



This year **curve** celebrates our 20th anniversary by looking back at the women who inspired us then. Twenty years ago, Elayne Angel was a master piercer at West Hollywood's The Gauntlet, the first piercing specialty studio in the U.S. You may know her best as the woman who popularized the tongue piercing. Fellow queer girl Raelyn Gallina was also a piercing pioneer. She invented the fishtail labrette and introduced modern scarification to American culture and is still going strong.



Making Your Mark

A piercing pro gives us five tips to keep that fashion statement healthy. **By Yana Tallon-Hicks**



Elayne Angel



how to get a healthy piercing and keep it that way.

1. How do I find a safe piercer? If they permit customers to try on piercing jewelry, run. But first, to find a safe piercer, become an educated consumer.

In the United States there are no standardized regulations—there's no such thing as a "certified piercer." Look for members of the Association of Professional Piercers. We uphold a standard of hygiene and sanitation, have training in blood-borne-pathogens exposure control and have studios that meet certain environmental criteria. Visit safepiercing.org for details.

2. How do I make sure I'm getting what I really want in the studio? Ask whatever you need in order to feel confident that you're getting exactly what you want. Every question you ask should be answered thoroughly. If the piercer cannot place a piercing where you want it, she should be able to explain why your chosen spot [isn't] safe.

3. What's the most important part of aftercare? Keep your dirty hands away from your piercing! You should also avoid trauma and friction. I don't believe there's one magic aftercare product that's best for all piercings,

but a strong product such as peroxide or alcohol will harm rather than help.

4. What should I do if my piercing becomes infected? At the first sign of trouble, visit your piercer. Many piercing problems can be handled with a change of jewelry or aftercare regimen. It's quite common for piercings to become somewhat discolored and ooze a little bit during healing, and piercees may mistakenly believe they have an infection. If you think you've got an infection, you should visit your doctor. If infected, [a piercing] needs to drain. And leave in quality jewelry, if the proper fit allows for drainage. If you abandon the piercing, the holes can close, causing an abscess, which is even worse.

5. What are some of the common mistakes people make that lead to unhealthy piercings? One mistake is choosing a piercer based on low price. Don't bargain shop! Piercees frequently stop being assiduous with aftercare or start playing with the [unhealed] piercing, [which] can lead to complications. People commonly leave out their jewelry for a short time, believing that it will be easy to reinsert. But even healed body piercings can close quickly if the jewelry is removed. So, if you like your piercing, keep your jewelry in. ■

In a society that dictates a frustratingly narrow concept of beauty, piercing has become a way to take back control of our bodies—and get that little extra sparkle while we're at it.

According to experts, many of us want extra body bling. Elayne Angel, an award-winning professional piercer and author of *The Piercing Bible* (piercingbible.com), says that 1 in 7 people between the ages of 18 and 50 sport jewelry in areas more exotic than their earlobes. In fact, in 2006, the Associated Press reported that among people between 18 and 29, that number rose to one in three.*

Getting pierced is not just a youth phenomenon—people get piercings to commemorate life events, for spiritual purposes and as a symbol of subculture membership. Sound familiar? Take a stroll through any dyke enclave and you'll see what I mean. We dykes definitely love our piercings, and that lesbian classic, the lip ring, has handily tipped this lesbo off more than once.

But there's nothing more unattractive than an infected or otherwise unhealthy piercing. So what do you need to know to protect yourself? Angel gives us her key pointers on

Where To Get Your Holes Punched

A few LGBT-owned piercing salons from coast to coast



1 IN 3 PEOPLE BETWEEN 18 AND 29 HAVE PIERCINGS
—ASSOCIATED PRESS*

ASHLEY AT SAVAGESKIN.CO.UK (FULL BODY TATTOO), MICHAEL ALAGO (INSET)