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The New York Times

SKIN DEEP Beware the Afterglow

By NATASHA SINGER Published: May 3, 2007

YEARS before Ursula Andress, the Swiss actress who was the first Bond girl, emerged from the waves in "Dr. No" with her caramel skin offset by a blindingly white bikini, the tan had taken hold as the abiding fashion image.



Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

SUN-KISSED Malibu Barbie, born in 1971, and a newer powder.



Photographs by Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

LIQUID GOLD A new spate of fake-tanning products are out, started by Jergens Natural Glow, introduced in 2005.

A honey-glowing face and a body that is buff and bronzed had come to conjure up associations of beauty, leisure and upper-class privilege: of exotic private beaches, robust games of tennis, long afternoons aboard a yacht and, of course, the healthy-looking afterglow of exercise or sex.

Even in the 25 years since medical groups began warning that ultraviolet irradiation can lead to skin cancer as well as to dire consequences for the appearance-conscious - wrinkles! - tan-looking skin has remained an iconic beauty image, promoted by fashion magazines, advertisements and celebrities.

But the chic method of acquiring a tan has shifted. With sunbathing and tanning beds deemed risky, some doctors, magazines and beauty companies are promoting the idea of a "sunless" tan begat by cosmetics as the safe alternative to UV irradiation.

And so simulated tanning is booming. This month, cosmetics brands are introducing new artificial bronzing agents including sprays, lotions, mousses, powders and towelettes into a market that is already brimming with products. Meanwhile, fashion magazines are enthusing over the fake tan with buzzwords like sun-kissed, radiant, natural-looking, tawny, healthy and glowing.

"We are being inundated with the look of a woman of leisure who has a beautiful glow, whether from a sunless tanner or a bronzer," said Karen Grant, the senior beauty industry analyst for the NPJ Group, a market research firm. "The marketing theme is that the products can give you the same glow that the sun can provide without the risks of going out into the sun."

Indeed, the notion of a safe, healthy sunless tan is making Malibu Barbie the retro icon of the season.

But some researchers who study the skin are worried that promulgating the simulated tan as a beauty ideal is simply perpetuating an image that is fundamentally linked to risky behavior. The concern is that the fashion for a bronzed look, even a cosmetically induced one, may encourage young women to seek a tanned appearance at any cost.

According to a study published last year in the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology, for example, young women who used sunless tanners were more likely to have been sunburned and to have visited tanning parlors compared with those who were not interested in and did not use such bronzing lotions. The study, conducted at Boston University School of Medicine, also reported that, although many self-tanning products do not contain sunscreen, a number of young women believe they offer sun protection.

"We know that physicians are urging patients to use sunless tanning products instead of tanning booths," said Alan C. Geller, a research associate professor in dermatology at Boston University and one of the authors of the study. "But sunless tanners are not serving the purpose of a safe alternative

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because we found young women using them as an adjunct to sunbathing and tanning beds.”

Many women say self-tanners have become as regular a part of their beauty routine as moisturizer or mascara. Most commonly, they apply powdered bronzer to their faces and tanning moisturizers to their arms and legs.

The sales figures bear this out. In the last five years, department-store bronzer sales have increased to about \$62 million from about \$30 million, according to NPD. At the mass market level, self-tanners, bronzers and tanning moisturizers, called “natural glow” lotions, have annual sales of about \$229 million, according to Information Resources Inc., a market research firm that covers the personal care industry.

Nina Jablonski, the chairwoman of the anthropology department at [Penn State](#) University, said that trying to change one’s skin color is a peculiar and disturbing phenomenon — whether it be Africans and Asians who use bleaching products to lighten skin or lighter-pigmented Americans seeking to emulate deck stain. Along that continuum, the sun-tanned look is a relatively new beauty ideal, she said.

“For most of the last 500 years, a tan was considered the mark of a hard-working person who toiled outside,” said Dr. Jablonski, the author of “Skin: A Natural History.” “A tan was eschewed by people who considered themselves upper class.”

During the Industrial Revolution, as work increasingly moved to indoor factories, sun-baked skin became the province of the upper classes who had more leisure time and money to travel. Coco Chanel, who returned to Paris with a dramatic suntan acquired during a holiday on the Riviera in the 1920s, is credited with initiating the vogue for sunbathing. She reincarnated what had been a lower-class stigma as an aspiration, a symbol of upper-class wealth, leisure, good looks and healthy athleticism.

In the 1960s, George Hamilton personified the perpetual tan. In 1971, Mattel introduced Malibu Barbie, the ultimate beach bunny. And baby oil, used to hasten a deeper tan, was the rage in the 1970s.

“The tan went from being a thing that working people got by the sweat of their brows to being associated with a glamorous, luxurious lifestyle,” Dr. Jablonski said. “It is one of the most deeply ingrained images in American advertising.”

But in the early 1980s, the tan began to lose some of its allure after health authorities in Australia noticed an increased incidence of skin cancer among residents who had emigrated from Europe. They began to link skin cancer and sunbathing. In 1985, the American Academy of Dermatology conducted its first national campaign to warn Americans about the risks of sun exposure.

As a result, the product-induced tan has replaced the outdoorsy tan as a beauty ideal. And celebrities like Jennifer Lopez, Jessica Alba and Eva Longoria, with their own naturally glowing skin, are inspiring legions of imitators. Now starlets like Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton often appear preternaturally bronzed. Even the model Natalia Vodianova, known for her porcelain face, appears this month in a [Calvin Klein](#) perfume ad looking as if she has been powdered with baked earth.

“Bronzer makes you look healthy, healthy, healthy,” said Olivier Échaudemaison, the makeup artistic designer for Guerlain. “Pale skin makes you look tired, but if you are wearing bronzer nobody knows you are tired underneath.”

To provide that simulacrum of health, cosmetics that create ersatz tans now come in three categories: self-tanners, bronzers and “glow” lotions.

Self-tanners trigger a chemical reaction, causing a brownish stain to form on the outer layer of the skin. Until recently, self-tanners were often messy to use, noxious-smelling, time-consuming and capable of turning the skin a bright shade of Oompa-Loompa orange. In the last few years, however, cosmetics companies have introduced improved formulas.

Bronzers are powders that are applied like blush. Guerlain is credited with creating the category in 1984 when it introduced Terracotta Powder, which could be brushed on for an instant coppery sheen.

“Suddenly, they have the look of just coming back from St. Barth’s, but really they spent the weekend at home and put on the powder,” Mr. Échaudemaison said.

Meanwhile, other brands, including Lancôme, are bringing out increasingly elaborate bronzing compacts that are embossed with patterns and come in multiple luminescent hues that can be used all over the body.

“Women today are on the go and they have no time or desire to sit down and sunbathe or wait overnight for a tanner to show its real color,” said Gracemarie Papaleo, assistant vice president for new product development at Lancôme USA. “With a bronzer, you get immediate results.”

“Glow” lotions, which are moisturizers that gradually darken the skin with each use, are also a growing trend. Jergens Natural Glow, introduced in 2005, was the first successful tanning moisturizer. Now

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other beauty brands are coming out with similar products based on the idea of a healthy, natural-looking glow. Ads for the new Nivea Visage Sunkissed Facial Moisturizer, for example, promise "a healthy-looking tan in just five days."

"People want to look healthy without getting sun damage, to have that same California, sun-kissed type of look like every celebrity on the red carpet," said Leigh Anne Rowinski, director of client solutions at Information Resources Inc.

But some critics worry that promoting sunless tans and glows as healthy, stylish and natural perpetuates the tan — whether cosmetic induced or sun-induced— as a beauty ideal, even as it posits pale skin as unhealthy, dull, unnatural and even passé.

"Even though a tan is now associated with pathology, it has had such a profound impact on the American psyche that to be untan is to look as terribly uncool as an unplucked chicken," said Dr. Jablonski of Penn State. "People tend to think they look healthier if they have some sort of glow on their cheeks."

But researchers at Boston University School of Medicine did not find that those who use self-tanners necessarily avoid UV rays. In a survey of 448 people age 18 to 30, the researchers found that young women who used sunless tanners were more likely to get sunburns and use sun beds than their peers who were not interested in self-tanning products; the results were similar to those found in studies in Australia. The researchers urged companies to include a minimum of S.P.F. 15 sunscreen in every sunless tanning product.

In a related research project, Zeina Dajani, a medical student at Boston University, found that a number of sunless tanners that did not contain sunscreen failed to carry a warning label, mandated by the [Food and Drug Administration](#), to indicate that the products do not protect against sunburn and other damage.

"The question is whether dermatologists should stop recommending sunless tanning products as an alternative to tanning beds and discourage the idea of a tan altogether," Ms. Dajani said.

At least one celebrity is glow-averse. In the May issue of Allure magazine, the actress Michelle Trachtenberg said the pressure to bronze is her pet peeve with beauty advisers at makeup counters.

"They're like, 'Maybe you'd like to warm up your skin tone,'" Ms. Trachtenberg is quoted as saying. "And I'm like, 'No, I'm going to embrace the pale.'"

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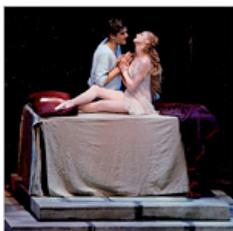


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