

# MALIBU

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## VERONICA SKIN &amp; BODY CARE CENTER

# THE GODMOTHER OF SKINCARE

Since opening her first center near Zuma Beach almost four decades ago, Veronica Barton Schwartz has transformed the beauty industry, and helped generations of women and men feel more comfortable in their skin along the way.

✍️ written by Holly Bieler 📷 photographed by Julie Wuellner

It's not a surprise that Veronica Barton Schwartz has amazing skin. The veritable godmother of L.A.'s now-exploding skin-care industry, Veronica has been practicing her array of glow-inducing facial treatments out of her world-famous Malibu spa, Veronica Skin & Body Care Center, for more than 35 years, entrusted by generations of local families and celebrities from Hillary Clinton to Miranda Kerr.

And yet despite her unparalleled reputation, Veronica still kind of amazes when you actually see her in person. At 71 years old her skin looks younger and about 20 times more glowy than mine, and I'm 29. Hers is the kind of pore-less, crease-less, unconscionably dewy skin you can't even be jealous of, in the way it's hard to begrudge Julia Roberts' her smile or Angelina Jolie her pout. Sometimes, genetics and luck just work in people's favor. A decade's



**LOCAL BUSINESS** Veronica Skin & Body Care Center opened in its current location in 1986.

worth of headgear isn't going to give you Julia Roberts' smile, and nor, it might seem, would all the facials and moisturizers in the world incite the seemingly God-given agelessness and luminosity with which Veronica has been blessed.

Surprisingly, this isn't true at all. Indeed Veronica's preternatural beauty isn't just an amazing piece of marketing for Veronica Skin & Body Care Center, but a true testament to the uncommon efficacy of her work. Having struggled with cystic acne from childhood through her mid-twenties, Veronica is keenly aware that the pursuit of clear skin is about much more than vanity. She's been exactly where many of her clients have been, skipping social engagements because she was too embarrassed to show her inflamed face in public, the agony of trying every treatment and product on the market to no avail.

"If you've never had bad skin, you just don't know how crippling it can be," she says one night last December over cookies and peppermint tea at her center, just a few minutes from Cross Creek on PCH. On this day her skin looks as brilliant and clear as ever, but as she gestures towards her now-perfect cheeks, once marred, she



says, by thick acne and scarring, it's clear the experience is still close to her heart. "I know exactly what it feels like, because I went through the same thing. And I know how life-changing it can be when your skin clears up. I know it sounds crazy but this has never been about making money for me. The reason I do what I do is because I love helping people feel better about themselves. That gives me so much pleasure."

However if you'd told a 25-year old Veronica that she would one day become one of the most acclaimed figures in skincare today, helping to completely transform the industry in the process, she wouldn't have believed you. At the time Veronica was a newlywed and young mother, working light-years away from the beauty industry at a promising career in the technical illustration field. Veronica's days were spent designing visual representations of computer products for the Westlake Village software company Bunker Ramo, and her nights with her husband and two young children, Lisa and Anthony, at their Broad Beach home.

It was 1973, and everything was different. Mothers of toddler-aged children didn't often hold full-time jobs in the burgeoning, male-dominated industry of software development. But Veronica had been raised by a single working mother, after her father died when she was just 3 years old, and her whole life had aspired to the same independence and drive. When her strong talents as a visual artist landed Veronica the job after college, she hadn't even hesitated.

Malibu was different as well. Still a sleepy little beach town, its commercial centers were still composed almost exclusively of little mom and pops—the Colony Diner near Cross Creek, or Trancas Restaurant in Western Malibu, where Veronica remembers Bob Dylan occasionally breaking out his guitar to serenade local diners. It was heaven-on-earth for Veronica, who'd harbored an affinity for the water since her childhood in Hermosa Beach, her days spent surfing with friends as The Beach Boys blared in the background.

"I've always had a fascination with the







#### **CUTTING-EDGE TECH**

One of the treatments offered at Veronica Skin & Body Care Center is the power-peel, a microdermabrasion treatment that exfoliates the skin.





**LIKE MOTHER LIKE DAUGHTER** Veronica's daughter, Lisa, handles the spa's business operations.

**MALIBU LOCAL** Veronica moved with her family from Encino to Malibu in the early 1970s. Their new Broad Beach home was just steps from the beach and heaven-on-earth for Veronica, who always loved the ocean.



**FAMILY TIME** At left, Veronica's great grandson Alan. At right, Veronica and husband Carl.







#### CHILDREN OF THE NATIONS

Veronica is active in charities including Operation Smile and Children of the Nations. In the summer of 2019, Veronica and her family traveled to Malawi to support Children of the Nations. At left and above, photos from that trip.



**LEGACY** Veronica gives her 99 year-old mother, Renee, a facial every weekend. Right, Renee in her twenties in Griffith Park.

ocean," she said. "I love the sunrise, the sunset, the smell of the salt, the feel of the water and sun on my skin. It's just my happy place."

Growing up, Veronica also loved how the ocean seemed to transform her tempestuous skin, the salt water and sun drying out the occasional breakouts she suffered throughout middle and high school. In the years since, her skin had mostly calmed down, however as she entered her mid-twenties her acne began getting worse than ever. Soon her face was littered with cystic acne flare-ups that no amount of Malibu sun or water seemed to fix.

Nothing, in fact, seemed to fix it. Over months, Veronica tried everything—changed her diet, read every skincare book she could get her hands on, started taking handfuls of supplements in the morning, all to no avail. Even the top Beverly Hills dermatologists Veronica visited seemed to have no concept or tools for how to remedy her worsening acne, sending her off with a prescription for antibiotics and a drying lotion that didn't do a thing.

"My acne got so bad I became embarrassed to go outside," she says. "I'd look in the mirror and think, I can't go meet my friend for lunch. Look at my skin."

However Veronica's life was forever changed when a friend suggested she make an appointment at Aida Gray, a small salon in Beverly Hills which had recently taken on one of the few working estheticians in Los Angeles. Her name was Bernadette and she had recently moved from her native France, where skincare was treated very differently than it was in the U.S. While facials were still largely uncommon in the states at the time, skilled and well-trained estheticians were plentiful throughout France's major cities, as were cutting-edge products and treatments that put Clearasil, one of the few targeted products on the American skincare market, to shame.

After just a few sessions with Bernadette, Veronica's cystic acne was all but cured.

"It immediately became my passion," she said. "I knew I had to learn what Bernadette





**MATRIARCH** At left, Veronica with her daughter Lisa and son Anthony. At right, Veronica with her great-grandson, 3-month old Alan, along with her grandkids (from left to right)

knew so I could help other people." Veronica became fast friends with Bernadette, peppering her with questions day in and day out about different ingredients and treatments, what foods and vitamins could help with acne, which were known to reverse aging.

A year later, as soon as her youngest child had begun first grade at Juan Cabrillo Elementary School, Veronica enrolled at an esthetician's college in Oxnard, taking classes during the day that got out just in time so she could still pick up Lisa and Anthony from school.

"It wasn't necessarily that I wanted to be an esthetician back then, as much as I wanted to learn everything about skin," Veronica said. "I wanted to know everything Bernadette knew. I wanted to know the chemistry behind it."

However Veronica demonstrated a passion and aptitude for skin that was soon drawing attention. While taking a cosmetics chemistry courses at UCLA, a school connection recommended her for a make-up artist position at Paramount Studios,

and by 1980 Veronica found herself working her first full-time job in beauty.

But the work, she soon realized, was kind of the opposite of what she wanted to do. As she pancaked foundation onto actors' faces, she saw firsthand the toll that makeup and harsh lights were having on their skin, and began offering facials to actors after the day was done. They were amazed at how much better their skin looked and felt after her treatments, and were soon driving up to her Broad Beach home on weekends, Veronica's master bathroom quickly becoming an ad hoc spa. As word began to spread, one client finally voiced the obvious:

"You need to open a skincare place in Malibu."

If it seems like a no-brainer in hindsight, at the time opening a skin care clinic in Malibu wasn't exactly a sure-fire financial move. If few people were doing what Bernadette was in L.A., there were 0 people doing it in Malibu, where many of the residents didn't even know what an esthetician was, much less were clamoring for a local one. And yet Veronica was fearless.

She knew in her heart that the community's well-traveled and celebrity clientele meant there was a market for her services. Even more, the opportunity to work on her own time presented something of a dream scenario for Veronica, who'd long struggled with juggling her dual ambitions of forging her own career path while still being an active, present mother.

"I didn't have any trepidations, because I knew I was in control," she says.

In 1981, Veronica officially opened shop, renting out a tiny room in the back of a nail salon in a newly-constructed Ed Niles building near Zuma Beach. Within a matter of weeks, her gambit paid off more dramatically than she could ever have imagined.

"We were popular immediately," she says. "I think people were really hungry for facials in Malibu. All of a sudden I was doing facials on Brian Wilson, Ali McGraw and Cicely Tyson. Within my first year, I had to hire another esthetician."

Bolstered by the success, Veronica found herself craving to learn even more, and began taking trips to some of the most re-









**HOLISTIC SKINCARE** Veronica's Malibu center features an array of treatments for the skin and body.

nowned wellness and beauty institutions in the world. She studied at the famed Guinot Institute in Paris, and in Montecatini, Italy, learning about the myriad health benefits associated with the city's ancient thermal springs. When she became fascinated by aromatherapy she traveled to Cairo, learning all about the rejuvenating powers of scent from the same family Coco Chanel had enlisted to help develop her trademark perfume, Chanel No. 5.

"She's the guru of what she does, but she is still always willing to be innovative," said Dr. Talia Emery, a dermatologist and Medical Director of Westlake Village's acclaimed Remedy Skin + Body, who has worked with Veronica for years. "Some people get in their groove of doing things, but Veronica has always wanted to learn new things and expand."

Five years after opening shop in the nail salon, when Veronica was approached about opening her own space in a new, Ron Gold-

man-designed space near Cross Creek, she seized on the opportunity as a chance to synthesize all she had learned during her education and travels into an entirely new kind of wellness location.

Opening for business in 1986, Veronica Skin & Body Care Center was one of the first treatment centers dedicated entirely to skin, with estheticians largely still working out of hair and nail salons at the time. In nearly every sense the center was innovative, epitomizing Veronica's holistic, cutting-edge, knowledge-based approach to skincare and wellness. Working with the building's designer, Veronica constructed a first-of-its-kind salt glow room, where she could treat clients with the same full-body thermal exfoliation she'd been blown away by at Two Bunch Palms in Desert Hot Springs. An early patient of microdermabrasion, a procedure which exfoliates the outer layer of the skin, Veronica had witnessed how dramatically the new treat-

ment had improved her acne scarring, and became one of the first estheticians in the world to invest in the expensive new machinery.

Veronica's new center also encapsulated her comprehensive approach to the maintenance of skin and health, which she'd long believed extended beyond simply treating the face. Her office was soon offering sessions with a variety of some of the top wellness practitioners and doctors in the city, from nutritionists and acupuncturists to yoga instructors and dermatologists.

"Health is everything," Veronica said. "It's skincare, it's your teeth, it's what you eat, how you sleep."

Another aspect which immediately set Veronica apart was the deeply individualized approach she adopted towards her clientele. She quickly gained a reputation for her ability to not just treat nearly any skincare ailment, but arm her clients with the knowledge and tools they needed to



maintain the results. Sophie Taub Haxton, a long-time client of Veronica's, said by the time she made an appointment at Veronica Skin & Body Care Center, she had spent thousands of dollars and tried nearly every treatment on the market to clear her melasma and acne, going to far as having surgery on her face. However after just a few treatments at the spa her skin wasn't only completely cleared up, but Veronica had diagnosed the problem and given her a prescription of products that have helped maintain her clear skin to this day.

"When she fixed my face, I couldn't believe I'd spent so much money and gone to all these other facialists, when literally Veronica was like, 'You're just using the wrong products and doing too much,'" she said. "We tried different things until she'd put together a concoction of a face wash, toner and salicylic acid that I still use everyday. She really studies each individual person and comes up with a solution for their face."

Dr. Davis Nguyen, a prominent Beverly Hills plastic surgeon whom has worked closely with Veronica and her patients for years, says its this kind of individualized, knowledge-based approach that has helped set Veronica apart.

"Her clients' skin is ageless," he said.

After opening in 1986, word of the small groundbreaking spa in Malibu soon began to extend beyond L.A., and Veronica's national profile grew. In 1987, Veronica became one of the first skincare professionals to appear on QVC, serving as the first spokesperson for one of her favorite brands, H+. Soon she was being interviewed as a top beauty expert by publications across the world and on TV shows like *Extra!* and FOX News.

Lucrative sponsorship and collaboration opportunities soon followed, however Veronica turned most of them down. When celebrities started approaching her about lending her name to their skincare lines for huge sums, Veronica instead opted to invest her money in developing her own line, working with world-renowned cosmetic chemists to develop a line of moisturizers, serums and other products that incorporate all of her favorite active ingredients, vitamins and minerals, without parabens

or preservatives. Dermatologists and wellness practitioners were also soon lining up to rent space at her center, however choosing to only work with the best of the best. Veronica's continued to keep her practice small.

"My business sustains me because I feel like I'm giving something back by making people feel better about themselves," she says.

For countless women and men, generations of them at this point, Veronica's mission to give something back has quite literally been life-changing.

"You don't notice your skin until something goes wrong, and then you feel so self-conscious and insecure about yourself," said Taub Haxton. "When Veronica cured my skin, it was so exciting. So relieving. I tell her all the time I wish you could clone yourself and live forever so you can do my facials for the rest of my life."

It's a sentiment her clients expressed to me over and over, sometimes with increasing worry, as Veronica nears her retirement-ripe mid-70s. However after nearly 40 years in business, her clients can rest assured that Veronica seems far from slowing down. Just a few years ago she opened a second location, on Montana Ave. in Santa Monica, and is still introducing new products to her line, including a candle inspired by the Bergamot-scented perfume her mother used to wear growing up.

This year alone is shaping up to be a big one for Veronica, with plans to open a satellite location in Beverly Hills, and a top-secret skincare line she's been collaborating on with one of the world's top cosmetics chemists, scheduled to roll-out mid-year.

Despite her packed schedule, Veronica still makes time for non-skincare-associated obsessions, of which she has a few. She and her husband Carl try to travel each year, one of their deep passions, and Veronica still spends much of her free time working with charities like Operation Smile, of which she's been an active supporter and fundraiser for over twenty years. Another charity which has become incredibly close to Veronica's heart is Children of the Nations, which provides support to impoverished and orphaned children throughout

the world. In July, Veronica and her family traveled to Malawi with Children of the Nations, where Veronica met two young girls in the program, 16 year-old Idess and 14 year-old Veronica, whom she now fully sponsors.

Oftentimes Carl and Veronica are spending time with their family, which has always been the most important thing in Veronica's life. Veronica's daughter Lisa, who used to do her homework after school in her mother's very first space near Zuma Beach, has become an integral part of the business, and now manages the majority of the spa's business operations. She and her family live just a few miles from Veronica, as does her son Anthony, and as often as they can the family will get together for meals, or days at the beach. There's no greater joy, Veronica says, then time spent with her growing family, which now includes 5 grandchildren and even a great grandson.

"I've got to be one of the only great grandmothers who is still this hands-on with their business," Veronica says with a laugh.

Indeed one gets the feeling this is a reason Veronica isn't eyeing retirement any time soon. After nearly half a century of breaking barriers, she is keenly aware that she occupies an important space as a successful female business-owner, and of the fact that there is still much more to be done.

"It's the Me Too era, but many women are still struggling," she says. "I'm always wanting to encourage young women to get into business, and I think it's good for them to see [me still working]."

There's also the fact that she is still deeply in love with what she does for a living, and that in many ways it's gotten easier, as she nears her 72<sup>nd</sup> year, with her skin looking the way it does.

"When I started in this business I would have 40 year-old women say, 'You're so young, what do you know?'" she says. "Now, when people find out how old I am, they just say, 'Tell me what to do.'" **MM**

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