

Look Ma, NO HANDS!

Will your next facial be touchless? And your next massage too?

BY FIORELLA VALDESOLO

During a session with Evoke, a new bipolar radio frequency treatment designed to address facial skin laxity that is being offered in dermatologist offices and in the salons of select aestheticians such as Joanna Vargas, the patient is set up in a comfortable seated position with the device strapped on and, well, left to her own devices. “I quickly realized this was great for a pandemic, because it’s private and hands-free, so you can sit there and answer emails, read, or listen to music, without a technician hovering over you,” says Bruce Katz, a dermatologist and founder of New York’s Juva Skin & Laser Center. Same goes for Emsculpt Neo, Emtone, and Emsella, devices that harness similar technology to treat the face and body with minimal hands-on contact. “We have definitely noticed a heightened interest in noninvasive procedures that require little human interaction,” says dermatologist David Shafer of New York’s Shafer Clinic.

But while Shafer thinks the initial appeal of these treatments was the low-contact aspect, what will continue to make them popular is that they are quick and require little to no downtime. During a year when many of us were forced to take our multitasking to new extremes, efficiency, even in the beauty realm, has become more important than ever. And it’s something beauty brands are prioritizing with their innovations. Chanel recently launched Lipscanner: You snap a photo of any inspiring color you come across (a flower, a magazine page, a shoe) and the app finds the closest lipstick shade for you to virtually try on and then immediately purchase. Vargas and her team of master aestheticians started offering video consultations, giving skincare acolytes in zip codes far away from their New York and L.A. locations new access, and Credo premiered massively successful Master Classes hosted by brand founders and beauty experts via Zoom. Acclaimed

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Palm Beach-based trichologist Bridgette Hill created her Root Cause Scalp Analysis, bringing in-salon scalp analysis to the digital realm. And for those who have long wanted their nail salon experience to feel more Jetsonsque, there’s Clockwork, a San Francisco-born brand of robots that use proprietary AI, 3D cameras, and sophisticated algorithms to give customers quick, contactless, affordable manicures. “I think many of the behaviors and preferences we picked up during lockdown will stay with us for some time,” says Clockwork co-founder and CEO Renuka Apte.

While efficiency and self-sufficiency will still guide our beauty choices, there are many for whom a return to IRL treatments

is a welcome reprieve. Dermatologist Amy Wechsler says many of her patients have been giddy at the prospect of seeing her in person. “Human contact is an important part of what I do, and the laying on of hands is very meaningful,” says Wechsler, adding that the private, peaceful, controlled environment of a doctor’s office helps ease the transition back to human touch—something that, says clinical psychologist Alexandra Solomon, our bodies rely on for immune regulation and to increase empathy and decrease stress. After a long touch drought, it is indeed a transition; moving on from a constant state of high alert about human contact is a process. “It can feel frightening to reestablish touch, and we try to resolve that by choosing touch that feels safe, and places that feel clean and familiar, like a doctor’s office or a salon,” Solomon says. “It’s a way of dipping our toes back in the water.” **T&C**

