

ONE WEEK IN THE SPA WITH

ENRIQUE RAMIREZ

OWNER, FACE TO FACE NYC

MONDAY June 30

Today, after a long weekend of boozing, partying and only six hours of sleep, I can barely get myself out of bed at 7:30 a.m.

I get into the bathroom and make myself look somewhat decent before stepping on to the streets of Manhattan. Wow! Who is that looking back at me from my mirror? It's certainly not the picture of a "beauty expert!" Whatever ...

I splash some cold water on my face to stimulate my senses but nothing happens. Then, with my wet hands, I make my hair look half-done. Once out of the bathroom I find a pair of jeans behind the door and get a clean T-shirt from out of the drawers. Louis, my dog, stares back at me, wondering if he'll get his walk. Then he realizes that he will have to remain in the apartment.

After 30 minutes of getting dressed, searching for house keys, and scrambling for my wallet, I leave. I slowly make it to the subway, where it's hot, humid and crowded. Once at my stop, I walk to my morning hot spot: Starbucks. I get an iced latte and grab four bunches of gladiolas at the local flower shop. Fresh flowers are a must for the relaxing atmosphere of my quaint spa.

I arrive at the spa. At this point I began to wake up. I check my e-mails. This morning I only have about 15 — a slow day. Several clients are requesting appointments for various spa treatments including waxing, facials, sugaring, etc. I began clicking away.

Three messages are media-related, including one from a local magazine who wants to include my men's waxing treatments in their "hair issue." I reply with a thank-you note and several booking options for the editor-in-chief to come in and experience the treatments.

Another e-mail is from About .com to remind me of our upcoming video shoot about my customized chemical peel (the Uptown Peel). Within their letter I find a script that I need to

memorize. Memorize? It's Monday morning and my neurons are far from working. How's an infomercial going to help me get more clients? Whatever ... I'm preparing for the day when Oprah's people come knocking on my door at which point I'll become a media expert and no longer camera-shy! I close that e-mail, intending to come back to it later.

After clicking, deleting and sending most of my letters to spam, I give the spa a quick sweep. By the way, I'm Enrique — the owner, the massage therapist, the esthetician, the waxer, the cleaning person, blah, blah, blah ... the list goes on and on. In my spa, spotless doesn't only apply to ageless skin. It also applies to my bathroom floor, the reception area and my treatment rooms.

By 10 a.m. my first assistant comes in and I'm ready to run out to the gym for my daily workout. I lift, grunt and sweat like a maniac until all the toxins accumulated from the weekend are part of yesterday. By the end of my workout I'm ready, fully awake and ready to take on the spa world once again. I take my cold shower, fix my hair, put on a clean, but tight, T-shirt (to show off my sinewy body ...

haha) and walk fast and furiously back to the spa.

I start seeing clients at noon — all regulars today.

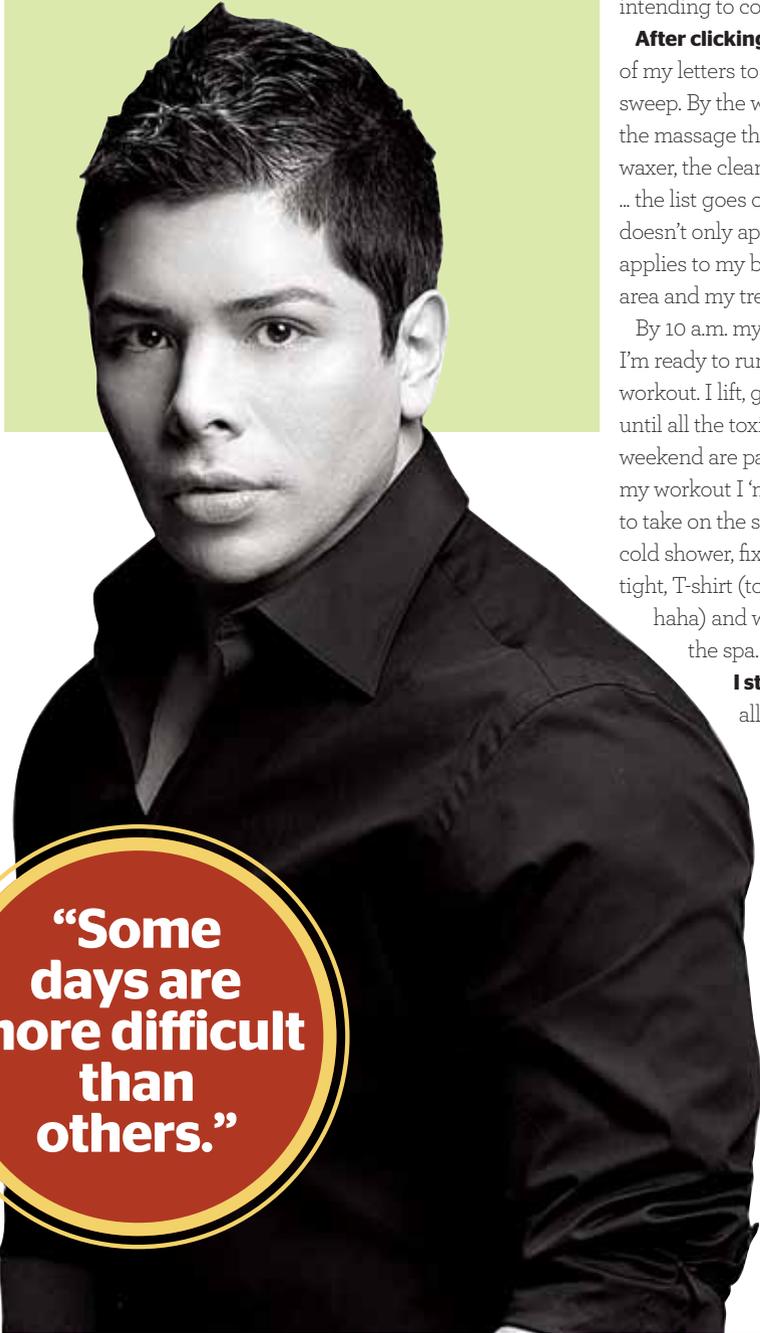
Jane Doe comes in for her monthly facial with lots of talks about her divorce and its related issues. Did I mention I also have to play psychotherapist for most of my clients?

TUESDAY July 1

I get up, walk Louis, grab a latte and head to the spa.

Fourth of July is just a few days away and the calls are pouring in. I never take any time off before a holiday. It's my busiest time!

I start my day by checking



“Some days are more difficult than others.”



FACE VALUE
 Located on the sixth floor of a nondescript office building in Chelsea, face to face nyc holds many surprises inside.

e-mails and writing skincare tips for my publicist to pitch to magazines. Lately, I've had writers' block. I have nothing creative to write about, it seems. How many different ways can you take care of your oily or dry skin?

Today I start thinking about my upcoming event: "National Men's Grooming Day" to be held on Aug. 16. I start imagining how to put my promo together in a way that grabs the attention of the media, especially the ever-so-demanding Manhattan press.

I begin to write letters and make phone call to get sponsors for my gift bags. I'm exhausted already!

Once that is complete, I start my day.

I warm up the wax and the sugar and place wet towels by the Eucalyptus mist in the hot cabinet to use later with my facials.

I start with a gentleman who comes in for a facial and waxing. It's going to take about 2-1/2 hours! I start by waxing his back and his butt, and then flip him to target the men's terrain (very popular these days).

Another waxing — again back and butt!

It's summer, what do you expect? This client comments on how the last time I waxed him he had red marks on his back for the first time in the four years I've been waxing him. After some questions he admits that he hit the gym and steam room after I waxed him. This is a big mistake, as heat and sweat will only aggravate the already-irritated skin. Cool water and rest is my best recommendation after any form of body hair removal.



YOU CAN NEVER GET A GOOD FACIAL WITHOUT LOOKING SOMEWHAT RED AFTERWARDS. I TRY MY BEST TO REMOVE YEARS OF IMPURITIES.

My next facial appointment comes in for their usual: microdermabrasion with a deep pore-cleansing treatment. This guy comes in every three weeks — it must be nice to have money! I can't even afford a monthly facial. The peculiar thing with this client is that he has a hair piece, and even after several treatments, I still get nervous that I'll pull it off accidentally. I wish I was able to express my concern to him, but how? I just want to know whether it comes off easily or if I would have to use all my strength.

I'm afraid of the next facial client. About a month ago she came in with a post-surgery lesion but still wanted a facial and asked me to work around it. It's very difficult — in fact, almost impossible — to "pore purge!"

Next is more waxing — a great way to end my day! A Brazilian-with-a-Landing-Strip and a, well, what we here call a "Marble Sack" treatment (obviously not on the same person!). I always wonder why a woman agrees to let me wax her and

then gets shy about it. Waxing is not for the discreet. It's faster and better to have the legs wide open (I need to get stirrups) so I can get a

closer look and make sure no hair is left behind.

I've noticed that some guys have a low threshold for pain when it comes to waxing. I get the same question from all these newbies: Is it going to hurt? Yes, I want to say, unless you're *unconscious*.

Oh wait! I go to the front desk and find a walk-in for a back wax. It's already 8:30 p.m. and I am starting to feel tired and hungry. I bring the client in and he has so many waxing questions it takes me 15 minutes just to answer his questionnaire.

Done! I clean and sanitize my treatment room and direct the front desk assistant on how to close up for the night. Shouldn't they know that by now? I collect all the trash, close the batch report, file all the intake forms, blah, blah, blah ... I get so tired of thinking for others.

I respond to more e-mails and return some calls. It's already past 9 p.m. and I have zero energy.

I close shop and head home — only to start all over again tomorrow.

WEDNESDAY July 2

I wake up in a panic. About.com is coming by to film the chemical peel treatment and I'm not prepared. I remember seeing an e-mail from the producer that included a short script that I was supposed to memorize. I frantically check my Blackberry and find nothing. I turn to my computer, check the trash icon — nothing! I get dressed and walk quickly to the gym for my daily workout, but I'm having a hard time focusing. I'm still thinking about the script ...

I finish, shower, fix my hair and walk back to the spa. On the way there, I stop to pick up a fresh bunch of lilies to place in the treatment room where I'll be filming the video.

I get to the spa, turn the music on, light the candles and arrange every item to create a relaxing ambiance. My publicist arrives and we start talking about our upcoming spa event. I'm starting to get nervous again and have a hard time listening to what he's saying. At one point, I feel like I am losing my sense of hearing — I only see his mouth moving and my make-up artist in the background. It all seems surreal, like I'm in a dream or a *Twilight Zone* episode.



After a few minutes of make-up application, the producer and her cameraman arrive. We have our normal, polite conversation before we move onto the "set." By then I have everything ready for the peel: the warm towels and all the necessary tools. The producer and cameraman begin to set things up and after about ten minutes call me and the model in. The model gets on the table while the producer places the microphone in a position where it won't be seen but is still close to my mouth.

At this moment, my heart starts to beat uncontrollably. "Mary" asks me if I memorized my script to which I quickly respond with a big *no*. I explain how I accidentally deleted the e-mail with all the information and I have no idea what I am about to say. "No problem," she replies. "I'll tell you

what to say once we start."

A few minutes later, we start the rehearsal part! "Hi, my name is Enrique Ramirez from face to face nyc day spa for About.com." Do you know how many takes I need to say this one line? About 10 ... seriously! I have an intro of one paragraph and we have to shoot it one sentence at a time! I feel a little mentally challenged. Ahhhh ...

After my intro, I explain to her viewers the steps of a chemical peel and the pros and cons. This is a breeze! I am flying high and mighty now. I kind of like being in front of the camera.

Forty-five minutes later, it's a wrap! I have finished the video and I am ready to leave. "Mary" has been so patient with me that I write her a thank-you letter that afternoon.

After, my publicist and I walk over to Starbucks to finish our meeting. We outline the press release, the sponsors and the local and national media to whom we will pitch our National Men's Grooming Day event. I'll work on the promos and advertisements once I have a few minutes to spare. I wish I could have an extra hour a day to catch up.

By the way, Wednesday happens to be my day off.

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THURSDAY JULY 3

I get up, walk Louis, go to the gym, grab my latte and pick up fresh flowers. Once at the spa, I check e-mails, check inventory and decide what we need (Thursday is supply day).

This time we need retail and professional products. My Yonka Paris line sells like hotcakes. I can't seem to keep them around (which is good). The other line we're low on is South Beach Solutions. This is a lightener for dark genital areas (which affects millions, especially people in darker-skinned ethnic groups.) I place my orders, this time doubling the amount to avoid costly shipping charges and having to deal with the sometimes-challenging customer service crews from these companies.

By the way, at this point I have already tidied up. Like I mentioned before, cleanliness is extremely important for me — just ask my teammates! I get neurotic and crazy if I see one dust bunny or if the treatment table is not done properly. The flowers are starting to look sad, but they can wait one more day before ending up in the trash. I spend so much money on flowers but it's worth it. They make my boutique spa (and, therefore, me) look pretty.

I start my day on the wrong foot. I have a certain client scheduled, but someone different shows up. Why is it so difficult to book appointments? Should I charge my booking squad for their mistakes? That would wake them up and force them to pay attention.

Halfway through my facial with this European client (weak dollar!) I get a faint knock on my door. I open it to find one of my assistants standing there looking perplexed. "Your other client is here! You were double-booked." I feel like killing someone right about now, but I don't want my face to appear on the cover of the *Daily News*. I'm so annoyed that I don't answer and go back to my European guest, leaving the assistant to deal with this situation on her own. After, cleaning, kneading and pore-perfecting, my European client is done.

Another facial client: this time a very quiet man who wants plenty of extractions but doesn't want to walk out looking red. Is he *kidding* me? You can never get a good facial without looking somewhat red afterwards. I try my best to remove years of impurities. I actually do well, his face looks good afterwards and he is happy. Oh ... and then he asks me to wax his eyebrows, but to have it look "natural". This guy must think I'm a magician. I clean the corners and the middle of his eyebrows and off he goes back to his corporate job.

I move on to my next client who, according to a recent letter he sent me, has a huge crush on me. And he's married. And his wife comes in for treatments and she is also in love with me. But neither one knows about the other's feeling towards me — except me. What a messy couple! I did respond to his letter, expressing my gratitude and saying how flattered I was about his feelings — but not interested. That's all. I'm available to provide spa services, not love.

My last client for the day is a very sweet man. He doesn't complain, he doesn't say a word and he smiles a lot. Phew.

End of the day: I check e-mails, return calls and clean up the spa again.

FRIDAY JULY 4

Same morning routine: iced latte, walk Louis, exercise until I turn blue, then head to the spa.

My first client is the editor-in-chief of a local magazine. He's here to try my men's waxing services for an upcoming hair-related story. I explain thoroughly the ins and outs of men's waxing and how common it is for gay and straight men. He finds it fascinating that straight men get waxes and assorted other "private" treatments. I reply by saying I respect everyone's privacy by not asking questions (though,

really, I *want* to ask a lot of questions and be all nosy about their personal business).

I finish with my editor and he's as smooth as a prepubescent boy. He asks more questions about the treatment and our products and then we wrap it up. I thank him again and he informs that the story will come out on Aug. 8 — the weekend before my National Men's Grooming Day event! He assures me that he'll give it a nice plug.

My next challenge is a guy who visits on a monthly basis for body grooming and massage. He is so difficult that I actually enjoy going deep on his back muscles. We begin with the grooming. He starts by telling me what he didn't like about his last visit: how his hair was very short in some areas and longer in others, blah, blah, blah ... it's the same deal every time he comes in.

He asks for water, and then asks that I change the sheet because there's a small stain on it. He is so paranoid about disease I would recommend he move into a plastic bubble.

He has so many requests that at one point I just turn and blurt out: "Any other requests?" After a few hours of constant nagging he goes — and leaves me no tip.

Next: another challenge! This gentleman also wants body clipping but without looking like he clipped his body hair. I don't understand this show!

Since we specialize in skincare at my spa, facials are the most popular treatments. Therefore, I have another facial. This guy is concerned about the newly-developed lines in his face, especially around his eyes. I ask the routine questions: Do you go out in the sun a lot? Do you smoke? Do you drink? Do you get little sleep? He answers "yes" to all of them. Well, we have a *lot* of work to do.

I start the session by recommending a chemical peel to target those unwanted lines. But he thinks the price for beauty is too high and declines. We still do the facial to clean his pores but nothing with anti-aging. After the treatment I recommend products to use. He buys a few, which I think is an excellent move on his part.

Next, one eyebrow and then a Smooth Operator (a.k.a. full body wax). The full body wax is grueling for both me and the client. It always starts out smoothly, but then we usually hit some trouble areas that slow the procedure a lot. Sometimes it's the knees, or the privates, or even the chest. I've had guys who have almost fainted while waxing their chest. That's how painful chest waxing can be.

This particular client just lies there, letting out small grunts when I pull the strip. But his hair is so curly and coarse that it only makes it harder to remove. By the time I finish, I am so exhausted.

Ahhhh ... done. Another week of digging, tweezing, rubbing and bleaching.

SATURDAY JULY 5

This is the most stressful and busiest day of the week. My most intense employees work on this day, so if anything goes wrong (and something *will* go wrong!) it's a sure thing that everyone is going to hear about it. Double bookings, last-minute cancellations, clients arriving late, and then all hell breaks loose. Even after many conversations with certain employees, I still can't get them to contain their emotions. It's *all* personal with them.

I try my best to stay clear of them and remain in my room. I don't think it has anything to do with me. I don't intimidate or yell or scream at them when they make a mistake. I treat them with respect and kindness. I've learned from past bosses how not to treat your employees. I like to believe that, for the most part, it works. I do get unruly employees who want to challenge me, but they end up losing. I'm kind but tough when needed.

OK, I feel better now that I let out some steam. My therapist hears this every week. The only way I stay healthy is to

pay someone to listen to me complain and whine about life.

I have a super-busy schedule today. I start early with a client who needs a facial before jetting off to Argentina, and she wants me to make her look her best. She's seeing her boyfriend for the first time in five months. The boyfriend will be living there for the next two years and she's concerned about the relationship. I also give her a Brazilian wax to make her visit more thrilling and dirty!

Next is another Brazilian wax. I love seeing this woman who always has fun stories to tell about the guys she sleeps with. One Irish, one British and one from Jersey — and all married men. Yikes! Again, it's not my job to judge but to listen (especially when their stories involve sex). After 30 minutes of listening to Miss Hot Pants (*no judgement!*), I finish the treatment and move on to my next client.

My front-desk squad loves to book me back-to-back, which gives me no time to eat, use the restroom, check my e-mails, or even breathe. Today is one of those common spa mara-

I SPEND SO MUCH MONEY ON FLOWERS BUT IT'S WORTH IT. THEY MAKE MY BOUTIQUE SPA (AND, THEREFORE, ME) LOOK PRETTY.

I'VE HAD GUYS WHO HAVE ALMOST FAINTED WHILE WAXING THEIR CHEST. THAT'S HOW PAINFUL CHEST WAXING CAN BE.

thon days for me. I somewhat enjoy them since they keep my heart going at a high rate.

I continue with waxing, facials, waxing, facials ... and today I have two massages booked. My massage therapist decides to get "sick" and leaves me doing his work. After 11 years of massage, I think I am pretty much done with it. I only have about 10 massage clients who visit me weekly or monthly. Massage therapy was fun for the first five years, but at this point I don't find it rewarding anymore. I get more pleasure out of ripping hair or sandblasting someone's face. My clients love the instant gratification that a facial or waxing provides and that makes me tingle.

Today, one of the massage clients who struts in is a football player-type: six-foot-three, 300 pounds. Is it discrimination if I ask for stats over the phone? My first instinct is to run but then I take a deep breath and smile. The Massage Without Borders includes lots of stretching and deep tissue massage for 100 minutes. I will need a massage after massaging this big guy. As I place my hands on his back I can feel the tension and hard twisted muscles. I give it my best shot and to my surprise he loves the massage. He gives me a tip and books another appointment for next week.

Then the last client informs me that on his previous visit he was hurt by one of the other technicians at the spa, and since then he was boycotting my business. I ask him: Did you inform anyone of this incident? Why didn't you write me a letter? I can't believe you would boycott me without an explanation. It's important for me to know these things. What I didn't say to him was that I already had fired that one particular technician. Sometimes you think someone is good for your business and then they turn out to be a disaster. I got several letters complaining about them, until I decided it was time. I had explained the protocol for each treatment several times, but this technician just insisted on doing his own thing. I didn't open my business for the sake of just having one, but because I have the knowledge and experience of what works in the spa.

One more back waxing and it goes smoothly. Sanitize, apply the wax and remove the hair. Simple and easy!

As you can see by reading my diary, some days are more difficult than others. But one thing is for sure: I *never* have a dull moment!