

MAN IN THE MIRROR

EVERYWHERE AROUND ME I see men like me – in their early 40s – coming up hard against the reality of their lives. And they're depressed. Depressed by the careers that have passed them by; the unfinished albums, the unpublished novels, depressed by the state of the world. And also by the state of themselves. This, truly, is the stage of life when you begin to notice the first real signs of your body starting its inevitable physical decline. The knees that no longer turn on a dime. The growing paunches. The receding hairlines.

I've felt all this recently. Especially the part about the hair.

There have been no dramatic hairballs gathering at the shower plug hole. And, as yet, there's no devastating monk-like bald patch at the crown. But for a couple of years now, an agonisingly slow pincer movement has been steadily making inroads into my hairline, leaving an increasingly isolated clump of fringe. Every time I look in the mirror I can't help but think of a melting polar ice cap, a great chunk of which will imminently float fatally away from the main corpus.

Of course I'm hardly alone in this. But I'm not finding solace in company. Instead, I've started to obsessively analyse my friends' hair, making mental notes of where they are on the spectrum, fostering petty jealousies: the musician with his luxuriant tresses and lush beard; the geneticist with his enragingly thick jet-black rug... Coming face to face with the reality of your vanity and the fragility of your masculinity is a sobering experience. I had hoped I would be bigger than this. But the fact remains: I don't want to go bald. I really, really don't want to go bald.

Like most men, I'd wager, the thought of a hair transplant is a step too far and the potential side effects of finasteride (a commercially available prostate drug found to stimulate hair growth) are way worse than a shiny pate. And so I journey to Palace Merano, the most storied spa hotel in northern Italy's most storied of spa towns. The property is dominated by its celebrated clinic, with all guests enrolled on one of its programmes. Everything is overseen by Henri Chenot, the septuagenarian creator of the Chenot Method, which synthesises the blood tests and dietary know-how of western medicine and the energetic analyses of Traditional Chinese Medicine to create a holistic approach to preventative care. The detox, which I'm doing, is six days of a carefully controlled diet (no booze, no caffeine, no dairy and one 24-hour fast), and a barrage of meridian-focused massages and hydro-aromatherapy treatments.

All this, it is hoped, will generally contribute to lower levels of toxicity, increased micro-circulation (including – encouragingly – to my scalp), improved stress levels and all-round greater vim, which

should of course be good news for my embattled hairline. But in addition to this core programme, I am having a battery of add-ons specifically focused on beefing up my wispy tufts.

Of these, the cheapest and probably most enjoyable is the Chenot Method scalp treatment. This involves a wondrous essential-oil-infused head massage to stimulate follicles and improve energy flow. At the end of it, while my head is still slathered in oil, the therapist binds my scalp with aluminium foil and instructs me not to remove it for a couple of hours. And so I go to lunch in my dressing gown wearing a tin hat like some madly paranoid conspiracy theorist from the 1950s.

Things get more rigorous at a consultation with one of the aesthetic doctors. After looking at my hairline – I notice it's not dissimilar to his – he recommends a trio of treatments, all of which, he implies, he might have experienced as both patient and doctor.


First is Second Generation PRP. For this, a vial of my blood

is run through a centrifuge to separate the red blood cells from the platelet-rich plasma. Prized for its concentration of growth factors, the latter plays a key role in the body's natural regeneration. Injections of it were first used to accelerate the healing of wounds and injured tendons but it's now widely used for aesthetic procedures. This is then injected back into my scalp – focusing on the area at the front – in a series of tiny, barely noticeable pinpricks, similar in intensity

to the least invasive acupuncture.

At the same time, I also get the Meso hair repair. Using similar skinny needles, a cocktail of vitamins, nutrients and minerals is injected into my scalp, the aim being to improve the nourishment and antioxidant capacity of the tissue. After that, I don a pair of protective glasses and lie back for a round of low-level laser therapy, which is thought to stimulate cell function and encourage regrowth. It only takes 10 minutes and I don't even realise it's happening.

Does all of this make any difference? A fortnight later, my wife is convinced there has been a noticeable improvement – increased baby-hair growth in the thinnest areas and everything generally looking thicker and more fulsome. I neither violently agree nor disagree with her assessment but happily attest that things certainly don't seem to be worse.

I was never going to come home looking like Side Show Bob. But I did leave feeling fundamentally changed. The happy outcome of the extensive blood tests, toxicity evaluations and bone-density assessments is that I'm in rude health. And this realisation has given me a new-found sense of equanimity. I walk out rejuvenated, feeling full of a strange and wonderful self-confidence. 

THE ISSUE

GRADUAL HAIR LOSS IN A YOUNGISH WRITER WHICH TRIGGERS A CONFIDENCE-SHATTERING PREMATURE SLUMP

THE REMEDY

SERIOUS SCALP STIMULATION AT PALACE MERANO ESPACE HENRI CHENOT IN ITALY WITH A WIDER-REACHING OUTCOME

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