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Japanese pure gold facials offer a dazzling promise

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By Hiroyuki Muramoto

TOKYO (Reuters Life!) - They say Cleopatra maintained her youth by wearing a face mask of pure gold to bed. Now in luxury-obsessed Japan, you too can gild your features and feel like a modern-day queen.

A Japanese firm showcased this week a "pure gold skin treatment" which investors say rejuvenates the skin and helps remove wrinkles and blemishes.

Gold leaf is placed on the face to accelerate cell growth in the basal layer of the skin, Umo Inc. said.

"The effects of gold include anti-ageing. It can also remove wrinkles and blemishes

that women often worry about," said a spokesman for the company which developed the therapy last year.

The luxurious treatment is available at some 30 salons and spas across Japan and one session, which lasts between one and two hours, starts at 20,000 yen (\$170).

"My face started feeling warm when they finished applying gold. It feels luxurious and I feel spoilt," said Satomi Ogura, 32, who tried the treatment at the Beautyworld Japan 2007, the country's biggest beauty expo.

The gold facials appear to be part of a trend in Japan towards a return to the good life.

In the 1980s "bubble economy" years, wealthy Japanese were known to sprinkle gold on food and drink pink champagne by the magnum. And even during the recession, Japanese were among the world's top buyers of luxury goods and diamond jewelry.

Tokyo's Ritz-Carlton recently started offering a "diamond-tini", a martini cocktail poured over a 1.06 carat stone, for 1.8 million yen. Its 13,000 yen "wagyu" beef burgers are also popular.

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