

Canada lost a promising neurosurgeon but gained a pioneer in cosmetic treatments when Martin Braun wrecked his left knee on a Whistler ski slope.

"It was January 28, 1996," he says, "and it was twenty below that morning, so cold there was nobody else up there. I'd driven up the night before to stay with a plastic surgeon buddy. It was late, I'd finished a shift in Emerg, and I was so exhausted, I left my skis on the roof rack. I'd skied for twenty years and never had a problem, but that night, the water froze in the bindings. When I went down, they wouldn't come loose. I blew my ACL and MCL [anterior cruciate ligament and medial collateral ligament]."

Having worked for eight years as an emergency room physician at Surrey Memorial had its advantages. Braun checked to see who was on duty the next weekend, found an orthoped friend, and had the knee repaired. But the point of this story is that Braun's wife, Susan, visiting him in hospital, brought him a stack of magazines. And picked up a copy of *Vogue* for herself. In it, she found an article on laser hair removal. Braun said, "Sounds like a good idea."

That June, the Brauns were in San Diego to train on the first laser designed for hair removal. "There were six doctors at that meeting," Braun says. "It must have been like the first six McDonald's franchise owners to meet Ray Kroc." Braun was the one Canadian doctor in the group, and he said to the manufacturer, "I can do some clinical studies for you." And that's how Martin Braun became the first doctor in Canada to perform laser hair removal.

Now it's important to back up, to the beginning of Martin Braun's career. The

Brockville-born son of an IBM executive who was transferred all over Canada (eight different high schools), Braun found himself in Vancouver in 1976 and decided to enter the School of Medicine at UBC. "I realized," he says, "that I'm not a good company man. I'm not good at taking orders, following company policy. What appealed to me about medicine was that I like working with my hands, I could set my own hours, be my own boss—really a small businessman, although they don't teach you that in med school."

Braun took his internship and surgical training at VGH. He also got married. Susan was then studying dentistry, and, says Braun, "became the first woman to have a baby while in dental school. She had the baby on Saturday, and was back to school on Monday."

At that time, Braun was drawn toward neurosurgery, because, he says, "You're left alone. Nobody knows what you do. And you usually get the OR



Braun employs Photodynamic therapy and the drug Levulan to treat a variety of skin conditions. "It's like a pap test for facial cancers," he says.

"Get smooth" urges Martin Braun's skin care centres. And people fly to them from Los Angeles, New York, Japan and Korea.

A Smooth



Dr. Martin Braun

when you want it.” But when he became the father of two children, he gave up his surgical residency (“You’ve got to be there all the time, you have to give up your family and personal life”) and started a family practice in Delta. At the same time, he was working in ER at Surrey Memorial. “I liked the fast pace.” Then came the ski injury.

After watching laser hair removal in San Diego and securing the right to use the machines in Canada, Braun began what eventually became the Vancouver and Delta Laser and Skin Care Centres. “It took a lot of

guts to leave the health care system, to walk away from a guaranteed job and a guaranteed income. None of our procedures is covered by MSP, and we received no government support, and no support from the Business Development Bank. My accountant couldn’t understand it. ‘Why are you doing this?’ he said. And the first year, we lost \$25,000. But I have great respect for entrepreneurs. You have to stick your neck out.”

Today, Braun and his wife (who gave up her dental practice to work with him) operate two clinics, one in Vancouver’s Fairmont Medical Building, the other in Delta’s Sunwood Medical Building. They offer a number of treatments. Laser hair removal is still most in demand, but there are many other procedures, and, says Braun, “We add a new one every year. There are new technologies all the time. It’s fascinating. You have to be on top of every development.”

Braun calls his specialty “non-surgical cosmetic rejuvenation,” and says, “it’s not vanity, it’s maintenance.” Best known of his clinics’ treatments, apart from hair

Operator



Thermage is described by *Vogue* as “the facelift of the future.” It tightens tissue, explains Braun. “Plastic surgery moves skin. We spare you the knife.”

removal, is the use of Botox cosmetic to soften or eliminate deep facial lines. Braun currently injects more Botox cosmetic than any other doctor in Canada (including some on himself—“I test all procedures on myself,” he says).

The name Botox comes from botulinum toxin type A, a purified protein. Developed by Dr. Alan Scott in San Francisco in the 1980s, it was used first, with FDA approval, to correct strabismus (crossed eyes) in infants. Adult injections for wrinkles began in 1987, and it was discovered that Botox not only removed wrinkles, it also cured migraine headaches or reduced their severity and frequency. Today, 100,000 Canadian women have had Botox treatments.

So, with apologies to Cole Porter:
*“All grandes dames say it’s good
And every star out in far Hollywood*

*Seems to give it a try—
So why shouldn’t I?”*

Botox is huge, but Braun is just as excited about a newer drug, called Levulan, developed at Queen’s University. He uses it in combination with photodynamic therapy for a variety of skin conditions, from acne to pre-cancers and early skin cancers. “It’s better than a surgeon’s eye,” he says. “It spots abnormal, rapidly growing cells, and gets rid of them. Cancers just peel off the face [or, in one case, the bald head] and there’s no surgery, no wound, no white mark from liquid nitrogen.

“It’s like a pap test for facial cancers,” says Braun. “Anyone who has spent time in the sun should have this treatment, and anyone who has had skin cancer should have it once a year.” Levulan taken internally, says Braun, may even be

effective in treating bladder, esophageal and laryngeal cancers.

Then there is Thermage, described by *Vogue* as “the no-surgery facelift...the facelift of the future.” Thermage tightens tissue, explains Braun. “Plastic surgery moves skin. We spare you the knife and make existing skin look better.”

Other procedures offered by Braun’s clinics include a complementary complexion analysis with a Visia camera, acne therapy; photorejuvenation, the use of intense pulsed light to eliminate uneven pigmentation; fillers with Restylane (Susan’s specialty) to create full beautiful lips and smooth facial wrinkles and folds; laser removal of tattoos, spider veins, and some varicose veins; lightening of certain scars (“We show fifty percent improvement on thoracic scars,” says Braun); and medical microdermabrasion.

Not surprisingly, people in the film and fashion industries flock to Braun’s clinics, but, he says, “While we really do have a world-class facility here, it’s for people in all walks of life, not just the rich and the famous. My philosophy has always been to offer our services at very affordable prices.”

Eighty-five percent of Braun’s clients are women, but the male quotient is rising. The main attraction for many is “no downtime. Surgery involves downtime. Come here, get smooth, look better, and go right back to work.”

Braun’s staff—attractive and warmly friendly—loves him. “He’s so real, so down to earth,” says treatment coordinator Janette Sen-Lum. “He’s open, he jokes. And he’s generous with his time and expertise. Because he’s internationally respected, and a friend of leading cosmetic physicians around the world, he always has knowledge to share when he returns from his trips.”

Martin Braun has created one of the world’s leading skin care centres, but he’s still a ski buff, serving weekends as a volunteer doctor at Blackcomb. “It’s great,” he says. “You can go out with the ski patrol at seven a.m., get first crack at the hills.”

Braun grins. “Gotta make sure those runs are safe.” ❖