

GLAMOUR

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**3-D
BONUS
SECTION**
GET YOUR
GLASSES
ON PAGE 63

**LET'S
TALK
ABOUT
SEX!**

The Stuff
You Wonder
About Most,
Explained By
Very Satisfied
Women

23

Great Things
To Do With
Your Hair
Tonight

**Free &
Easy
Stress
Cures**

**52 Simple
Health, Beauty
& Happiness
Secrets**

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UNDO MY TATTOO

It's the ultimate accessory—until the day it starts to bug you. More and more women are developing tattoo remorse, and taking serious risks to remove theirs. Even if you're just thinking about getting inked, read this.

BY JASON HIDALGO



FEW YEARS AGO, Donna Masly, 25, got a tattoo on her right bicep. A Taurus, she considered the multicolored bull in a circle to be makeshift therapy after a breakup. "All it took was \$80 and an hour and a half," says Masly, a program coordinator at a New York state park. "I was transferring my emotions into something powerful-looking, hoping it would make me feel stronger."

Tattoos used to be a rocker-chick/bad-girl thing. These days, though, your average young career woman and Prada-ed celeb are just as likely to be sporting them. Forty percent of American women ages 25 to 29 have at least one, according to a recent Harris poll. What's popular: small, chic designs like the bow on Jessica Alba's lower back and the trio of sexy stars on Sienna Miller's shoulder. "But more and more young women are going for bigger ones," says tattoo artist Kat Von D, star of the reality show *LA Ink*. *Continued on page 106* ♦♦

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“Thanks to Angelina Jolie, I thought it had become socially acceptable to have a tattoo,” says one woman. “But I kept catching clients staring. It had to go.”

(continued from page 102) A lot more women are also reconsidering theirs. The Harris survey revealed that 29 percent of women in their mid- to late twenties have regrets about their tattoos, which could explain why aestheticians, cosmetologists, tattoo artists, dermatologists and medi-spas—as well as clinics with make-no-mistake names like Dr. Tattoff and Tat2BeGone—are doing a brisk business in tattoo removal. Masly is in the process: “Thanks to Angelina Jolie, I thought it had become socially acceptable to have a tattoo so visible,” she says. “But I kept catching clients staring at it. It had to go.”

Removing a tattoo is no simple process. “Because of things like misleading consultations and misinformation on the Web, women think they can erase tattoos in one or two sittings,” says Jenny Kim, M.D., Ph.D., an associate professor of dermatology at University of California Los Angeles. In reality, even with numerous laser treatments—the most efficient method available—some tattoos never completely disappear, especially ones with blended colors. And, far scarier, dermatologists around the country tell *Glamour* they’re seeing a growing number of patients with

skin damage from removal done wrong. “If you don’t go to a good expert, you can end up with complications like an infection or permanent scars,” says Dr. Kim. “Women are taking serious risks to get tattoo-free.”

“I Love It! I Love It!
I...Hate It.”

Tattoos weren’t always a fun thing: Ancient Greeks forced them on slaves and criminals. These days, though, they have all sorts of appeal: They’re acts of rebellion (“I may have a day job, but there’s a devil on my ankle!”), life mantras (like LA BELLA VITA on Lindsay Lohan’s lower back, Italian for “the beautiful life”) or declarations of love (Nick Cannon slapped a huge MARIAH on his back to celebrate their wedding).

“Body art is just one more way to be unique,” says Myrna Armstrong, a professor of nursing at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Lubbock, who’s studied tattoos for 17 years. Celebs have fueled the trend. “I was looking at photos of Rihanna, and I saw a Sanskrit prayer design on her hip,” says Heather Woodard, 27, a

senior account executive at a public relations firm in St. Louis. “I ended up getting a little star there! It’s sexy and mysterious.”

Yet even as lots of women adore their tattoos (for proof, see checkoutmyink.com), many fall out of love. Negative reactions are the major reason, according to Armstrong, who recently surveyed 196 patients at removal clinics. “Women were getting more negative comments than men at work and in public,” she says. Sometimes, women just get bored. “It’s like buying a convertible,” Armstrong says. “When the novelty rubs off, it gets old fast.”

Removal has come a long way from the sixth century, when Greek and Roman physicians used turpentine and pigeon poop to scour off tattoos. In recent years, certain creams have promised to fade them, though doctors warn about inefficacy and irritation. With the new generation of lasers, erasing is more possible than ever, but it’ll cost you: Masly has spent \$3,000 for 12 treatments, with four more to go.

The key to making a tattoo go away lies in who does the job—something many women don’t realize. After botched removals, says Eric Bernstein, M.D., a dermatologic surgeon in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, “patients come in to my office scarred up and tell me, ‘But I got a good deal!’”

Regulations aren’t uniform. Some states don’t require that doctors perform the procedure. Some don’t mandate that a physician be on the premises when a nurse or technician does the job. And claims that a clinic has a “medical director” or “supervising doctor” don’t necessarily mean much, notes Dr. Bernstein: He or she may not be in the room or even in the area.

“WHY’D I GET THAT THING ANYWAY?”

Welcome to the wonderful world of tattoo remorse.



“I began to hate this when I became a legal recruiter. It’s hard to sell yourself to law firms when you have dancing people on your arm.”
—Jill Rorem, 35, Chicago



“On a whim, I got a tattoo of my home state, New Jersey, on my lower back. People would tell me things I could fill in, like highways or Springsteen’s autograph.”
—Mattie Azurmendi, 25, Atlanta



“Why did I think this was a good idea? Just because I majored in marine biology does not mean I need to show my love of dolphins on my calf.” —Rachel Frederick, 32, San Francisco



“I got this to rebel against my dad. Now it looks like fire coming out of my rear! And the symbol does not mean courage, as I’d thought. I’m not sure what it means.”
—Jenny Naday, 29, Denver

Glamalert

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SoL-Angel: Music to Our Ears

Just when we were getting bored with our music playlists, along came singer/songwriter Solange Knowles — AKA SoL-Angel — with her debut, *SoL-Angel and The Hadley St. Dreams*. The album features collaborations with award-winning producers like Mark Ronson, Pharrell, Lamont Dozier, and Cee-Lo. Put this one on heavy rotation. Available now.



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kate spade
NEW YORK

STAR TATTOO REDO

Problem: The guy's long gone, but his name is emblazoned on you. These stars' solutions? Erase that sucker—and add a new tattoo.



ANGELINA JOLIE PUT ONE OVER ON BILLY BOB: She reportedly lasered that man right off her arm in favor of the geographical map coordinates for places where her first four kids were born.



DENISE RICHARDS: SORRY, CHARLIE! Tattoo artist Kat Von D helped Denise with this part of her breakup therapy.

Check out the best and worst celeb tattoos at glamour.com/magazine.

What's more, a doctor needs special training, important for complications. "Every person's skin reacts differently to laser," says Cameron Rokhsar, M.D., a laser surgeon in New York City. Horror stories abound: One patient was at a spa getting laser leg-hair removal; the aesthetician used the laser to wipe out the tattoo on her stomach. She ended up with a burn and a scar. Dr. Kim recently treated a woman with a scab that wouldn't heal; she'd gone to a removal clinic with no physician present. "She had a drug-resistant staph infection," says Dr. Kim. "They can be quite serious."

Veronica Ebie, 30, a model based in Houston, had a bad experience when she went to a clinic to laser off a three-inch teddy bear on her chest. She got a burn and a keloid—a black, rubbery, raised scar. "I cried for days," she says. "I lost a lot of modeling jobs." After a year of monthly steroid shots, the scar's been reduced to a few bumps. Ebie's working again, though

she's getting fewer assignments. "My tattoo cost me \$20, and getting rid of the scar cost \$8,000," she says. "I advise *anyone* getting a tattoo off to see a dermatologist."

How to Stay Safe

Find a derm who specializes in tattoo removal. Visit the American Society of Dermatologic Surgery site (asds.net).

Be patient. Even small tattoos typically take three to six laser sessions.

Request a spot test. Critical for dark-skinned women, at risk for scarring.

Watch the area. Signs of infection: severe pain, redness, swelling and tenderness in the first two to five days postlaser, or oozing a week after.

The best way to dodge disaster? Skip getting a tattoo you'll regret. As Kat Von D says, "You don't want someone asking you, 'Who's George?' if things don't work out." ■

With reporting by Akiba Solomon.

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Take care.

A photograph of Kylie Minogue is the central focus. She is wearing a light-colored, possibly silver or champagne, one-shoulder dress. She is smiling broadly, looking towards the camera, with her hands near her chest. Her blonde hair is styled in a short, wavy cut. She is wearing a necklace with a large, intricate snowflake pendant. The background is a deep red or maroon color, decorated with numerous small, white, stylized snowflake patterns. The overall mood is festive and elegant.

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Kylie Minogue

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