

aging comes of age

The baby boomers are forming a new concept of aging and your spa can capitalize on the trend.

By Kendra Kozen

SINCE THE BABY BOOMERS CAME OF AGE IN THE 1960S,

America has undeniably become a youth-obsessed culture. From Rodeo Drive to Madison Avenue and everywhere in between, for at least the last decade one of the most prevalent trends in the beauty industry has been the idea of complete antiaging—do whatever possible to fight any appearance of aging. Our society now happily spends billions of dollars each year on the latest creams, gels and serums to keep us looking as young as possible, and more invasive treatments like cosmetic surgery and injections are now commonplace.

All of this has been a blessing for the spa industry. By capitalizing on the desire to look younger, you've probably increased your bottom line and brought in more than one new client. But will this trend continue now that the baby boomer generation has entered its 60s? Inevitably,

we'll all continue to get older, but will members of this generation still want to try to look like they're in their 30s when they reach 75?

Some in the industry believe we're beginning to see a shift in the way that we look at aging. It appears that we may be moving away from the concept of "fight aging at any cost" to a more graceful, wellness-based approach of "look your best at any age." "We're beginning to see hints that people are recognizing that there's beauty at any age," says Pamela Mayberry, associate director of the Ithaca College Gerontology Institute in Ithaca, New York. She notes the Dove "Real Beauty" campaign as one example of this trend and says that even if only a small number of baby boomers embrace this notion, it's still significant because of the size of the generation.



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Young at heart

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What does it mean to look your best at any age? Jane Aransky, owner of La Residencia Spa (www.laresidenciaspa.com) in Newton, Massachusetts, points out that it's important to remember that aging isn't strictly about appearance—it's also about how we feel. Embracing this mind-set means valuing living well, appreciating yourself for who you are and living passionately. “You can't separate aging from living well—eating right, getting enough exercise and not smoking or overindulging in alcohol,” says Bella Schneider, founder and CEO of 5 Star Formulators and La Belle Day Spas (www.labelledayspas.com) in northern California.

While at first glance it may seem revolutionary, this approach to aging isn't necessarily a new concept. The iconic “distinguished gentleman” has always been seen as suave, sophisticated and debonair, and Europeans have had a special regard for the older woman—one in her 40s, 50s or 60s—for generations. Actresses like Sophia Loren are still considered sex symbols.

Mayberry suggests that one of the reasons we have a difficult time accepting aging here in the United States is that the media has defined the American ideal of beauty as youthful. “You can't underestimate the power of this image,” she says. “Older generations, especially the baby boomers, still feel young and vibrant but when they look in the mirror and the face they see doesn't match the ideal, they have a hard time accepting it.”

Ironically, one of the driving forces behind this shift in how we deal with aging may be a backlash against the paper-thin teenage models portrayed in the media and the overdone, surgically enhanced look promoted by the bevy of makeover television shows in recent years. “I think the pendulum is definitely swinging away from extreme surgery and total transformations to a more subtle, less radical approach to age reversal because of the category of minimally invasive treatments and effective nonmedical procedures now available to slow down the appearance of aging,” says Wendy Lewis, a New York City-based cosmetic surgery consultant. “Today, many women would rather look like themselves, only refreshed.”

With all of the advances in science and cosmetics over the last decade, the beauty and skincare industries can indeed offer viable approaches to aging that are more effective and less obvious. “Our knowledge of the structure and biology of the skin has greatly increased in the last few years,” says Dr. Ben Kaminsky, founder, B. Kamins, Chemist, based in Pointe-Claire, Quebec. “Invasive procedures that treat the symptoms of aging for only a short period of time are no longer the only answer.



What's required now are both long-term prophylactic (preventative) and therapeutic treatments."

These advances are welcome, because according to Jane Wurwand, founder of Dermalogica, based in Carson, California, some of the extreme techniques may, in the long run, end up being counterproductive. "Much of what's done in the name of preserving the youthfulness of the skin in fact compromises the lipid barrier, weakens the skin and may make it age more dramatically. This is particularly true of intrusive resurfacing procedures which overexfoliate the skin to a dangerous degree," she says.

This may sound as though invasive medical cosmetic procedures are no longer acceptable, but that's not the case. It just means that clients now have more choices than ever to do what's right for them individually for the long term. "It's totally pathetic to accept aging without looking your best," says Schneider. "But now it's not *all* about cosmetics. It's about making choices for a physically, emotionally and mentally healthy lifestyle."

Group Focus

To understand why U.S. impressions may be shifting toward this "new" view, it's important to understand the complex mind-set of baby boomer women as a consumer group. According to Mary Brown, president and founder of Portland, Maine-based

JWT Mature Marketing Group, which specializes in marketing to baby boomer women, this group is one of the most powerful in the marketplace because of its size, economic capacity and power as purchase decision-makers. The baby boomer generation spans 18 years and is an extremely diverse group of about 78 million. Because of the large number of years the generation spans, baby boomer women are more easily defined by their life stage than their chronological age. For example, a 42-year-old baby boomer may be a first-time mom or a new grandmother.

No matter where they fall in the spectrum, these women aren't likely to subscribe to the label "middle-aged"; many say they feel younger than ever, but they've come to appreciate their life experience and wisdom. This may be due to the fact that they're still living an overactive life of work, family, and numerous social and community obligations. Some are also just now discovering new passions and embarking on new paths in life.

"One hallmark of the boomer generation is its strong sense of personal identity and individuality, and for many, aging gracefully is a reflection of what they've experienced and what they believe in," says Brown. "Rather than trying to scramble to hold on to the past, many boomers are proud of where they are now."

Booming Business

Mary Brown, president and founder of Portland, Maine-based JWT Mature Marketing Group, suggests these targeted strategies for attracting baby boomer clients:

Focus on time. Baby boomers are still busy. "I think as we get older, we cherish our time more—I know that I do," says Jane Wurwand, founder of Dermalogica, Carson, California. Consider offering express service options. Wurwand suggests clusters of shorter services given several times a year rather than standing appointments once month or so.

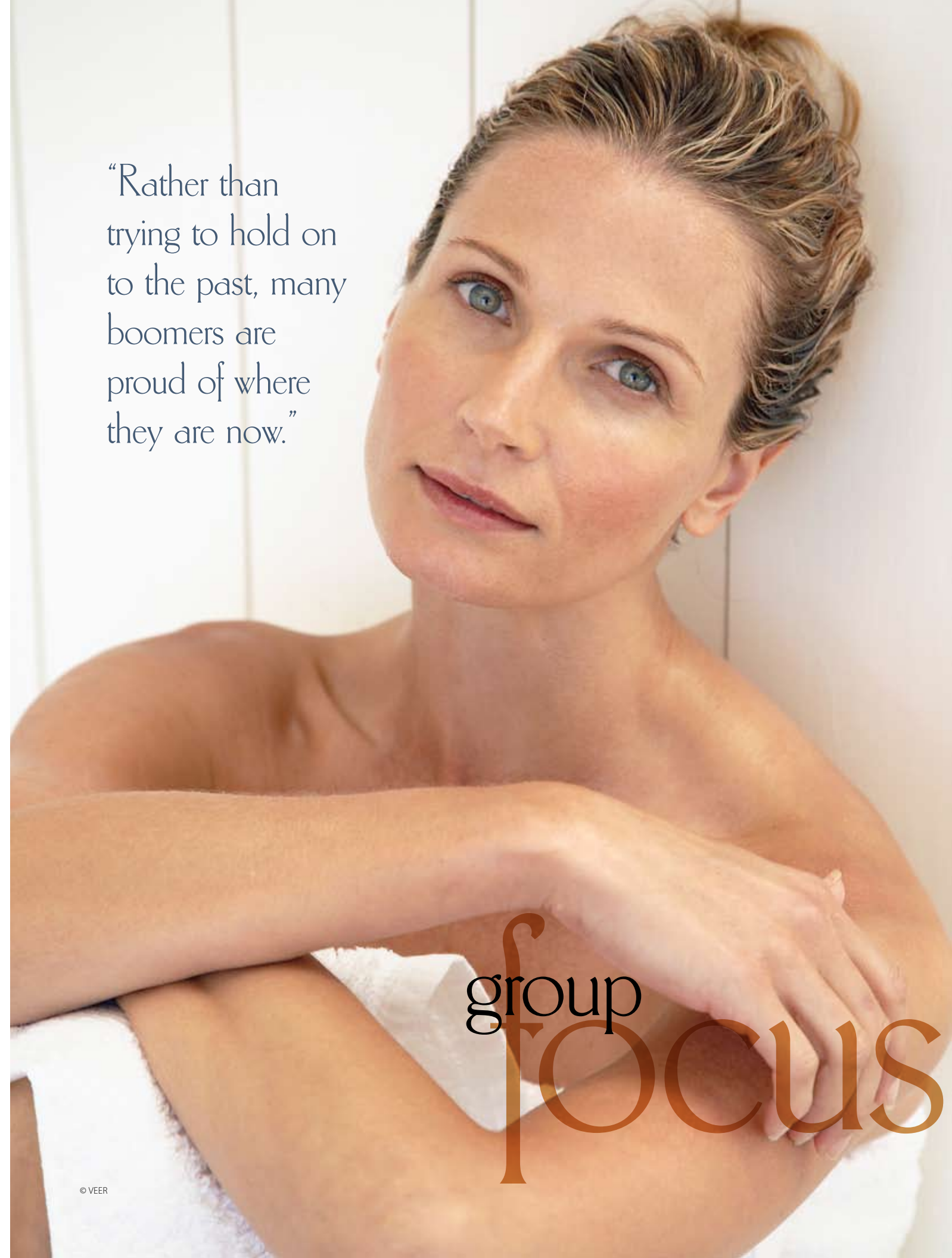
Create a good story. According to Brown, the most influential marketing channel for reaching a boomer woman is word of mouth. "She'll spread a

good story like wildfire," says Brown. "But be careful: She'll talk about a bad experience even more!" When developing a story for your spa brand, remember that for boomers, luxury is all about experience.

Don't exaggerate or overpromise. Brown says baby boomers are born skeptics, willing to invest the time to research a product or service purchase. Be sure that your services produce the results you've promised.

Stay fresh. "It's important to know that, contrary to popular belief, boomer women aren't set in their ways and their brand loyalties aren't cemented," says Brown. "In fact, many claim that the older they get, the more likely they are to try new things."

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Shades of Gray

If your spa is bringing in a tidy profit touting the latest antiaging treatments, why should you consider shifting your focus to a more “beauty at any age” philosophy? Won’t that mean losing money if clients refuse more radical options, which are likely to be the most lucrative? Not so, says Kaminsky. “A shift toward graceful aging should be interesting for spa owners,” he says. “After all, extrinsic [external] factors count for about 80% of skin aging and these fall into a category that’s perfect for spa treatments.” Wurwand agrees. “Professional skin care offers an alternative to intrusive procedures because it places the long-term health of the skin first,” she says. “Skincare therapists offer what no one else does: results, along with the soul-nurturing power of human touch.” Aransky says she has been most successful with her vitamin pen-

etration therapy treatment, Hydrodermie moisturizing treatment and pigmentation peels, all examples of treatments designed to promote skin health, no matter a client’s age.

level. “The fact is, we’re all aging, even at 20 and 25, and as practitioners in the spa if that’s not a fact we’ve come to accept, how can we expect our clients to accept it?” says Aransky. This means that it’s important to help your staff (no matter what their age) understand that while there’s no denying the aches, pains and other ills associated with aging, it can still be a beautiful process. Aransky educates her staff—and clients—by providing them with inspirational articles and other materials.

Transitioning your spa to a “beauty at any age” approach also includes changing the language you use to discuss and define aging as well as treatments targeted toward aging clients. According to Mayberry, research suggests that older people are just as insecure about their appearance as young people, and focusing on the idea of antiaging only plays on these insecuri-

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ties. “Be careful how you advocate products,” adds Schneider. “Stop using the word ‘antiaging’; instead, use words like ‘rejuvenating’ or ‘comforting’ and promote lifestyle management instead of cosmetic ‘quick fixes.’” Brown recommends focusing on the positive with words like “renewal” and “reward.”

It’s also important to remember that aging is more than just cosmetic. In addition to offering targeted skincare treatments, you can encourage your clients to consider options that focus on overall wellness. “Spas that prosper in the future will offer the best of dermatologic technology alongside more holistic therapies for a sense of true overall well-being,” says Elaine Linker, co-founder of DDF Doctors Dermatologic Formula in Yonkers, New York. “Provide complementary treatments that produce a synergistic effect—for example, manual lymphatic drainage to stimulate circulation in the lymph system to drain away excess fluids paired with body microdermabrasion,” suggests Lewis. Schneider suggests that one way to add to your services is to establish relationships with partner businesses that complement your treatment menu and add to clients’ overall wellness. For example, if you don’t offer yoga, try partnering with a local yoga studio and invite one of the yogis to lead a free introductory class to introduce your clients to the practice.

Aligning your spa with the idea that aging is beautiful first requires making changes on a personal

ties. “Be careful how you advocate products,” adds Schneider. “Stop using the word ‘antiaging’; instead, use words like ‘rejuvenating’ or ‘comforting’ and promote lifestyle management instead of cosmetic ‘quick fixes.’” Brown recommends focusing on the positive with words like “renewal” and “reward.”

It’s worth considering these changes because attitudes toward aging reach beyond the baby boomers. “Women are imparting to their daughters the benefits of lessons learned such as early use of a sunscreen and other good skincare habits,” says Linker. “Spa owners have a big opportunity to capture all generations by offering a variety of facials as well as skincare education for their clients.” Mayberry adds that by instilling a more open-minded concept of beauty in younger generations, they’ll be much more comfortable with aging as they get older.

No matter what approach you take in your spa, “the conversation about what makes a woman beautiful has never been more interesting,” says Linker. Mayberry notes that with the graying of the baby boomers, there will likely still be a range of viewpoints on aging in the coming years. But one way or another, it will happen to us all, so why not help your clients learn to embrace it? ●

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