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Face the future

A laser-based facial involves some pain and lots of gain

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Disclaimer forms are pretty much standard procedure before most beauty treatments these days. But when said form warns of "pain", "bleeding", "blistering" and "crusting", potentially lasting several days, it's hard to be blasé.

Clear + Brilliant is brand new to Scotland. Zen Lifestyle, who have recently refurbished their Teviot Place branch (pictured), is the only salon in the country that provides it, and one of just four in the whole of the UK.

It uses a fractional laser to penetrate the skin, causing it to renew itself, targeting signs of ageing and uneven skin tone and reducing pore size. I like the sound of the results, but I'd rather not endure fire and brimstone to get there.

My therapist Gemma is just lovely, putting me at ease while still being honest about what's involved. To begin with, she says, it will feel like pins and needles, but is likely to get hotter as the treatment goes on.

Suitably prepped, I begin by getting my face cleansed then Gemma applies a topical anaesthetic, to numb my skin and reduce any feelings of having my flesh ripped from my bones. In the 20 minutes it takes to activate, I relax further with

a hand and arm massage (in as much as it's possible to relax with thoughts of bleeding and blistering preoccupying your mind). But

when the laser begins to roll over my skin, first horizontally then vertically, across my forehead then down my cheeks and up and down my nose, I can barely feel a thing. And that's with the setting turned up to "medium".

Gemma's right - pins and needles is the best way to describe the sensation. When she goes over my face for the second time, the anaesthetic is starting to wear off and my face is already pretty hot, so it feels a little more nippy, but it's never unbearable.

Once it's all over, we finish with a

soothing cold face mask, a massage with gentle moisturiser, and a head rub.

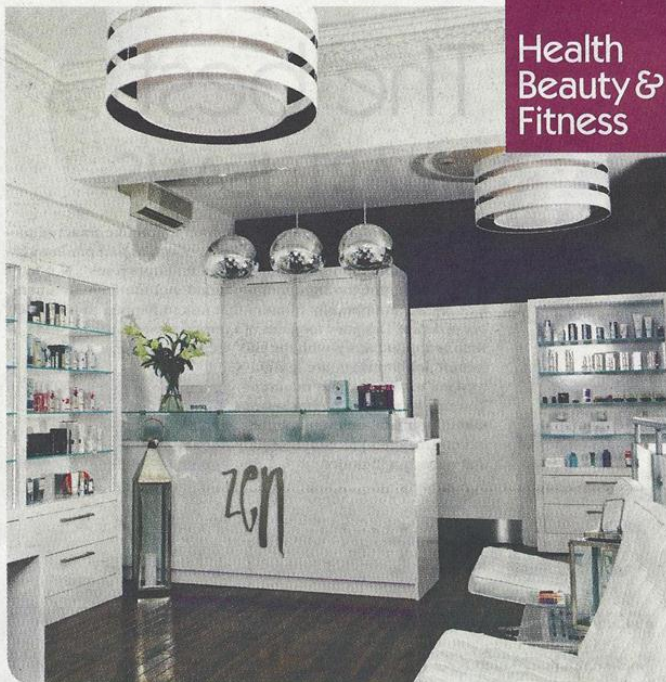
After just over an hour, I emerge into the night. OK, so I look as though I've overdone a day in the sun. My face feels tight and warm, but already much smoother. I'm advised to use gentle products - plus a sunscreen - on my face for the next fortnight, over which period the results will begin to show.

Day two and I'm able to go out in public without people staring - my skin still feels tight and warm but is already looking smoother. A few days later and the tone is more even, though there is a

slightly gritty feel to my skin. After just over a week I'm positively glowing. And in a good way. I look fresh, my face more youthful, blotchy patches on my cheeks have gone - and that's after just one treatment. They recommend six, which doesn't come cheap, but the results are pretty clear. And rather brilliant.

RUTH WALKER

Zen Lifestyle, 2-3 Teviot Place, Edinburgh (0131-226 6777) and also, from June, 84 Hanover Street, Edinburgh (0131-225 7009), www.zen-lifestyle.com



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Clear + Brilliant costs £195 for one treatment and £975 for a course of six