

A Man's Tan, Without the UV

By BEZ SHAPIRO MAY 11, 2015



Eric Helgas for The New York Times

Men may not like to discuss bronzing creams and self-tanners, but that doesn't mean they don't use them.

"It's bizarre," said Dominick D'Erasmus, 41, a marketing sales executive in Manhattan, "but it's just uncomfortable to talk about anything related to tanning."

Mr. D'Erasmus said his favorite product in this department is Clinique for Men Face Bronzer. "I'm Italian," he said. "I look the best with burnt olive skin, but I had to stop with the tanning bed. This is the safer version." He added that he likes the Clinique bronzing cream because it has no chemical odor and the color isn't too dark.

Tom Ford, the designer, film director and creator of a namesake fashion label, said he created Tom Ford Men's Bronzing Gel for his own use. "I use a bronzer every single day," he said, "and I had been searching for something that was high quality and masculine at the same time."

He added that similar products for women usually have dewy finishes. A men's version, in his view, should read matte. "I do not want to see any pigment on a man's skin," he said, "so this is a sheer water-based stain that just tints, without masking natural features."

Other men don't mind dipping into women's products. David Cotteblanche, 43, a founder of Red Market Salon in downtown Manhattan, said he started using his wife's Shiseido tinted moisturizer because he liked how the caramel tones warmed his skin. (His wife is naturally a shade or two darker than him.) "The tinted moisturizer has become my go-to," he said.

Beyond the bronzing creams, which wash right off, are men's self-tanners, which dye the skin, such as Clarins Radiance Plus Golden Glow Booster. The new formula is essentially concentrated self-tanning drops, which the user can mix with his usual moisturizer.

Paul Jarrod Frank, a dermatologist in Manhattan, said his clients often ask him about self-tanners. He advises men going this route to first prep the skin by exfoliation (he likes Neutrogena Oil-Free Acne Wash, which uses 2 percent salicylic acid) even if the complexion is pimple-free, because self-tanner can grab onto dead skin cells.

He cautioned against falling for the industry's marketing ploys. "The only self-tanner ingredient out there is dihydroxyacetone," he said. "It doesn't matter if the label says it's an organic or a natural self-tanner. Just choose the formula you like." For men, he is a fan of L'Oréal Sublime gel, because it "dries very quickly, and you don't feel like you have anything on."

If the idea of a skin dye brings on the heebie-jeebies, bronzers remain a solid option for commitment-phobes.