks after my skin, I get to answer, "Me."



Antioxidant Cleansing Powder, \$65, HERBARIO, herbario.com.au

Antioxidant Cleansing Oil, \$46, HERBARIO, herbario.com.au

Jade Roller & Gua Sha Massager With Facial Cleanser, Anti Aging Serum And Massage Cup, \$140 for kit, WHITE LOTUS, whitelotus.com.au

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EDITOR'S PICKS

1. SQUEAKY CLEAN

When your locks are weighed down by a build-up of dry shampoo and hairspray, this clever exfoliator sorts out the scalp with salicylic acid and kaolin clay. It's deeply cleansing in a way that shampoo can't be, without drying you out, so use it monthly to bring back balance.



1. Crown Scalp Scrub, \$56, R+CO, davidjones.com

2. POP STAR

Peach, vanilla and apple notes make it inexplicably like wearing a bubble bath. Spray it on days when you need a little more light and sunshine in your get-up.



2. Prada Candy Sugar Pop, \$142 for 50mL, PRADA, myer.com.au

3. TWINKLE TWINKLE

Paris-based hairstylist David Mallett's Volume Powder already has a cult following. Now that formula comes with a generous side of sparkle, adding a delightful level of luminosity (plus body and volume) to all hair types and colours. That it makes you feel like Tinker Bell is just the cherry.



3. Gold Dust, \$89, DAVID MALLET, david-mallett.com.au

4. YOU'RE CHEEKY

If you still haven't mastered your highlighter-and-blush combo, this tricked-up duo, in a flattering blurring cream formula, will take out the guesswork. It's cheek colour for dummies.



4. Pretty Youth Glow Filter in Pretty Fresh, \$60, CHARLOTTE TILBURY, charlottetilbury.com/au

5. LET THERE BE LIGHT

The genius gel formulation strengthens hair without adding even a skerrick of weight. Use it if you have baby-fine locks or just want to make a big, bad blow-out go the distance.



5. Luxurious Volume Core Restore Protein-Infused Clear Conditioner, \$18, JOHN FRIEDA, johnfrieda.com

6. MIC DROP

In this fast-paced world, there's something particularly refreshing about a beauty regimen that requires you to slow down. This potent solution brightens skin by way of hot compresses. Squeeze a few drops into a litre of water, then compress onto the face a few times for gentle exfoliation.



6. Cell Renewal Drops, \$89, SODASHI, sodashi.com.au

Additional words: Janina Johnson O'Toole, Photography: Pelle Lammefors, Sevak Babakhani and Chris Jansen (still life)