

THE  TIMES**Beauty special: the no-Botox facelift**

Acupuncturist Ross Barr and Deborah Ross Robert Wilson

Deborah Ross

Published at 5:20PM, June 7 2014

Can facial acupuncture be as effective as surgery? Deborah Ross has an appointment with Ross Barr, the beauty editors' go-to practitioner

Because I require rejuvenation and beautification (it's true; am not in denial), I am asked if I will undertake a few sessions with Ross Barr, an acupuncturist who is "amazing" and whose rejuvenating acupuncture facials are "like Botox without having to have Botox" and "as good as a facelift", and who is popular with celebrities and whose number, apparently, is only ever passed on begrudgingly, because why share a good thing, when you can keep it to yourself?

"Great," I say. "Sure." But even as the words are coming out of my mouth, I feel my heart sink to my boots.

I am not much interested in rejuvenation or beautification. I need both, as I said. Crow's feet. Frown lines. I have the forehead of a pug. I looked in the mirror not so long ago and recoiled with a horrified, "I am pug lady!" But I have never been much interested. I once attempted a "beauty regime". It involved a muslin cloth. What a faff. The faff of faffs. I once had actual Botox, to write about it, and it hurt, and I ended up looking like a Klingon, so that went well. Plus, it left me with a dented eyebrow, which is nice.

I am also, I should confess, quite a fan of western medicine and not at all interested in alternative therapies, even when they have "a clearly recorded history of 3,000 years" or whatever. Why, I have always wondered, is this legitimising? Why, I have always wondered, is this any kind recommendation? Trepanning goes back to 6,500BC, yet I'm not about to let anyone drill a burr hole in my skull. But antibiotics? I have met a few over the years, and have always found them most delightful. It may even be true to say I've never met an antibiotic I didn't like (metronidazole has proved a particular friend, not just to me, but also my teeth).

My first appointment, which my editor had to beg for because Barr's appointments – from £70 a session – sell out quick as anything, is at his rooms on Wimpole Street in central London, although he also practises in Notting Hill in west London and Thame, Oxfordshire. I sit in the waiting area where some video on a loop urges me to "take back your life with improved health", and then shows photographs of flowers and hikers, as if I might yearn to hike through flowers, which I don't.

My greatest hope, at this point, is that it is all over quickly so I can do something more accepting of middle age, such as escape to John Lewis on Oxford Street and look at bed linen. I don't need bed linen. I don't need it like I need rejuvenating beautification. But it's always good to know what is available. (Actually, Muji is best for bed linen because its duvet covers come with zips rather than those buttons that shatter in the wash or those poppers that stop popping. This is the sort of thing, FYI, that I actually do care about, and a subject on which I have some expertise.)

In to see Barr, and the first thing to say is that the room smells lovely – an Eve Lom candle the size of a barrel is on the go – and there are no crystals or those funny little cups for cupping. (A friend once had cupping; ended up with a back like a pepperoni pizza.) Any crystals or funny little cups for cupping and I'd have legged it.

And the second thing to say, although it's the first thing I notice, is that Barr is extremely handsome. He looks like a prince from a Disney movie. Firm jaw, dark eyes, thick, long eyelashes. I feel my heart rise from my boots, and perform a little skip. Can't help it, not going to apologise. I am old (52) and have frown lines and crow's feet and sometimes look in the mirror and gasp, "I am pug lady!", but I'm not dead yet. None of this makes me any less reluctant or snippy.

"I hear you do the best rejuvenating facials in the world," I say, in a tone that adds, "Yeah, right. I think I'll be the judge of that." I feel horrible about this now, and such an idiot. But what I didn't know then is that Barr is "amazing" (truly), and I will end up with skin that's a thousand times better and I'll feel a thousand times better and I will like him so much I will (bit embarrassing, this) be begging him to marry me. Sadly, he will decline.

Barr begins by saying he is not going to talk "a lot of w***y stuff", which is promising. I say the only alternative treatment I have ever had was at my son's school fair, where a mother was offering Indian head massages, so I paid £10, and allowed her to slap me around the head. It did not feel therapeutic. It felt like being slapped around the head. (She later approached me at the school gate and asked if I would like to book a private appointment. I found I did not.)

I then ask Barr if he's going to stick needles in my face and if it's going to hurt. He says we're a way off from needles in the face yet. He says he has to treat "the whole person". I say that sounds like a drag. I am busy. I have bed linen to look at. He says, "You have to treat a person's organs or the effects are short-lived. If your system is working well, then your skin will work well, too."

He takes a history, asks many questions. "Do you drink alcohol?" Yes. "Do you drink coffee?" Yes. "Do you eat meat?" Whenever I can. I had to put down a chop to come here today. "Do you feel tired most of the time?" Doesn't everyone? "Do you smoke?" Given up. But I do chain-chew nicotine gum until I am just on the brink of throwing up, pause, then it is business as usual.

So, that also went well.

He lies me down, looks at my tongue, takes my pulse. "You can tell a huge amount from the pulse," he says. He then adds, "Your liver feels a wee bit hot and bothered. Even when you sleep for long periods do you wake feeling sluggish?" Yes, I say. I can sleep 14 hours and still wake up feeling like death. "And your skin is flushy and there's some rosacea, because heat rises, and your skin is getting a wee bit hot." I say I know about the rosacea and I did once go to my GP, who gave me some kind of cream that made no difference whatsoever. He says GPs often hand out prescriptions just so you "f*** off and go away". Being such a fan of western medicine, this is painful to hear but, deep down, I know it to be true.

He asks if I might remove my socks. Hello, I say. Feet down there, face up here. This isn't right. "I have to treat the whole person," he repeats. The needles go into the soles of my feet. It isn't exactly painful, but it is unpleasant. You feel a smart "zap" pinging its way up the body, as if you might have accidentally touched an electric fence, or even done it on purpose.

"Youch!" I exclaim, bravely. He says, "It's what we call chi, the life force that determines your energy level, and which we find so difficult to comprehend here in the west. If you've never had acupuncture, you won't have felt it before. Some people love the buzz of it because they know something is happening."

I ask him how he got interested in acupuncture. He says that when he was 20 his father died suddenly of a brain embolism. "He died completely out of the blue, and my mum had always been quite holistic and she recommended I go for acupuncture, as it is really good for grief and bereavement. It made a huge difference to how I dealt with it, and I fell in love with it after that."

^{Share via} Barr was working for the family's export business but, a year later, quit. "I traded in everything I had. I sold the car. I sold the flat. And did the training." How long does acupuncture training take? "Four years." Jeez. And who are your celebrity clients? You can tell me. "Ha!" is all he will say.

No needles in the face today. Just an acupressure massage using warmed rose oil, which is heavenly. Afterwards, I feel quite spacey, but not so much that I forget to nip into John Lewis (no; no zips in John Lewis yet). I don't look in the mirror until later that evening, when I notice this: my skin is exactly the same. Also, at no point has anyone said to me, "Wow! You look amazing." My editor phones. "Do you look amazing?" she asks. No. "Are you sure?" she continues. Yes. Quite sure.

However – and this is where it gets weird – I do wake up the following morning feeling, well, lively, and I never, ever wake up feeling lively. I never feel lively, full stop. The last time I felt lively was in 1982, or thereabouts, and even then it was fleeting. I mostly feel, as I had told Barr, that I have lead in my veins, and some days it's as if I have lead in my veins and I'm also swimming uphill through treacle. I'd just got used to it. When I see him a week later and tell him that I've come over all lively, he says simply, and with satisfaction, "This is a good medicine."

Is it? While some studies claim to have shown acupuncture offers no proven benefits beyond, at best, a placebo effect, others have said inserting needles into the skin ("to restore the flow of chi and aid the body's natural healing responses") triggers pain-killing endorphins in the brain. I ask him what he'd say if I steadfastly refused to believe. "I'd say, if it were hocus pocus, it wouldn't have lasted this long." It would have gone the way of trepanning? "Exactly. And acupuncture is supported by 5,000 years of scholarship, which in itself is very scientific." Also, "I see it working, every day."

He asks if I'm still drinking my couple of glasses a wine a night. Um, yes, I say. He is not too disapproving. Better if I didn't, but there you are. He is caring and warm and interested in a way in which, I can now see, western medicine practitioners so rarely are. (I swear, every time I've visited my GP she's as good as yawning in my face.)

Barr does the feet again, but also the face. Needles in my cheeks and needles in my chin and needles either side of my nostrils (youch!) and needles in my pug lines. This, he says, “invigorates the chi and blood to flow though the face and re-energises it”. He also performs gua sha, rubbing at my forehead lines with a piece of jade, as if it were an eraser. He is wonderfully easy to talk to.

We talk about my hot liver and films we have seen and whether he should get a dog and the overprescription of antidepressants and why he won't marry me. “It wouldn't be very professional,” he exclaims. Hey, I say. I think I'll be the judge of what's professional or not. Plus, I wouldn't come to the marriage empty-handed. I would bring duvet covers, some of which have zips. But he won't be swayed, which is a pity.

Not going to lie. I've had three sessions and still no one has said, “Wow! You look amazing.” But – and this is a big but, a massive but – when I last saw my mother she did ask whether I was wearing make-up. No, I said. You know I can never be bothered with make-up. “Oh,” she said, sounding disappointed, because she would love it if I “made more” of myself. “You just look different.” Do I? “Better,” she announced. “Younger,” she added.

I looked at myself closely in the mirror that evening and saw what she meant. I'm never going to be a great beauty, or 22 again, but my eyes were brighter, my dent less dented, my skin less flushed, more even-toned, and my frown lines less frowny. (I think, because I feel less headachy, I may be frowning less.) Eight to ten sessions with Barr are optimal and I'm determined to see it through. Watch this space, as they say, and, as for passing on his number, sorry, no can do. Lost it.

face@rossbarr.com; rossbarr.com

0 comments



Karen Price

1 person listening

+ Follow

Post comment

Newest | Oldest | Most Recommended

Livefyre

© Times Newspapers Limited 2014 | Version 5.11.2.3(127993)

Registered in England No. 894646 Registered office:

1 London Bridge Street, SE1 9GF

[My Account](#) | [RSS](#) | [Classified advertising](#) | [Display advertising](#) | [The Times Whisky Club](#) | [Encounters Dating](#) | [Sunday Times Wine Club](#) | [Privacy & Cookie Policy](#) | [Syndication](#) | [Site Map](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) | [Contact us](#) | [iPhone](#) | [Android smartphone](#) | [Android tablet](#) | [Kindle](#) | [Kindle Fire](#) | [Place an announcement in The Times](#) | [Sunday Times Driving](#) | [The Times Bookshop](#) | [Times Tutorials](#) | [Times Currency Services](#) | [Times Print Gallery](#)

v