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Clear skin unsullied by freckles or age spots is another perennial client request. "A lot of friends asked how celebrities have such white skin. It looks like they've never been out in the sun," says Helle Jeppsson, owner of Hela Spa. The secret, she says, is intense pulsed light technology, which aims to erase pigmentation. It's a celebrity-touted treatment with a celebrity price tag: \$350 to \$400 per treatment at Hela, and most spas recommend a series of three.

Jeppsson, who splits her time between New York and Washington, says that in the past five or six years, "D.C. has evolved so much. It's much more of a fashion city than it used to be."

It's also a notoriously career-obsessed city. And people in all professions are finding that it pays -- literally -- to be attractive. Economists Daniel Hamermesh and Jeff Biddle began studying hiring bias in 1994; their research indicated that an unwrinkled brow and puffy lips could indeed trump a stellar résumé. A person with below-average looks makes 9 percent less an hour than an average-looking person, they found, while a real looker can expect to earn about 5 percent more.

"It's not just celebrities who have to look good. Everyone has an image they need to uphold. If you're a receptionist, an investment broker, in big business, a certain look is expected," Read says. "People come to me and say, 'I'm a single parent and I have a financial obligation.' This isn't frivolity -- this is about keeping jobs."

Still, D.C. folk often dial down their celebrity-inspired procedures.

Eugene Giannini, a spokesman for the D.C. Dental Society, says less than 1 percent of his clients asks for the kind of neon-white teeth regularly blinding viewers of awards shows. Most of his patients simply want to go a few shades lighter.

Says Tanzi: "The interesting thing about Washingtonians -- and I've worked in New York as well -- is that they're a very discreet group, particular about what they want, and they want things to look natural."

And so, she says, although celebrities raise the profiles of certain dermatological procedures, her patients often come in and say, "I don't know what so-and-so celebrity had done, but it looks like too much," Tanzi notes. They'll say, "I don't want to look like the woman on 'Desperate Housewives' or Nicole Kidman; I don't want the mannequin look."

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Anne Wayson gets lash extensions at Morgan Gerard Salon & Spa in Annapolis. (By Dennis Drenner For The Washington Post)

Change Your Look Without Breaking the Bank

Not everyone has a celeb's beauty budget, but that doesn't mean you can't get the star treatment at home. As beauty product reviewers for Trend Spotter, we're familiar with the DIY approach to looking good, so we signed up to try four extreme (yet relatively affordable) ways to get ready for your close-up.

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On the other hand, some patients have their hearts set on certain celebrity-approved procedures that aren't right for them, Giannini says. "People ask for procedures, [and they] don't even know what the procedure is," he says. Some patients request veneers -- perfect-looking fake teeth, which are usually bonded over real teeth after they've been drilled down -- when they really need orthodontics.

Not to mention, getting veneers hurts. There are the injections, the uncomfortable drilling, the post-op sensitivity, all the stuff *Us Weekly* doesn't tell you about. "People are surprised," Giannini says. "Nothing is easy just because they are celebrities. They are real."

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