

Thread's hip for hair removal

South Asian practice less painful, more natural proponents say

By **LEELA DE KRETZER**
Columbia News Service

Josie Carbone used to travel from salon to salon in Manhattan looking for the perfect wax for her bushy brows.

She had long given up on plucking with sharp tweezers and had yet to find a beautician whose technique could lure her return business.

Then Carbone, 31, heard from a friend about the ancient south Asian method of hair removal called threading.

"All my friends in the city got threading done," Carbone said, sporting perfectly shaped eyebrows after a recent appointment. "Most of those who did waxing have now switched."

Bollywood brows have overtaken Brazilian bikini lines as the hottest depilatory fad. What once was relegated to the back rooms of immigrant women's houses in Indian enclaves around the country is now a major drawing card for high-end spas and salons around the country.

A beautician holds the end of a thread in her mouth and then uses both hands to make it taut. She quickly winds the strand around individual hairs, like a lasso, twisting and pulling them out of their follicles by the root.

Beauty therapists say the technique, which is usually used on the face, rather than the more delicate nether parts, is less painful, more precise and more natural than waxing. Threading is quicker and less likely to irritate the skin.

It is also a relatively inexpensive hair removal method, with prices around the country ranging from \$5 to \$15 for the upper lip and eyebrows.

Shobha Tummala, who has salons in trendy SoHo and the Upper East Side of Manhattan, has built a business around the treatment.

Tummala, of Indian descent, said she came up with the idea of turning threading into a high-end beauty treatment when she noticed that her Western friends loved the technique but were reluctant to patronize the small shops in Indian neighbourhoods that performed the treatment.

"When I first started in this business about four years ago, nobody had



Soma Chakraborty, 31, threads the eyebrows of Jennifer Shaw, 29, at Shobha Salon in Manhattan. Chakraborty, who is originally from India, has been threading for three years. (PEARL GABEL / CNS)

heard of the word threading," Tummala said. "In the last year and a half, everybody at least knows it exists. Then more recently people have at least tried it once."

Threading's evolution from ethnic to hip status is being replicated around the country. The Spa Index website lists salons with threading in almost every state.

Celebrities reported to have regular threading appointments include Brad Pitt, Glen Close, Reese Witherspoon, Liz Hurley, Heather Graham, Cher and Selma Hayek. And magazines like

Vogue, Cosmopolitan and Glamour have all featured the hair removal treatment.

The growth of the Ziba Beauty Center in Artesia, Calif., demonstrates the trend. Ziba cosmetician Raj Rajooluhanibal said the company had ex-

panded from one salon in Artesia to a training academy where threaders are "certified in the Ziba way."

Trainees are certified after three to four weeks, but she said it often took months before they were really skilled in the art.

"Some people pick it up fast, others take a little longer," she said. "Basically it's at your own pace."

The technique has grown so popular among women of non-Asian descent that the company has opened other salons in Orange County and in South Bay, Calif.

Regular threading can maintain a clean, sharp appearance of the eyebrow, without the common irritation and puffiness from facial waxing and other hair removal techniques, Rajooluhanibal said.

She said threading pulls strands out by the follicle, so it does not leave in-grown hairs.

While Rajooluhanibal said the salon recommended women return every two weeks for a threading appointment, Carbone said she scheduled threading appointments every three weeks.

She said part of the reason she kept returning was that threading had a traditional background in the East.

"Because it's an ancient tradition, I feel like it's a real experience," she said.

Shalini Vadhera, a celebrity makeup artist and television beauty expert, has made her career by proffering Asian beauty secrets. She is currently writing a book on the different ways women around the world preen and pamper.

She said the explosion in the number of women in America who wanted to thread facial hair had a lot to do with a growing fascination with the East.

"I think especially over the past few years with yoga and Ayurveda coming into popular culture, Asia is becoming very trendy," Vadhera said. "Women are looking for interesting ways to interpret Eastern ways into their beauty regimes."

But in the end, she said, the decision to swap waxing for a cotton string came down to one thing.

"You are going to get the most amazing arched eyebrows," she said.

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