



Inside job Waxpert/Browhaus therapist

Paul Johnson tries every job in Shanghai. This month: waxing legs and threading eyebrows at Strip and Browhaus

I begin the day as a waxpert in the Strip half of Strip/Browhaus, a dynamic duo unswerving in their fight against unsightly hair, employing an eager staff of hair removal visionaries who see a rough, stubbly world and yearn to make it smooth. One of the Strip-erellas, SiSi, has volunteered to let me wax her upper legs, and I'm relieved to learn that nobody has volunteered for the Brazilian wax. Lynn, the marketing manager, wants me to understand the full range of hair removal services and asks if I want to try receiving a Brazilian for men. I don't want to admit I fear the pain, so I defer by telling her I'd promised my wife to stop taking my pants off at work.

Strip-erella Vanessa demonstrates on one of SiSi's legs while I wax the other. We both open our hygiene packs and put on the latex gloves and masks, wipe the legs with cleanser, and then apply baby powder to protect the skin. Before applying the wax we examine the hair to see which direction it's growing in. The wax is applied with a roller and after rolling a few lines to create a square, we smooth a wax cloth against it. Vanessa has me use one hand to pull the skin taut, I grip the wax cloth, and SiSi emits

a nervous giggle, either because she's anticipating pain or because the rest of the staff members have gathered to watch and she's never had so many people staring at her thighs all at once.

I tear the cloth away and push my hand against the hairless patch to decrease any pain. SiSi smiles throughout the process and insists she doesn't feel any discomfort. Her approval carries some weight since she's a bit of a hair removal pro, regularly waxing her back, armpits, legs, and arms. Her fierce commitment to hair removal surprises me since Chinese girls have never struck me as especially hairy, but the managing director BJ assures me that a visit to her gym locker room proves Chinese women could use some help south of the equator. 'I could grab it with two hands. I get so tired of waiting for the hair dryer.'

We move to the Browhaus side so I can learn the art of threading, a hair removal practice that has existed for thousands of years. In China the practice was often performed before marriage to create a square hairline, signifying the new status as a married woman. Threading offers more eyebrow precision than waxing and is gentler on the skin. Full face threading is also popular because

it makes the face appear very fair.

Before the threading section of my work begins, Lynn asks if I want to have my eyebrows shaped. I'm hesitant, not because I'm worried it won't improve my look, but because I'm worried it will. I'm already getting too many complaints about my

handsomeness. 'Can you shape my eyebrows so I look permanently surprised?' I ask. 'Or maybe one eyebrow higher so I look puzzled?'

Lynn smiles. 'We don't recommend people do this.'

'Or can you make it look like I have a good idea? People will see me and say, "We better not disturb Paul. Looks like he's in the middle of a good idea."'

Lynn smiles. 'We don't recommend people do this.'

Lynn tells me a Browhaus therapist, Gloria, has saved her eyebrows for me. I'm a touch overwhelmed as I realise this might be the first time a woman ever saved something for me. Gloria takes a seat, and one of the therapists, Jane, shows me how to cleanse the face before Hoi Tong white powder is smoothed across Gloria's skin to absorb oil. I use a hand mirror and stick to point out her hairline and ask how high she

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wants me to thread.

Spool of white thread in hand, I grip the end in my teeth, pull out an arm length with the left hand, double it with the right, then rotate the right wrist four times to create a scissor V in the centre. This takes me six tries to get right. Jane demonstrates the threading technique by removing all the hair from the back of my hands. The fingers on her right hand expand and contract in time with the occasional nod of her head, creating a smooth scissoring motion. No discomfort at all. The only sensation is that of a light tug.

I imitate her motion across Gloria's hairline and the edge of her eyebrows but success is spotty. I only do one motion before the centre of my thread becomes tangled. I untangle, repeat the motion and become tangled again. This will be a recurring theme. I successfully remove

some of the hair but miss some spots and Jane cleans up the areas I missed.

Before I leave, Lynn asks again if I want to try the Brazilian wax and attempts to sweeten the deal by mentioning the staff can also do custom shapes. Although the day's experience has convinced me it probably wouldn't be too uncomfortable, I still prefer not to take any pain chances with that region of my body. I stall. 'Um... can you do an exclamation point?' Lynn leaves to ask one of the Strip-erellas and returns with a yes. My shoulders slump. 'Um...actually, what I really want is a cowboy hat.' Again, Lynn consults with the Strip-erella before shaking her head. My shoulders unslump.

When it comes to branding your country, Denmark got it all wrong. When you hear 'Danish' you think of pastries. But when you hear 'Brazilian' you think of grooming for sex. If you're not convinced sex is more popular than pastries, ask yourself when was the last time a friend said, 'Sorry I've been so cranky lately, but I haven't had a pastry in three months. At this point I'd take a pastry on a dirty bathroom floor.' Well played, Brazilians. Olé!

Strip and Browhaus See Mind & Body Listings, page 30, for details.