

The story behind... THE WORLD'S MOST EXPENSIVE FACIAL

Acclaimed war reporter
Jamne di Giovanni begins
the battle against ageing



I have been taking diligent care of my skin since I was 13 - SPF50 sunblock, Elizabeth Arden's Eight Hour Cream. Dr. Sebagh's Rose de Vie Serum - but cutting-edge beauty is not my thing. Furthermore, I live in Paris, where women don't go in for needles and plastic surgery and instead opt to spend a fortune on facials of which,

I'm not ashamed to admit, I have had my fair share. So when a friend told me that I needed to have the most expensive facial in the world, I refused, point blank. "You have to go," she said simply. "Think of it as a war zone: this is a battle against ageing." Then she told me about Aïda Bical, a refugee from

Kosovo who arrived in America in the Nineties.

If you ever wonder why you never sit next to A-list celebrities in your salon, it's because many of them go instead to Bical's Manhattan

salon, snuggled between two brownstones,

where treatments start at \$500 (£316).

The day I arrive I have a hangover, jet lag and three months of non-stop

work and travelling behind me. Bical, whose sun-streaked hair and very tight jeans belie her 48 years, scrutinises my face. "This is war," she repeats. Bical's story is astonishing.

On arriving in America, she started working for the French pharmaceutical company Biologique Recherche as a receptionist. Bical began using the company's products and trained to become a beautician using them. They exfoliate the skin in a natural way to prepare it for products. "Unless you do that, the most expensive products in the world are wasted," she says.

First is a diagnosis. Mine isn't bad: I just needed some refining. Then Bical sets to work, mixing gels, serums and creams, and massages them into my skin, shaping my face like a ball of dough; grabbing my facial muscles, lifting them and holding them in that position to create "a memory". After more than an hour of squeezing, scrubbing, massaging and infusing, Bical uses a micro-current machine which, she says, ensures the serum is absorbed fully by the skin. She then applies Lotion P50 exfoliator. "Do this twice a month," she says, "and you will never need a facelift."

"You look as if something magical has happened," says

my friend when I'm back to Paris. "Is it Botox? Or is it love?"

"The latter," I reply, before booking my next facial.

This is a love affair that will never end. **X**

Biologique Recherche opened in London in January at EF Medspa, 69 St John's Wood High Street, London NW8

CHRISTOPHER THORNTON

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