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## GO FOR THE GOLD

**Is getting gilded the secret to an eternal glow? Believers are betting on it. Emily Dudding investigates.**



Victor Demarchelier

"I promise you won't glitter like a disco ball," aesthetician Mary DeRolph assures me as I sink into a massage table at the Ritz-Carlton's La Prairie spa in Manhattan. "Your skin will have an incredible iridescence." She has already exfoliated, steamed, and massaged my face with lavender oil and placed pads soaked in caviar extract on my eyes. Now, for the grand finale, DeRolph is bathing my skin in 24-karat gold or, more precisely, [La Prairie's Cellular Radiance Concentrate Pure Gold serum](#) (\$615 per ounce). "The gold will dissolve on your skin's surface to instantly reflect light, and tiny particles will seep in to protect against fine lines and discoloration," she says.

While studies to confirm the efficacy of gold's antiaging properties continue, the instant-

fairy-dust luminosity is hard to argue with. Hours later, I'm still glowing. And therein lies the (beauty) rub. There's no solid data proving gold's beneficial effects on skin, but women who experience it firsthand are creating a gold rush all their own—one that aestheticians and cosmetic companies are more than happy to accommodate. Gold is turning up in an increasing number of creams and serums from some of the most sought-after cult beauty brands. Many of the products contain other active ingredients, from peptides to antioxidants, and skeptics suggest that they're the reason for the results that gold fans swear by.

"There are not enough studies yet on the cosmetic use of gold," says dermatologist Robert Anolik, of Dr. Brandt Dermatology Associates in New York. "If there are real improvements, it is likely because of other ingredients in the product or because the material it comes in is moisturizing." But gold believers stand by their claims: The substance has long been known for its anti-inflammatory properties. In fact, colloidal gold, which is essentially minute particles of gold suspended in a liquid formula, is sometimes injected by doctors to treat rheumatoid arthritis. Aestheticians and product developers are convinced that the same anti-inflammatory agents used for the treatment of a disease like arthritis can prevent the breakdown of collagen and elastin, which causes wrinkles and loss of firmness.

Recently, nanotechnology has been developed that enables the precious metal to be broken down into "nano gold," a type of colloidal gold with even smaller particles that are believed to be absorbed more readily into the skin. While critics have charged that there's a risk of these nanoparticles lodging in other parts of the body, beauty companies claim to have found a way to use them safely. "I'm not sure if it can be harmful," notes Anolik. "The dosages of colloidal gold given medically for arthritis are far higher, and they're considered safe."

Veronica Barton Schwartz, owner of Veronica's Skin & Body Care Center in Malibu, says she always sees an uptick in her signature **Umo 24 Karat Gold Facial** (\$300) during awards season. "It's the ultimate red-carpet treatment." After cleansing and performing a lymphatic drainage massage, Barton Schwartz layers on sheets of 24-karat gold, then aims Umo's cooling ultrasonic mist charged with negative ions at the client's face to help the ingredients penetrate. "Your skin will look luminous," she says, adding that results last for about 10 days. One spa client flew in from Dubai and requested a gold facial for her entire body. It took four hours and cost \$4,000. The woman was clearly happy with the treatment: She asked Barton Schwartz to come to Dubai. And in June, the Japanese-inspired beauty line Tatcha is launching **Gold Camellia Beauty Oil** (\$125 for 1.7 ounces), which comes laden with flecks of colloidal gold. "I met an 80-year-old retired geisha," recalls Tatcha founder Vicky Tsai. "She had the most beautiful complexion. She told me the geishas used to rub pure edible gold leaf on their skin. I don't have hardcore science behind it, but we put gold in as a tribute to the geishas."

For Margaret de Heinrich de Omorovicza, the inspiration for the new **Omorovicza Gold Night Drops** (\$250), out this summer, came from the thermal baths of Budapest. "We use colloidal gold fermented in Hungary's mineral waters along with retinol and vitamin C," she says of the serum. "The gold has an immediate effect, and because of its bioavailability [the rate at which a substance is absorbed by the body], it creates a reservoir in the skin that fights the breakdown of collagen." The downside? "I check the price of gold all the time. It drives me crazy when it goes up."

But price is no barrier for some in the gold-card set. **OroGold's 24K Nano Night Recovery**, which touts the use of nanotechnology, mixes gold particles with seaweed extract, sunflower seed oil, and peptides. The serum clocks in at a vault-worthy \$1,500 per ounce. "Gold helps the other ingredients penetrate," says Judy White, OroGold's director of marketing and customer relations. But, she admits, the allure may be more emotional than scientific: "Women just love seeing gold on their skin."

Corset and shorts, **Dolce & Gabbana**, 877-70-DGUSA. Rejuvenating Golden Face Mask, \$999, [spaandequipment.com](http://spaandequipment.com).