

## From Chrissy Iley

IN LOS ANGELES

**T**HERE'S a non-surgical treatment that can knock years off your appearance in your lunchtime without resorting to knife or needle — and it's had America buzzing since it was featured on the Oprah Winfrey show.

Thermage tightens and lifts the skin by stimulating it to produce new collagen — giving all the effects of a facelift, so its fans claim, with none of the pain. Unsurprisingly, it's already caused a sensation in the States (where it was launched a couple of years ago).

Inevitably, too, it's now crossed the Atlantic and is provoking excitement among beauty experts in the UK as well.

A friend of mine in LA has had it done — and it has taken 20 years off her. Now in her 70s and retired, she used to be a high-flyer in one of the big film studios, but 18 months ago she looked old, saggy-faced and frail.

Then she had Thermage and now she looks like a woman in her mid-50s — but there are no weird lines or scars like there might be with surgery, and none of the expressionless face and big shiny foreheads which so many of my other friends sport after Botox.

Thermage is available at the Skin Fitness Plus centre in Los Angeles, which offers a variety of non-surgical anti-ageing procedures.

'Within the next few years the facelift will be redundant,' says the centre's founder Dr Julia Hunter.

Thermage is similar to laser treatment, but uses radiofrequency heat rather than light waves to penetrate the skin.

'Thermage goes down to the main framework of support for the skin's collagen network,' says Dr Hunter. 'You can use it not only for facelifts but to tighten arms, thighs and stomach.'

A patented technology called Thermacool is used to penetrate and heat the reserves of collagen in the dermis, while simultaneously protecting the outer layers of the skin from burning with a cooling technique.

This causes an immediate tightening in the deep structures of the skin, meaning wrinkles are visibly reduced after just one session (unlike many laser procedures, which can require four or more treatments).

Afterwards, the manufacturers claim you'll continue to see results for up to six months as new, remodelled collagen is produced, causing further lifting and tightening of the skin. The improvements are said to last up to two years.

And there's no down-time either — you really can return to the office an hour later without a bright red face.

**M**ANY people see results after the first treatment — though Dr Hunter says it takes two sessions, six months apart, to give a 'really tight facelift'.

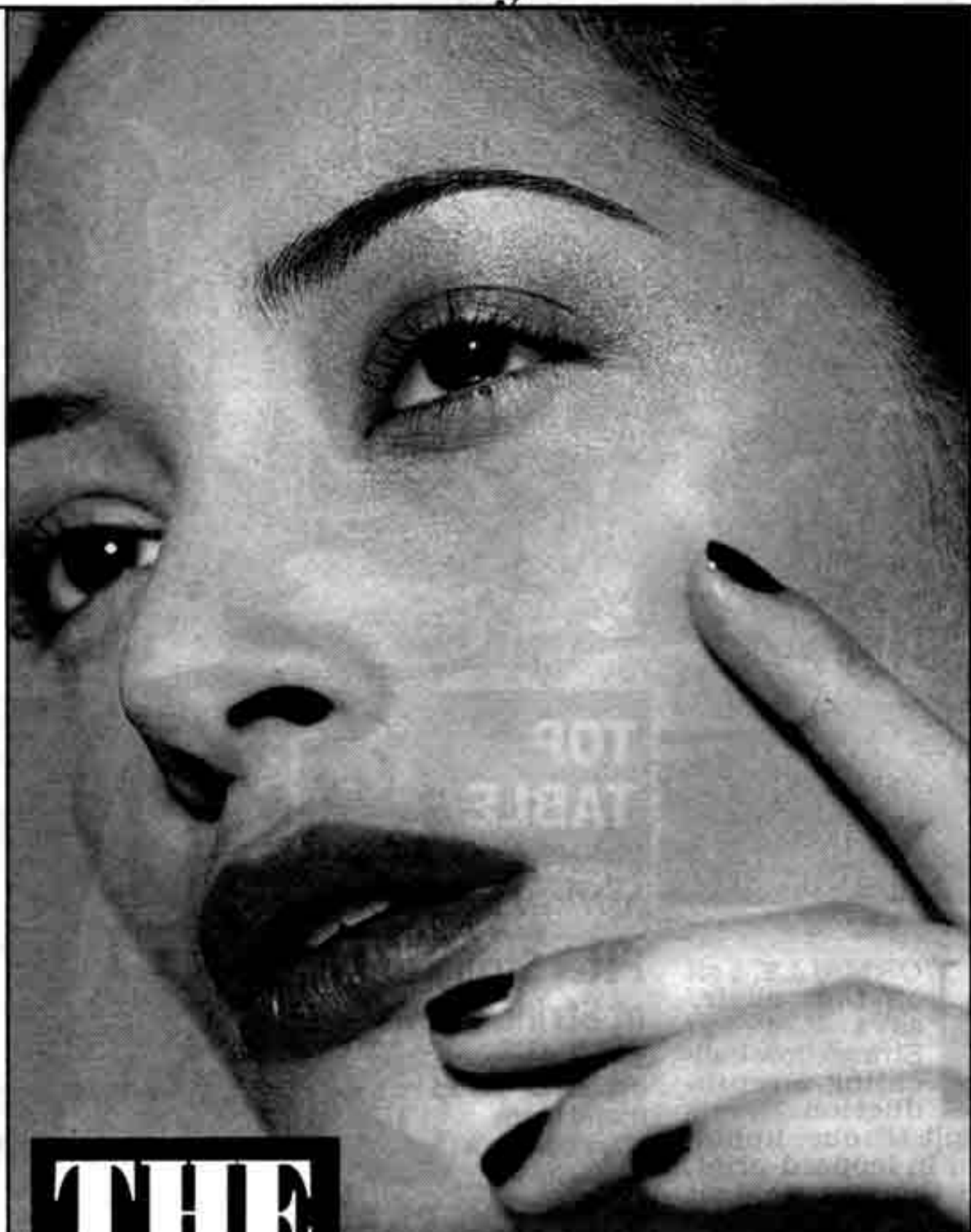
Sessions can last up to three hours, depending on the size of the area being worked on.

'It doesn't hurt, but you feel heat,' says Dr Hunter. 'I won't pretend you don't feel it. You get a Valium and a painkiller.'

Before founding Skin Fitness Plus, Dr Hunter worked as an anaesthetist for cosmetic surgeons. 'I have had first-hand experience of what happens,' she says. 'Patients wake up after surgery and say if I'd known that this is what it was going to be like, I'd never have done it. Sometimes surgeons aren't honest with them about recovery time.'

Skin Fitness Plus is one of a growing number of clinics offering alternatives to plastic surgery, as a backlash against the surgeon's scalpel gathers pace.

Dr Hunter also stresses the need to tailor treatments to the individual: 'Everybody's needs have to be catered for. You can't immediately throw somebody on the table and do the Thermage, or any other laser treatment. To get the best results, you have to prepare the



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# THE HEATWAVE FACELIFT

Look years younger without surgery

skin properly,' she says. I'm lucky enough not to need a facelift so I'm not a suitable candidate for Thermage, but I have experienced other non-invasive procedures, and the results so far have been excellent.

Dr Hunter first gave me an intense exfoliating treatment called Epi-Blading, which removes the top layer of skin in order to enable a course of powerful antioxidant creams to penetrate the skin properly.

I was then slathered with pharmaceutical-strength lotions containing Vitamins A and C, and was also sent away with a series of lotions to use daily for six weeks, to prepare my skin for a laser treatment called Smoothbeam.

This is an alternative wrinkle-buster to Botox and fillers that fills in scars, treats recalcitrant acne and also tightens the skin, giving a more youthful appearance.

After the Epi-Blading, my face glowed like a washed pebble for a couple of days, then it became as dry and flaky as my cat's litter box. Then the top layer of skin fell off — and with it, it seems, so did my horizontal forehead wrinkles.

This procedure wasn't particularly relaxing, but nor was it unpleasant. The results weren't instantaneous, but after a month of diligently using my prescribed products, my skin was smoother and healthier — and people keep telling me how well I look. In fact, many of them assume I've had Botox.

This brave new world of facials is definitely not about gimmicks, marketing or glamour. It doesn't pamper you for half-an-hour and leave you feeling relaxed but still lined. It's purposeful,

pragmatic and medical — but without the anaesthetics, the knife and the painful recovery time.

■ FOR information about Thermage treatments in the UK call 020 8950 9501 or visit [www.thermage-treatment.co.uk](http://www.thermage-treatment.co.uk). Treatments cost from £1,000 per session. Skin Fitness Plus is based in Beverly Hills, California. Tel: 001 310 247 8744 or visit [www.skinfitnessplus.com](http://www.skinfitnessplus.com). Smoothbeam and Thermage cost \$485 (£285) per treatment. Chrissy also spent \$200 (£117) on vitamin creams.