

A Special Bond

Bringing her daughter into the fold has provided a business rebirth for one veteran spa owner. By Bekah Wright • Photography by Dawn W Klugman



LATELY, PATRONS OF VERONICA MALIBU SKIN & BODY CARE CENTER (veronicaskincare.com) in Malibu, California, find someone new, yet familiar, sitting behind the reception desk—Lisa Deleau, daughter of the spa's namesake, founder Veronica Barton-Schwartz. No wonder she looks familiar: Standing next to her well-recognized mom, Lisa supplies strong evidence of the family resemblance, from the women's petite statures to their sunny smiles. Neither minds a bit. "I always thought if there were only another Veronica, I could own the world," says the proud mom. Interestingly, though, it's these two women's differences that just might make Veronica's fantasy come true.

Before getting to this story's happy ending, however, let's take some twists and turns back to look at its beginnings. In her mid-20s, Veronica was working as a technical illustrator and caring for her two young children, Lisa and Anthony. She had no plans to become a spa owner—until out of the blue she developed cystic acne. Veronica's self-esteem took a hit as she made the usual rounds of doctors who offered cortisone shots and antibiotics. She found that, within weeks of these treatments, the results would wear off. Determined to get a handle on her acne, Veronica began receiving regular facials at the Aida Grey salon in Beverly Hills. The esthetician there went beyond steam and masks in the treatment room; she educated Veronica on the effects vitamins and nutrition can have on the skin. True, lasting improvement to Veronica's skin followed, as did a passion for proper skin care. She had found her calling.



Veronica Barton-Schwartz's (pictured here and above with daughter Lisa Deleau) mind/body/spirit philosophy forms the basis for her day spa and medical spa business.



you have to eat well, sleep, exercise, laugh and meditate. Skin is even impacted by the people with whom you surround yourself."

In 1981, with family cheering her on, Veronica opened the first Veronica's, a one-room operation in Point Dume on the California coast. The business thrived, and in short order she took on an

While Lisa attended nursery school, Veronica immersed herself in beauty school and business classes at UCLA. In the evenings, a five-year-old Lisa happily lent her services as a test subject. "My mother would practice on me," Lisa recalls now. "I was her little doll." Not surprisingly, the experience helped spawn Lisa's own interest in the spa industry at an early age.

In the years that followed, Veronica traveled beyond the classroom to meet some of the innovators in the skincare industry and discover techniques being used in different countries. "I wanted to learn from the top people," she says. "I studied at the Guinot Institute in Paris, learned about aromatherapy in Egypt from the family who made rose oil for Chanel No. 5 and journeyed to Montecatini, Italy, to gain knowledge about the water from the thermal springs." Along the way she developed a mind/body/spirit philosophy that's the crux of Veronica Malibu Skin & Body Care Center. "You can't just take care of your skin from the outside—it's an internal thing too," Veronica says. "To have healthy, glowing skin

additional room and esthetician. Seven years later, Veronica was treating an architect when she learned about a building under construction farther down the coast, overlooking the Pacific Coast Highway in beautiful, upscale Malibu. Ready to take her business to the next level, Veronica signed a lease.

Making Space

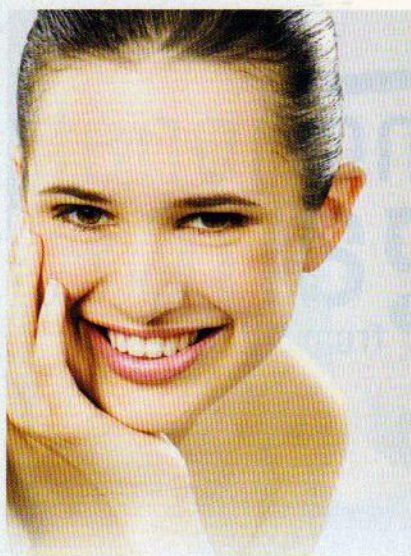
Today, Veronica Malibu Skin & Body Care Center is a fixture in the high-profile seaside community of Malibu. Celebrities such as Olivia Newton-John (who introduced Veronica to her husband of five years, Carl Schwartz) and Tea Leoni are regulars on the spa's client roster.

The day spa's 1,000-square-foot suite is tucked neatly into a striking, modern, concrete-gray cliffside building set off by sea-green glass. Veronica chose a first-floor space offering accessibility for clients in wheelchairs. The site also allowed for a wet room. "In Malibu, the water situation is tricky," she says. "Everything is on a septic system." The city's requirements include specific plumbing permits.

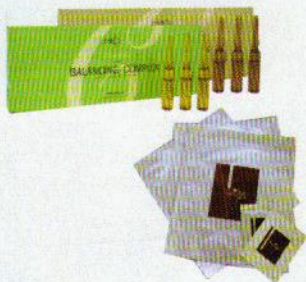


Veronica Malibu Skin & Body Care's Malibu location has presented both advantages and challenges.





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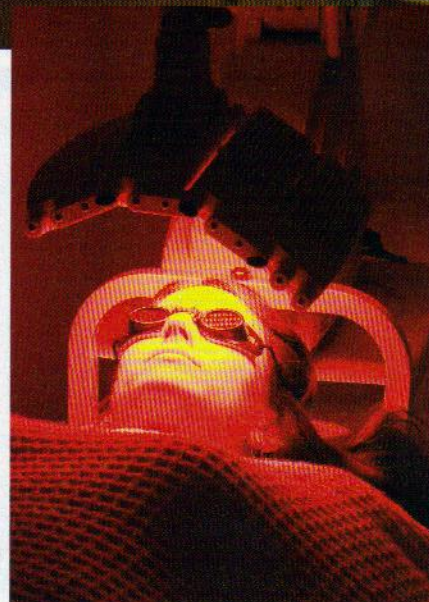
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The spa encompasses a reception area with a makeup station and retail displays, a restroom, four facial rooms, one body treatment/wet room and a tiny sauna room that's designed to double as a private meditation area with its own altar. Veronica's efforts to create a space that promotes relaxation and serenity in a modern setting are apparent in design choices such as soft pink walls, Buddha statues and photographs of orchids. Visitors to the spa enjoy the added convenience of the services offered by other on-site tenants: a Pilates studio, hair and nail salons, and a physical therapy provider.

Several years after opening her Malibu spa, Veronica tried doubling her efforts by opening a Veronica Skin, Body & Hair Care full-service spa at the Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel, but that proved overwhelming. "For seven years, I ran two spas," she remembers. "I was literally working seven days a week and eventually became exhausted." At age 50 she sold the second business to Loews and invested all of her energy into the Malibu location. Even then, "I was ready to take Veronica's Malibu to another level with a medical spa," she says. That dream, however, wouldn't see fruition for another nine years.

Meanwhile, daughter Lisa was enjoying a part-time job at her mother's spa while she pursued a degree in marketing. In 2006, 30-year-old Lisa approached her mother about switching to full time and becoming, in essence, a "right-hand daughter." "I always knew I liked the spa industry and wanted to help my mom explore other options and help the business grow," she says. This was the opportunity both Veronica and Lisa had been waiting for. "It was as if I'd sprouted wings," Veronica says. "With Lisa's participation, I could spread the word about proper and healthy skin care on a larger scale."



Veronica's Medical Spa is the first co-venture between Veronica and her daughter Lisa.

The mother/daughter team decided their first co-venture would be the launch of a medical spa. Fate did its part—a space, two doors down in the building, became available.

In November 2006, as Lisa neared graduation from California State University, Northridge, and Veronica was completing her 25th year in the spa industry, the long-awaited medical spa opened its doors. The women marked the occasion with a spa launch event that doubled as a benefit for Operation Smile, a volunteer medical services organization that provides reconstructive facial surgery to indigent children and young adults. There were 300 attendees helping to celebrate this night of new beginnings.

Veronica's Medical Spa is a modernized reflection of its predecessor, with white-beamed ceilings and sleek, contemporary white leather and chrome chairs. Honey wood floors contrast against crisp white walls, and seashells pay homage to the ocean setting visible through the back window. The 1,000-square-foot space has three treatment

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rooms and a reception area. Between the two components, the day spa and medical spa, Veronica says, "I feel like I have a little oasis here."

Growing Up

Doubling its space with the addition of a medical spa meant doubling staff too, and Veronica went from 6 employees to 12, including Lisa as spa manager. By all reports the mother/daughter team has developed a simpatico working relationship. "She's creative and a people person," Lisa says of her mother. "I have that too, but I'm more organized." Beyond her duties as spa manager, Lisa serves as a makeup artist and licensed holistic practitioner. Her influence can be seen with the addition of e•lix•r Tonics & Teas to the complimentary beverages served to clients.

Lisa has also taken over most of the business duties at the spa. In the past, there was no spa marketing strategy, but Lisa has taken those reins, assisted by a public relations company she hired about a year ago. So far, the Veronica

spas have been featured in numerous national publications, as well as in television spots on entertainment shows like *Extra*. Veronica is delighted with the change. "I'm a very hands-on person," says Veronica. "It was hard to be that way and run a business also. Now that I'm closer to 60, I can turn my attention to new things."

Staffing the medical spa was a snap for Veronica. Over the years, she had kept tabs on physicians, other health practitioners and beauty professionals in the Los Angeles area. "I periodically met with doctors I might want to recommend to my clients for services I don't offer," she says. One of those doctors was Beverly Hills cosmetic surgeon Alexander Rivkin, M.D. "I'd read an article about a procedure he uses to make pockmarks disappear," says Veronica. Eager to test out the treatment, she booked an appointment. After experiencing immediate results, she hired him on the spot to serve as the spa's medical director.

Veronica also brought into the fold

Veronica Malibu Skin & Body Care Center

Founder: Veronica Barton-Schwartz

Location: Malibu, California

Size: 2,000 square feet (day spa and medical spa, 1,000 each)

Treatment areas: Four facial rooms, one body/wet room, one sauna room, three medical treatment rooms, two reception areas and a restroom

No. of employees: 12 total, including the founder's daughter Lisa Deleau, as manager

Average day spa service ticket: \$100

Signature services: Oxygen Facial (using Intraceuticals system), microdermabrasion, Veronica's Special Occasion Facial

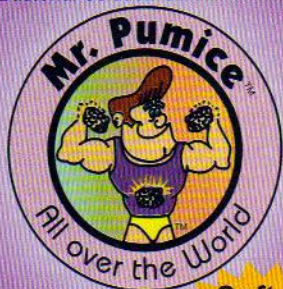
Biggest revenue generator: Mainstays: 60-minute massages and facials; new offerings: Fraxel, microdermabrasion and Endermologie

Product lines: 302, Ayur Medic, Boscia, Epicuren, Jane Iredale, Jessica Wu, Medicalia, Murad Sun Protection, Nectifirm, Osea, Paul Scerri, Rene Guinot, Revitalash, Själ, Skinceuticals, Veronica Malibu

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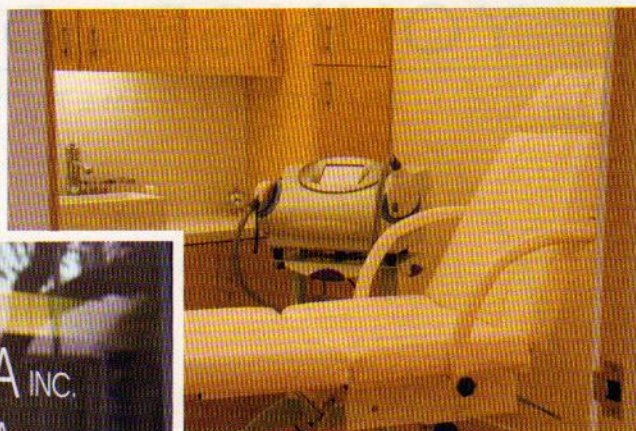
Veronica Medical Spa clients can receive services like injection rhinoplasty, cosmetic acupuncture and biochemical analysis.

of the medical spa an acupuncturist, a nutritionist and two nurses trained to work with laser treatments. And soon, to round out the spa's comprehensive offerings, Dr. Peter Sheerin, a cosmetic dentist, will be on staff. "Teeth can show aging," says Veronica. "You can have nice skin, then smile and display terrible teeth." The different health professionals are available at the medical spa on specific days of the week.

The day spa is open Tuesday through Saturday for services from several facialists, an Endermologist who's also a massage therapist, an esthetician who specializes in waxing and a receptionist. Once a month, employees from both spas come together for training sessions on products and equipment. "We're always learning new things," says Lisa. All employees earn a high percentage of income from services rendered.

Treatment Duality

Medical spa clients at Veronica's may receive several types of laser services including laser hair removal, and skin and body treatment performed with Titan and/or Fraxel units. Botox and Restylane treatments are on tap as well. In lieu of cosmetic surgery, the medical spa offers injection rhinoplasty, a new procedure pioneered by Rivkin, and medical and cosmetic acupuncture with acupuncturist Tatiana Rubio. Nutritionist Mary Rose, of the Rose



Nutrition Center, conducts biochemical analyses, iridology and symptom surveys in devising plans for clients suffering from nutritional imbalances.

Just as mother and daughter bring generations of spa care to the business, the business's menu brings generations of treatment approaches to clients. Indeed, the day spa touts itself as offering "traditional European skin care with the latest American biotechnology." Veronica attends various spa conferences to ensure she has the most cutting-edge equipment available. Omnilux Red and Blue lights and IPL Fotofacials are available to help address specific skin conditions. However, the most requested treatments are microdermabrasion and oxygen facials using hyperbaric oxygen. "Ever since Madonna started talking about getting oxygen facials, our treatments have gained in popularity," says Veronica. "The facial has a wonderful delivery system." Clients also use these treatments before and after cosmetic surgery to hasten the healing process. The popularity of Endermologie LPG was another surprise. In fact, the day spa has moved away from standard body treatments such as salt glow scrubs to open up more time for the high demand.

Through it all, though, Veronica

continues to be a proponent of what some may call "old school" spa care. She offers traditional aromatherapy massage using essential oils imported from Switzerland. And she gives traditional skincare advice: "I believe in a good, deep-cleansing facial," she states.

Sharing the Future

The high energy at Veronica Malibu Skin & Body Care Center and Medical Spa is apparent to anyone who visits the facility. It's the excited buzz of a mother and daughter looking together toward the future and making big plans. "I'd love to turn this whole building into a women's health center," Veronica says, talking about her latest dream for promoting her body/mind/spirit philosophy. In the meantime, she'll continue to educate the public with an ongoing series of speakers and an upcoming newsletter.

Veronica is also taking a good, hard look at her product offerings. "The reason I carry more than 10

major lines is because there isn't one line that has everything that I love in it," she says. Therefore, this seasoned businesswoman is also planning to formulate her own product line. She and Lisa have been meeting with chemists to discuss possibilities, among them a milder line without active ingredients that's targeted for tweens. Veronica's granddaughter, Kendall, is the inspiration for this idea. "She has my skin, so at age 11 she's already coming in for facials," Veronica notes. The women are reviewing product packaging as well as they move toward the goal of a green spa. "We've become more aware of the environment and have started selling products with recyclable packaging," says Lisa.

Future changes are inevitable for Veronica's Malibu. Perhaps the surest change will be in September: That's when Lisa herself is due to become a mother. And so it goes ... •

Bekah Wright is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer.



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