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In Pursuit of Perfection

The plastic surgery capital of the world is located 10 miles east of the Pacific Ocean, where luxury and excitement intersect on a swollen corridor known as much for its fancy boutiques as for the private reservation telephone numbers of its restaurants.

In Beverly Hills the rich and the famous gather to shop, eat and be seen; however, much more significantly, to look and feel better while being pampered all the while. In the medical specialty of plastic surgery only the successful survive.

Here in the most famous real estate triangle in the United States, there is one plastic surgeon that doesn't advertise. His reputation speaks for itself. Dr. Garth Fisher's name is whispered at cocktail parties and in women's dressing rooms at the most prestigious boutiques of the world. From the Rue de la Paix in Paris to the Via dei Condotti in Rome to Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills the name's the same. In Los Angeles, a gifted plastic surgeon commands center stage, no less so than an Oscar-winning director accepts the award in Hollywood. Youth and beauty are venerated above all else, because in L.A., everyone is a star – or wants to look like one.

Dr. Garth Fisher is a plastic surgeon whose patient roster reads like a who's who of Hollywood and corporate America. He's an artist who sculpts human faces and bodies with such care and precision that the end result is consistently natural. He corrects what we wish nature had given us, or perhaps what nature has taken away. Voted by his peers as one of the Best Doctor's in America, he is at the top of his game and shares the spotlight with his beautiful wife, who just happens to be a celebrity in her own right. Brooke Burke is the hostess on E! Entertainment's "Wild On" series. She's gorgeous, and without Fisher's surgical assistance.

Dr. Fisher is board certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery and his practice is in Beverly Hills, California, USA. Dr. Fisher is an assistant clinical professor of surgery (Plastic) at the University of California, Irvine.

Arguably, there are many talented surgeons in Beverly Hills; the endless list of celebrities demands such a supply. However, the decision to undergo a cosmetic procedure can foster anxiety, fear, and unrealistic expectations. The

skill, honesty, integrity, and personality of the doctor are defining factors in the overall equation. It is precisely these qualities that separate Dr. Garth Fisher from the rest of the talent.

His office is located in a medical building on a cozy tree-lined street within the din of Beverly Hills activity. Limousines are back to back against the curb. On the second floor where, at the termination of a private hall (ensconced in marble), a hidden camera synchronized with some sort of electronic buzzer, offers those with appointments made long ago, selective entrance.

A cross section of human experience waits. A woman had come all the way from San Paolo; a man from New Orleans, another woman from Singapore. A stunning looking woman walks through the room on her way to the exit. She pauses for a moment to chat with the receptionist. The conversation is casual enough, yet there's a hint of intimacy. What possibly would have brought this magnificent looking female to a plastic surgeon's office?

And then you meet him. The Southern accent has been assimilated (cultivated in the Mississippi Delta), but the charm is still there. It is quite evident that when you are with him, it is you, and only you, who matters. Having the vision and the hands to create beauty is a gift, just as precious as the endowment bestowed upon the classicalists of ancient Athens and Rome. This gift has led him to perform almost 10,000 surgeries in only 12 years. The selectivity the office demands necessitates that potential patients are turned away every day.

The decision to become a surgeon took hold when he was 19, witnessing of all things, a gallbladder operation. After graduating from the University of Mississippi, he did his residency at the University of California Irvine and has become Board Certified by the prestigious American Board of Plastic Surgery. The "gift" was further refined during a fellowship with one of his mentors, Dr. Bruce Connell, followed by a partnership with his other significant mentor, Dr. John Williams. Connecting with these two gentlemen has helped shape Fisher into the finest plastic surgeon on the West Coast today.

Dr. Fisher is highly sought after for advice and has been consulted extensively for many



television, news and magazine interviews. From "Entertainment Tonight" to ESPN, the word is out. Breast augmentation and facelifts are the operations he performs most frequently. Taking the time to carefully place stitches in strategic folds in facial skin has garnered him the respect from *Town and Country*, *Best Doctors in America*, and *Los Angeles Magazine*, who all placed him on the list as one of the best doctors in America.

A perfectionist, who enjoys people, he is always honest with his patients. His mantra is emphatic, it is the patient who is most important; by striving to perform the surgical experience that provides the most appropriate result he knows he has offered his best. He lets each patient know what he or she can or cannot expect, because unrealized expectations make for unhappy patients. The search for perfection can be a demanding taskmaster. New procedures do not necessarily yield better results. It is the surgeon's skill that makes the difference, not always the latest technique.

According to Fisher, facelifts or rhytidectomies, as they are medically known, will retain their effect for about 15 years. Obsessive attention to detail with double and triple seaming sutures deserves his \$50,000 price tag for extensive facelifts. Because of the required

additional time and attention, Fisher only performs one facelift per day. I've seen his before and after work. The results are simply inspiring.

There is minimal standardization to facelift procedures. Techniques vary and often quality is equated to operating speed. Attempting to complete complex procedures as these in two or three hours is mentioned only to be condemned. Alterations in facial contouring are surgical procedures that provide an enormous opportunity for consumer misinformation. Patients need to be informed about the required attention that should occur. For less money than some facelifts cost many of us purchase automobiles. With that acquisition we're provided a several user manuals that coordinate with one another. Granted we're a mobile society and spend large amounts of time behind the wheel. Do we deserve any less for our facial presentation?

The real artistry involved in performing a facelift begins with planning the contouring process. The manner in which the surgeon undermines, or trims the tissue beneath the superficial layer of skin is called "dissection." Here techniques vary. The more common "lift" involves a superficial dissection. This type of facelift is easier and faster to perform. The skin is merely separated from the deeper, underlying facial supportive muscle and connective tissues, and simply trimmed and stretched to create the illusion of a smooth seamless appearance. Fisher does not favor this method. His reasoning appears firmly grounded in anatomical good sense. Using this "superficial" method, all the remaining tension rests on the skin. It follows, according to Fisher, that the tension therefore also will be placed on the incisions that re-attach the skin, and thus the areas where scars are ultimately formed. This often leads to poor tissue healing and unattractive scar formation. Poorly positioned earlobes, uneven hairlines and a tight, fixed appearance of the mouth are clear giveaways that a superficial lift has been performed. What has happened is that the skin has been pulled to tight to over compensate for the lack of a deeper tissue dissection. The unnatural result is a "wind tunnel appearance." Beware of earlobes that have been pulled down too far, ear openings that are too prominent, and visualized scars upon emerging from bathing or swimming. These fast and easy facelifts are rarely appropriate.

In Dr. Fisher's assessment the deeper, more demanding dissection is the facelift of choice. In this method, the deeper tissues are separated and lifted along with the superficial skin, and then approximated into a more natural, youthful appearance. This type of lift more accurately reflects the individual's facial contours. The tension created with this method of dissection is transmitted to the deeper structures of the facial muscles where it is needed most, and thus the superficial skin need not be pulled so tightly. The result is a more natural appearance with less scarring, and no distortion of the ears and mouth.

Deeper dissection of the underlying facial tissues is a much more technically demanding surgical procedure. While this type of facelift increases surgical time, the dividends in quality and

longevity are well worth the expenditure. Beware the surgeon who offers a "mini" lift that can be performed in three hours or less. Some surgeons even use metal staples to hurriedly close incisions, believing in error that the resulting scars will heal as well as carefully placed sutures. These three-hour lifts can be compared to an attempt to detail an entire car in 15 minutes. This type of offer is proffered by the cosmetic surgeon, usually trained as a dermatologist or ear and nose surgeon, who now attempts a far more challenging procedure than previous training permits.

A goal of a precisely executed facelift, with exceptional attention to detail, should yield results that look natural, youthful and in summation, well rested.

Dr. Fisher is one of the most experienced breast surgeons in the country. According to the major manufacturer of breast implants in the United States, Fisher was in a group of five surgeons who inserted the most breast prostheses in the entire country last year. He feels that the ideal implanted breast is one that remains soft and looks most natural. This type of "teardrop" shape should be obtained by proper surgical technique and dissection, not by the shape of the implant itself. The implant is most properly inserted through an incision made in the tissues surrounding the nipple. This pigmented area of skin, known as the areola, resists scar formation. When closed with meticulous detail, the incision should be undetected even under maximum visual scrutiny.

The most common complication of breast implant surgery is the formation of scar tissue between the implant and the breast "pocket" in which it is placed. Known as the formation of a "capsule," this condition causes the breasts to appear firm and occasionally misshapen. Newer techniques for insertion of breast implants include placement through the umbilicus using a visualizing telescopic instrument. This technique is dangerous, restrictive and simply offers a method of marketing to the unsuspecting consumer. "I mention it only in condemnation," states Fisher.

Fisher's practice also includes skin care and laser hair removal. Injectables, such as collagen and Botox, are also offered. Botox is a new and exciting substance derived from the botulism bacteria associated with food poisoning. Small amounts of Botox can be injected into muscles of the face to reduce wrinkling and fine lines. Botox essentially freezes the facial muscles, and by doing so, disables those muscles from contracting. It is extremely effective in creating smooth skin as well as improving the appearance of maturing skin, sort of pre-facelift. Wrinkles and frown lines around the eyes and the forehead are great candidates for Botox injections. A youthful and rested appearance is the result. The shots are painless and take only a few minutes.

Dr. Fisher's success is certainly well deserved; earned by attention to detail combined with realistic expectations. A creative sense of artistic proportion doesn't hurt either. Dr. Fisher has been in pursuit of perfection for some time and the beneficiaries are his patients. ■

Selecting a plastic surgeon can be a difficult and confusing process. In the end, it is a personal decision that patients must make for themselves. Dr. Fisher offers several caveats:

* Certification by the American Board of Plastic Surgery is essential, accept no substitutes. This is the only plastic surgery board recognized by the American Medical Association. Beware of "sound alike" boards that do not reflect the required extensive education. Some physicians advertise themselves as plastic surgeons when their specialties are actually drawn from non-plastic and reconstructive training such as dermatology, ear nose and throat and gynecology. Contact your state medical board, the American Society of Plastic Surgery (888) 4-PLASTIC or the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (888) 272-7711 to confirm the proper specialty training in plastic surgery for any surgeon considered.

* Be certain your surgeon has operating privileges in a nearby hospital.

* Be certain that his or her hospital credentials are for the very procedures you expect them to perform.

* When in doubt, make a simple yet imperative request to review their training credentials and board certification. While questioning a potential surgeon in this manner may seem odd and misplaced, be assured that physician's who have no hidden agenda, welcome such queries. They will be most delighted to share the fruits of their long and arduous training with prospective patients. Those surgeons who find such queries intrusive and balk at your requests are best waived for other less informed clients.

* Take your time. Most cosmetic surgery is elective, not an emergency. Time spent learning about your surgeon and the surgical procedure you desire, will be time well spent. Arrange for consultations with several board-certified plastic surgeons. This will assist in making important choices.

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