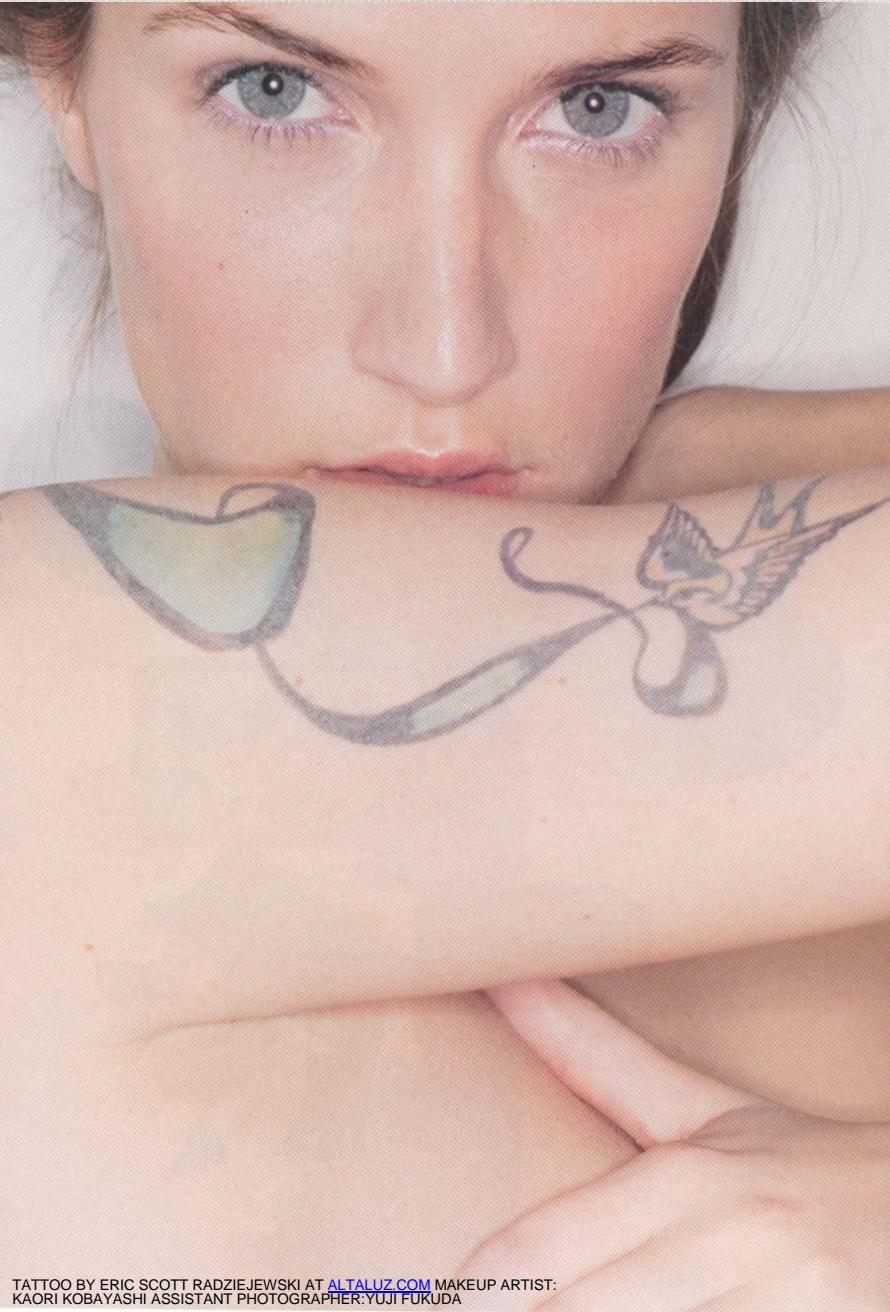


# permanent record

IT'S OK IF YOUR CHILDHOOD FANTASIES NO LONGER LOOK SO PRETTY IN INK. HERE'S HOW TO GET RID OF THAT TATTOO. BY KARA JESELLA. PHOTOGRAPHED BY VAN TRI LE.



Sometimes it seems like getting a shamrock permanently, indelibly, rebelliously inked into your 16-year-old skin is a wonderful idea. It's on the inside of your thigh, after all, so who will ever see it except for the boyfriend you don't have yet—which imbues it with the additional cache of sexual sophistication. And at 17, 18, 19, and 20, you continue to derive pleasure from the sight of that little green weed, which, unlike the heart or the rainbow you wear contemplating, at least carries the connotation of ethnic pride, not to mention the smiling specter of good luck. You believe in its serendipitous power even when, upon its initial bikini-framed debut on the big beach vacation, you father nearly asphyxiates and your mother bursts into tears. But by the time you're in your mid-twenties, even your most conservative friends are hip to ink, the cute clover has dissolved into a barely discernible blob, and you're sick of the requisite "What is it?" whenever you're in a telling state of undress. It's a tattoo, of course.

In the last 20 years, countless academics have devoted their entire careers to explicating the nuanced symbolism and cultural importance of the common tattoo. And though there are many incredible examples of body art and people who wear it proudly and philosophically, there is an equal number of disappointing adolescent experiments with nontraditional tribal markings. But thanks to advances in laser technology over the last few years, it's now easier than ever to undo the results of a drunken lapse of judgment or overly literal expression of identity. Dr. Robert Guida, a Manhattan-based plastic surgeon and an expert on tattoo removal, tells us how.

"At the consultation, when I first see a patient with a tattoo, I try to get an idea of how long they've had it, what their general motive was for getting it, and who did it—whether it was done by a boyfriend or girlfriend, or done professionally, gives me an idea of the quality of the dye. I also find out whether they want the entire tattoo removed. Knowing the size and the color helps me determine how many sessions we'll need to completely remove it. Patients need to know that it's not one magical treatment—it could be anywhere from three to seven sessions. The larger the size of the tattoo and the more colors there are, the more time the patient will need to come in. Single-color blue or black tattoos are the easiest to get rid of.

"The Versa pulse is the most versatile laser for tattoo removal. The laser breaks up the pigment in the tattoo, and the body naturally absorbs it. The white blood cells see the ink as a foreign body and begin to attack.

"When the patient comes in for their first removal session, I rub alcohol on the tattooed area and numb it with a little bit of novocaine. Then the patient and I both put on safety glasses and I work away on the section for a few minutes with the laser, being careful not to go too deep. A lot of patients worry about scarring but, with the right plastic surgeon, scarring is virtually nonexistent. The tattoo doesn't disappear right away; it just looks lighter and begins to scab over. For the next week or two, the patient needs to treat the area with an over-the-counter antibiotic ointment like Bacitracin and a Band-Aid. Patients need to understand that there is some aftercare. If you're going to the beach, you can't just go out and sunbathe that area—it could hyperpigment and turn darker. Even after a few weeks, you need to use an SPF of at least 40. You can shower and get wet, but you still have to be careful, because there's a little bit of a wound."

Dr. Robert Guida is located at 8 East 75th Street, New York City, 212.871.0900. Visit [www.drguida.com](http://www.drguida.com)

TATTOO BY ERIC SCOTT RADZIEJEWSKI AT [ALTALUZ.COM](http://ALTALUZ.COM) MAKEUP ARTIST: KAORI KOBAYASHI ASSISTANT PHOTOGRAPHER: YUJI FUKUDA