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& BRAINS

Rachel Weisz

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VOGUE OCTOBER

182 **OVERHEARD**
What's hot, cool,
new, and next

190 **LIFE WITH ANDRÉ**
By André Leon Talley

view

196 **STRONGER THAN EVER**
The house of Thierry Mugler, home to the body-sculpted glamazon Valkyrie, is back with a new designer and a new face—Naomi Watts. By Mark Holgate

204 **THE NEW BIJOUX**
Made with butterfly wings or meteorites, feathers or funny faces, the latest baubles are an enchanting and curious lot. Florence Kane is charmed

212 **FANTASY HIGHLAND**
Scottish designer Bill Gibb defined the hippie-deluxe look of 1970s London

214 **A TWIST, TO THE WRIST**
Plum Sykes revels in the allure of the long sleeve

218 **CLOSET CASE**
The *deux gamines* behind Paris label Heimstone reveal their globe-trotting style

220 **STYLE SHEETS**
Though they won't hang in your closet, these four books will fill a collector's quota

224 **BLISS TRAVELS**
Louisa Thomas left New York for Berlin with two suitcases and only an inkling of what she actually liked to wear. Feeling every bit the foreigner, she turned to fashion and found herself

228 **HEART & SOLES**
Husband-and-wife shoe designers Binith Shah and Elizabeth Rickard go green

230 **NEED IT NOW**

beauty health & fitness

233 **THE ART OF PERFUME**
With a little help from painter Sophie Matisse, rising fragrance star Kilian Hennessy reimagines the perfume bottle. By Catherine Piercy

238 **FRESH FACE**
Fashion and fragrance are all in the family for Romano Ricci

240 **BEYOND BOTOX**
Updated versions of the miraculous wrinkle cure are coming—one doesn't even require a needle. Sarah Brown reports

246 **A BEAUTIFUL LIFE**
Jancee Dunn reveals the secrets to thriving after breast cancer

people are talking about

259 **DANCE**
The captivating *Jardin aux Lilas* takes ballet to new heights—and daring depths

260 **MOVIES**
Ed Harris's *Appaloosa* and Guy Ritchie's *RocknRolla* put a different spin on two classic genres. John Powers reviews

262 **THEATER**
Iraq's front lines come to life in an exhilarating production. Adam Green reviews

264 **EXHIBITION**
Petah Coyne's waxed sculptures at Galerie Lelong

268 **TV**
Joan Juliet Buck enjoys the lively adventures of Bella Bloom in a must-see CBS series

268 **PHOTOGRAPHY**
François Halard captures the splendor of Marie Antoinette's gardens

270 **ART**
An exuberant show celebrates Picasso's young mistress

270 **TALENT**
Ethereal beauty Valentina Cervi takes Hollywood

continued >88



a beautiful life

f

ive women are stretched on the floor of Lithe Method, a boutique fitness studio in Philadelphia with Tiffany-blue walls and light-flooded windows. Lauren Boggi, a petite, high-energy blonde, is leading them through her signature blend of Pilates, ballet, and strength training.

"Grab your ball and your weights," she calls over a Radiohead song. "Anyone who is six months post-op, use the two-pound weights. Under six months, you can use the one-pound weights—or no weights."

What at first resembles a standard exercise class is actually Lithe Pink, a workout for postoperative breast cancer survivors. Repetitions are gentler. Pillows are used for tender chests. "A lot of women are in pain when they first come here," says Boggi, who founded the studio three years ago and launched Lithe Pink the following year. "And they have to get past the scar tissue, past that feeling of 'I'm not supposed to be lifting weights; I should be babying this part of my body.' But I tell them, You will be stronger."

That has certainly been the case with 33-year-old Michelle Glynn, who remembers being so helpless after her bilateral mastectomy that her husband had to bathe her. When she eventually mastered ten push-ups in Lithe Pink, she was elated. "Class after class, you just get better," says Glynn, a vibrant brunette



THE NEW PORTRAIT
AFTER A CANCER DIAGNOSIS, IT'S INCREASINGLY POSSIBLE TO RECLAIM YOUR BODY. *GOLD NUDE*, 1999, BY JOHN CURRIN.

The latest surgeries, custom workouts, and nutritional strategies—Jancee Dunn reveals the secrets to thriving after breast cancer.

whose hair grew back after chemo in lush waves. "Within six months, I felt like a different person."

Classes like Lithe Pink are springing up all over the country, along with a host of other post-breast cancer services—from specialized nutrition to state-of-the-art reconstruction—that focus on improving the quality of life weeks, months, and years after diagnosis. Thanks to a torrent of research (breast cancer studies receive more funding than those of any other cancer), which has led to swifter, more effective diagnoses and targeted treatments, women are living through—and beyond—breast

cancer in record numbers. (Some hospitals have even opened entire departments devoted to survivorship; see livestrong.org for a list.)

Granted, the statistics remain sobering. Cancer still trails heart disease as the second-leading cause of death among women, with breast cancer fatalities exceeded only by those from lung cancer. But the American Cancer Society estimates that there are 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States, and their picture has changed radically. Where once a newly diagnosed woman could expect to face grueling treatments followed by years of debilitating

side effects, survivors like Cynthia Nixon, Kylie Minogue, and Sheryl Crow prove that it's possible to lead a life as rich

and glamorous and successful as ever. Many go on to have children, or grandchildren: 89 percent are still alive five years after diagnosis, while 73 percent are still living fifteen years later. In short, the emphasis has moved beyond surviving to thriving.

REFINING RECONSTRUCTION

Two movements are changing the world of breast reconstruction. One is a significant reduction of time spent under the knife: A small but growing group of doctors is being trained in the emerging field of oncoplastic *health >255*

REGAINING BALANCE
INSTRUCTOR LAUREN BOGGI
AT HER STUDIO, LITHE
METHOD, IN A SPLITS59
SPORTS BRA AND SHORT.

surgery, in which a tumor is removed and the breast cosmetically repaired in a single session. Alternatively, some oncologists have begun to team up with plastic surgeons to perform what's called an immediate reconstruction, where the two doctors work in tandem.

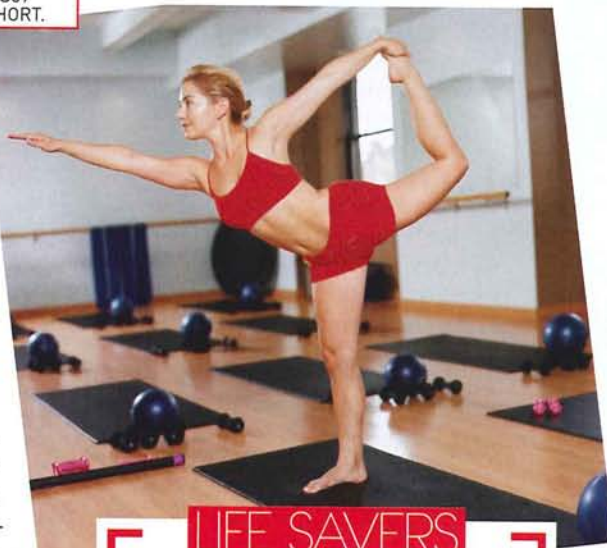
The other major trend is the concerted effort to conserve tissue and muscle. One of the most commonly performed breast-reconstruction surgeries is the TRAM flap, in which tissue, fat, and muscle are taken from the transverse rectus abdominis muscle (TRAM) in the lower abdomen.

An irksome side effect is that women are apt to lose a significant percentage of their abdominal strength when this muscle is removed to rebuild one breast, and even more for both.

But in recent years a new procedure called the DIEP (deep inferior epigastric perforator) flap, which uses skin and fat but no muscle and only slightly affects abdominal strength, has gained popularity among a number of specialists. "This technique is really wonderful because we're not sacrificing someone's muscle," says David H. Song, M.D., a preeminent plastic surgeon at the University of Chicago Medical Center whose patients fly in from all corners of the globe. "Especially for the young, athletic, image-conscious woman. The patient is in and out quicker, back to work and activities a lot sooner." (Miraculously, one of these activities is sit-ups.)

The next big developments in breast conservation, still in the pipeline, are the use of the body's own stem cells to generate new tissue for reconstruction, and nipple-sparing mastectomies, in which the tumor and much of the duct system of the breast is removed but the skin of the nipple is saved.

The tilt toward a natural appearance even extends to nipple tattooing, a standard way to re-create nipples after a mastectomy (skin grafting is another). Typically these tattoos are done by an aesthetician in the plastic surgeon's office, with decent, if varying, results. But



LIFE SAVERS

What to read, join, and wear to move from survivor to thriver.

CANCER AND CAREERS

A marvelously comprehensive resource, this site offers guidance on everything from how to share the news with colleagues to your legal rights in the workplace. *cancerandcareers.org*.

YOUNG SURVIVAL COALITION

With information, resources, and programs such as telephone networking sessions, this group appeals to women under 40. *youngsurvival.org*.

FIVE LESSONS I DIDN'T LEARN FROM BREAST CANCER (AND ONE BIG ONE I DID)

In her refreshingly spiky new memoir, former news producer Shelley Lewis admits that her journey through breast cancer didn't really offer any profound insights. "It's quite enough to get through it and move on."

CHIKARA

Named for the Japanese word for *strength*, this new line by Hilary Boyajian offers sensitively designed but stylish (and supersoft) dresses and tops. *chikaradesign.com*.

LA REDOUTE

Many post-mastectomy swimsuits and bras are not the most fashion-forward; La Redoute carries a small but chic selection. *laredoute.co.uk*.—J.D.

Women "have to get past that feeling of 'I'm not supposed to be lifting weights; I should be babying this part of my body.' I tell them, You will be stronger"

some innovative young women have tried a different tack, heading straight to a tattoo artist.

"A nurse may be good, but the skills that you need to do a realistic tattoo with suitable pigments are learned over many, many years," says Vinnie Myers, a seasoned Baltimore tattoo artist who has been masterfully re-creating realistic nipples as a side gig for the past five years. "It's gratifying for me, too," says Myers of women's emotional reactions to the results. "I'm putting a finishing touch on the end of a long journey."

FIT FOR LIFE

Not long ago, breast cancer patients who underwent surgery were often warned to avoid exercise, which doctors feared would exacerbate, among other things, the painful arm swelling called lymphedema. Now a significant 2005 Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital report confirms that exercise increases survival rates and lowers the risk of recurrence. (Myriad studies have also shown that fitness helps prevent the disease to begin with.)

Post-breast cancer exercise programs had typically been confined to hospitals, but in the past few years, a number of private studios, like Lithe Method, have opened. "You're not necessarily going to relax in a hospital wellness program," says Camille Kittrell, founder of Exclusive Yoga, a Boston-area studio for breast cancer survivors. "You're walking through the same place where you got your diagnosis and treatment." *health* >256

BEAUTY HEALTH & FITNESS

breast cancer thrivers

Kittrell's serene space has Brazilian cherrywood floors, Japanese screens, and a marble fireplace. She leads 50 or so women through flowing, full-body exercises that relieve tightness caused by scarring, reverse loss of range and motion, and calm stress. She specifically targets posture because many women instinctively develop a chest-protecting hunch during treatment. "It may be subtle, but it's there, and it creates other kinds of discomfort, like back pain," she says of lingering postural problems. She also lavishes attention on the hip area. "Chemo does a number on all the joints, especially the hips," says Kittrell. "So I do these great hip-opener movements."

In Denver, renowned plastic surgeon Christine Rodgers, M.D., who has weathered the disease herself, has designed dance classes with moves that help the shoulder area, which is usually stiff from inactivity and, sometimes, nerve damage. "Some patients who had 'frozen' shoulders for years were able to participate in all forms of activities once again," she says. A few studios even waive the fee, including New York City's OM Yoga, which offers a free class for breast cancer survivors every Tuesday.

HEALING FOODS

Nutritional oncology is a young science, and researchers are still discovering the elusive links between diet and cancer. But experts agree on a few general guidelines to fend off recurrence (and, for all women, to prevent the illness). The consensus: Avoid processed sugar and limit alcohol to one drink a day, max—and if you have a family history of breast cancer, even less. Eat meat sparingly, and pile on the fruits and vegetables, at least five cups a day, as well as plenty of legumes, omega-3s, and "good" fats like olive oil.

In recent years, a number of nutritionists have tailored their practices specifically to survivors, teaching them how to eat to rebuild chemo-sapped muscles and bolster immunity. One of the most prominent is Rachel Beller, founder of

the Beller Nutritional Institute in Beverly Hills. A specialist in nutritional oncology and a former clinical researcher at Cedars-Sinai, she now runs a private practice that caters to a star-studded client list, including Sheryl Crow.

One of Beller's mantras: Eat 30 to 35 grams of fiber a day. "I'm a big fiber pusher," she says. "There are numerous studies showing that high-fiber diets prevent breast cancer."

"Prunes
have twice
the antioxidant
capacity
of blueberries;
they just can't
get the PR
because they're
prunes"

Her favorite preventive superfoods include omega-3-rich sardines ("one of the absolute best things for you; have it on a Wasa cracker or wrap it in nori"), wild salmon, and trout, as well as two to three moist prunes daily. "They have twice the antioxidant capacity of blueberries," Beller says. "They just can't get the PR because they're prunes."

When it comes to the crucial fruit-and-veg servings, one of her secret weapons is half a cup of broccoli sprouts a few times a week. "They're loaded with sulforaphane, which is a phytonutrient that stimulates very strong detoxifying enzymes," she says. (Linus Pauling Institute researchers were excited to discover last year that broccoli sprouts have 50 times more sulforaphane than mature broccoli.) "They're a powerhouse of nutrients," says Beller. "Use them instead of lettuce in your sandwich or add them to salads."

As for liquids, she urges clients to drink green tea, which may short-circuit the cancer process. "In most of the studies I've been reviewing, subjects drink seven to nine cups, which is totally unrealistic," she says. Instead, she steers people to matcha green tea, beloved by the Japanese, in which the nutrient-rich whole leaves are ground to a potent powder.

Beller has seen exhausted, chemo-addled clients blossom as they follow her plan. "You're taking a toolbox, which is your refrigerator, and pulling stuff out to build strength and protect you," she says. "I have clients who are five, ten years out from being diagnosed. Even better, I have women 20 years out." □