

MAGIC TOUCH

Paris' best-kept beauty secret, Sophie Carbonari, is combining ancient with modern massage techniques to finesse the face

Words by FIONA EMBLETON

In an industry where 'anti-ageing' sets the beauty standard, it is a refreshing voice that declares the best sort of face is not one curated by cosmetic doctors but by massage so that it radiates a next-level glow. That voice belongs to Sophie Carbonari, a sought-after skin guru who splits her time between London and her chic, sun-flooded studio at the Jardin du Palais Royal, Paris. Her bespoke facial massages are hailed as taking skin from wan to possessing an almost magical quality, and now that the genie is out of the bottle, her clients include notable names such as Rihanna and Naomi Campbell, as well as a raft of models and beauty editors.

When you arrive in Sophie's treatment room, there is no dizzying menagerie of facial offerings to choose from – just a singular holistic treatment. Nor is your skin subjected to clinical poking and prodding under harsh light while a magnifying mirror reveals how crater-like your pores are. Instead, you are greeted with warm conversation as Sophie assesses both your skin and your emotional state so that she can swoop in to alleviate

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Sophie, “takes into account blood sugar levels, pH, excess fluid and body temperature,” and informs her approach to facial massage. “My vision of skin is not as an isolated organ, but rather as the body's biggest organ, which plays a really important role in our system,” she explains. “The skin reflects the internal state of our metabolism: inflammation, hormonal issues as well as mineral or vitamin deficiencies. ►

the manifestations of stress or a punishing work schedule. “I like to be someone with whom my clients can share any anxiety they have about their skin,” she says gently.

Another notable difference is the absence of branded skincare. Sophie blends every (soon to be released) product from scratch, according to your skin's specific needs. “It is an alchemy between apothecary and high-performing actives such colloidal silver and gold, hyaluronic acid and vitamins,” she notes. In other words, an effective roster of ingredients to replenish hydration and antioxidants, as well as temper inflammation.

While all facials beat a familiar drum of cleanse, resurface, mask, moisturise – and you can expect the same here – it is Sophie's unwavering belief in a concept called homeostasis that sets her treatments apart. This state of complete equilibrium, says

PHOTOGRAPHY: LINDA LEITNER. SOPHIE IMAGES: SUPPLIED





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While facial massage is an ancient ritual, Sophie spent years perfecting her own technique. Known as the Sophie Carbonari Protocol, it is a modern blend of lymphatic drainage, acupressure massage (through the scalp, jaw and even inside the ears) and famously includes Japanese Kobido. This over 500 year-old technique – involving kneading, rolling, tapping, pinching – is designed to get energy (Qi) moving through your facial meridians (the channels it flows through). “When you work on the meridians, the body enters a state of full consciousness,” Sophie notes.

Each stroke of the Protocol – learnt in France, New York and at London’s Chi Yu Japanese wellness centre – is aimed at stimulating the deep facial muscles, revving up collagen production and alleviating poor blood and lymphatic circulation. And it is nothing short of a masterpiece at lifting the cheekbones and erasing all traces of fatigue from the brow. “It is a type of choreography that allows me to work on all skin levels, from the deepest to the most superficial in order to activate the rejuvenating process,” Sophie says. “From the first moment that the face is cleansed to the final hydrating touch, every movement is calculated to have a real impact on the skin. It is not solely aesthetic, it is also a full meditative experience.”

However, the real fairy-tale happens when Sophie homes in on your fascia, using firm pressure to release muscle tension in the face and jaw in order to improve skin suppleness. The slightly disconcerting clicking sound is not unlike the crackling of Rice Krispies, but the effect of this final flourish is immediate on a sunken, deflated face.



Sophie hard at work performing her signature facial massage

“The Sophie Carbonari Protocol not only involves the skin and muscles, but it also takes into consideration the complexity of the skin’s tissue,” says Sophie. “It mobilises connective and vascular tissue for drainage and uses fascia acupressure for deep stimulation. It is a real metabolism booster and is customised to each client depending on their loss of elasticity and how much muscular tension and water retention they are holding on to.”

It is not hard to see why Sophie fits so neatly into the zeitgeist where health is wealth. While her facial massage moonlights as self-care, a lustrous glow is still the star of this show and it will see you ditch the frosting of highlighter in favour of that other famous French girl staple: au naturel skin. ■

A facial with Sophie starts from €400 [Dhs1,585]. Visit sophiecarbonari.com