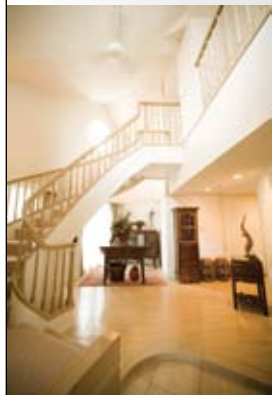


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BUSINESS

Secret Weapon

Weekender's foreign correspondent in Thailand, Ellen Boonstra, pays a visit to Dr. Nantapat, arguably South-East Asia's top dermatologist. Her large client base includes a fair share of local Japanese expats.

As American cosmetics tycoon Estée Lauder once put it, "Time's not on your side, but we are." Thailand has its own warrior in the ongoing battle in the signs of aging, although not everyone is equally willing to acknowledge this fact...

"You don't know me!" is what many a client will furtively whisper into Dr. Nantapat's ear when accidentally running into her at a social event, party or shopping mall. We all want to look good, but without divulging to others what lengths or costs we've gone to achieve this: Botox injections, liposuction, a hair transplant or laser skin tightening.

Yet these types of 'covert operations' are daily business for Dr. Nantapat Supapannachart, Thailand's—if not South-East Asia's—number one dermatologist and founder of APEX Profound Beauty skin clinics. Fortunately the doctor takes such denials in her stride, recounting laughingly how she was once invited as a guest speaker in the suburbs of Bangkok only to find at least 20 of her clients facing her in the lecture hall. "I had to pretend that I didn't know any of them!"

Dr. Nantapat does not expect the taboo surrounding cosmetic procedures to change anytime soon, but this has not stopped her from building a thriving private practice in Bumrungrad International Hospital, the world's leading destination for medical tourism, as well as establishing a slew—six in total—of successful skin clinics in Thailand: four in the Bangkok area, one in the seaside town of Pattaya and one on the popular island of Phuket.

One of her Sukhumvit—Bangkok's commercial and shopping district—clinics caters predominantly to the local Japanese expat community. The center has gone to great lengths to accommodate these clients—from dispatching Thai staff to study in Tokyo and hiring interpreters, to translating brochures and the company website into Japanese. "Patients can do everything in their own language here," the doctor says.

How did it all start? A straight 'A' student in high school, Dr. Nantapat was quickly steered towards an academic career, the pinnacle of which was considered medical school. "In those days, if you were a good student you automatically had to become a doctor," she says. After her graduation—with honors—from Thailand's oldest and most prestigious Mahidol University, she was asked to join the Intensive Care Unit team at the University Hospital. Although she enjoyed her work, it was there that she found her true calling: dermatology. She decided to advance her studies in this medical field in the United States, obtaining her master's degree in Dermatology and becoming American Board Certified.

In the US she became acquainted with a range of dermatological specializations at that time not available at universities in Thailand such as laser technology, liposuction and several other cosmetic procedures which have recently become commonplace. With great zeal she

elected to study as many of these as possible and when she returned to her home country, she was one of the first to bring this cutting-edge technology to Thailand.

Dr. Nantapat is considered South-East Asia's leading specialist in 'non-invasive rejuvenation,' i.e. procedures enhancing a person's appearance without resorting to the sharp knives and scalpels of surgery. "If a person comes to me and says 'I want to look five years younger in one week,' I can achieve this by giving her [or him] Botox injections, fillers and reshape her face a little bit, all in a relatively short time."

Needless to say the doctor herself is the poster girl for beautiful, glowing skin, belying her mature age of

48. She explains the unattractive forms in which the aging process exhibits itself on our face: there are fine lines and wrinkles, blemishes, moles, redness, pigmentation, discoloration, enlarged pores, sagging... Not particularly 'uplifting' to hear, but the good news is that with today's rapid and ongoing advancements in cosmetic dermatology, each of these imperfections can be combated with a specific treatment.

Dr. Nantapat explains that the most recent and exciting discoveries in cosmetic dermatology are taking place in laser

technology. "Just like with computers, every time you blink, there's a new machine or technological development, that's what keeps my work so challenging."

Granted, these laser and other cosmetic treatments don't come cheap. The fact remains that no price is too high for looking good, as testified by the many clients who say Dr. Nantapat has changed their lives. The doctor proceeds to share a few colorful stories: the psychiatrist who had a hair transplant and claims to perform better at his job because his patients view him differently; the high society Thai lady who used to spend large sums of money on diamond necklaces and designer clothes but after laser treatment says a simple t-shirt is all she needs to look great; or the divorcee who credits the doctor for being able to attract a new husband.

But for those earning Japanese yen, the price may be just right. "Thermage is about one third of the price here compared to Japan," the doctor estimates, adding that "some of my patients fly in especially from Tokyo twice a year for Botox injections and fillers."

Besides treating patients six days a week, Dr. Nantapat lectures at her alma mater Mahidol University as well as conducting training courses to fellow dermatologists on her free Sundays.

Admittedly this extremely hectic schedule does not leave much room for a social life. Her limited free time is spent with her pediatrician husband and her 13-year old daughter and 12-year old son. Years ago, when the doctor asked her then five year old daughter what she wanted to be when she grew up, the girl answered "a pediatrician, just like daddy, because he saves lives." Dr. Nantapat quickly set the record straight: "Daddy may save lives, but mommy saves souls!"



Dr. Nantapat and APEX Profound Beauty.

More information on Dr. Nantapat and APEX Profound Beauty at www.apexprofoundbeauty.com