

DEPARTURES



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Magnificent Obsessions

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SERIOUS SKINCARE

Facing Up to Reality

A check in with Manhattan plastic surgeon Gerald Imber for the latest on how to deal with the inevitable signs of aging. **BY AIMEE LEE BALL**

The anxiety of aging in our youth-obsessed culture has produced many recent and prominent examples of plastic surgery junkies and work gone wrong—the blowfish lips of Meg Ryan, the perpetual look of surprise on Sylvester Stallone, the frozen features of Faye Dunaway, the odd androgyny of Bruce Jenner. And new shows like E!’s “Botched!” about plastic surgery nightmares emphasize the extremes of our obsession. Dr. Gerald Imber deplores this trend of excess, even though he realizes these people may have gotten what they asked for. “It’s easy to do a whole litany of things and make a mess,” he says. “Somebody in the room has to use common sense. If there’s no common sense, it’s inviting disaster. You’re just supposed to look good, not like you’re 19.”

Over the course of four decades, Imber has earned a reputation as one of the go-to plastic surgeons if you don’t want to end up looking like you’ve been sitting on the wing of a plane. “My mantra is: Less is more,” he says. “If anybody knows you did it, then it wasn’t done well.” He is a proponent of having his patients do “little things” earlier in life to stave off the ravages of time, rather than waiting until, as he says, “they need me to put my foot on the back of their head and pull. I’m not the plastic surgeon for the ladies who lunch. I’m the plastic surgeon for the ladies who work—plus, about 35 percent of my patients are men. They run television stations, they’re famous lawyers and entrepreneurs: people who have to get out of here and go back to work.”

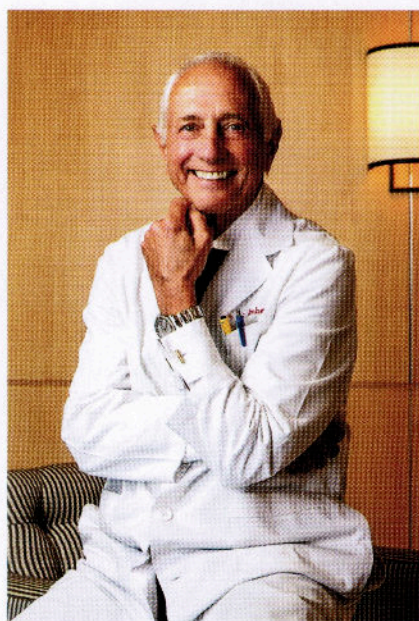
For many of them, syringes have replaced, or at least postponed, the scalpel. “My patients have lots of little things done, like fat injections,” he says. “We all have facial wasting over the years because the subcutaneous

padding goes. So fat makes a world of difference.”

When injectables aren’t enough, Imber is known for a procedure called the Limited Incision Facelift Technique, or LIFT, in which he avoids any telltale scars at the hairline, instead hiding them in the sideburns and just behind the earlobes. Surgery is done in a state-of-the-art operating room at his office, which is paneled in pale-wood veneers and dotted with sofas covered in a soft, nubby fabric. “I wanted it to be clean and attractive but not to say, ‘Oh my God, look how much money he spent,’” says Imber. “It’s not an antique store, and it’s not an art gallery.” Located on Manhattan’s Upper East Side, the space is cleverly designed with undulating corridors that limit sight lines and an exit that bypasses the waiting room to maximize privacy—a concern for some of the bold-face names who seek out his services. Yet Imber insists that he is clueless about celebrities and needs a cheat sheet when royalty or movie stars are scheduled for appointments.

Entertainment-industry public relations maven Peggy Siegal calls herself the poster child for Imber. “I am 102 and look 50,” she jokes. Actually, she admits to being 67—“Either you put a gun to your head or you embrace it,” she says—but at her 60th birthday party, she distributed a booklet called “How to Look Like Me at 60” with the names of her “miracle workers,” including contact information for Imber. They met more than 30 years ago, when she needed a breast biopsy, which happily turned out to be benign, and asked him to assist in the operating room to make sure she didn’t scar.

“My mother had no idea why I was tap dancing after this procedure, but he came in and made me look better,” Siegal says. Since then, she’s had her puffy eyes and her “chicken neck” fixed, plus two facelifts and the occasional Botox. “But Jerry respects the face you come in



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Dr. Imber’s Youth Corridor skincare line is based on his philosophy of prevention, maintenance and correction. The Boost 2.0 antioxidant serum (\$145) offers a combination of vitamins C and E and melatonin.



A new addition to the line, Luxurious Moisturizer (\$300) is designed to be used alongside Boost 2.0 and a Retinol Complex. It doesn’t use emulsifiers or surfactants, enabling your skin’s own oils to be maintained.



The Sooth & Defend SPF 30 moisturizer (\$45) has proven effective in reducing free-radical damage, which causes redness, inflammation, wrinkles and sagging skin. All products are available at youthcorridor.com.

with and doesn't try to create another one. He is the secret weapon of many celebrities and has never so much as mentioned who his patients are, not even to his wife, and certainly not to me, because I would tell you."

Despite his impeccable sense of style (he is most likely the only person in a Savile Row suit having coffee at the old-fashioned soda fountain across from his office), Imber remains "undone" himself and is content when he looks in the mirror. "I just feel as if I'm at the place I should be at this stage of my life," he says. "I don't color my hair—I don't have any hair. I'm certainly not against any of it, but I'm at peace." And although he has an artist's eye (if medicine hadn't been his *métier*, it would have been architecture), he insists he doesn't go around critiquing friends and neighbors. "I don't look at people that way," he says. "Everybody's imperfect, and I don't want anybody picking at me."

There is a subtle aspect of his work that Imber takes seriously. "This is a watershed moment for the patient who makes an appointment, comes in and says, 'Can you help me?' My job is to help if I can and make it easy for that person to talk to me. There's a lot of

psychology involved." And yet he was taught "less than nothing" about the emotional component of his profession in medical school. "I didn't learn anything about the ethics or the morality of what I do until I was doing it," he says. "Are people saying what they feel? Are they telling the truth? I've done this for a long time—I know the red flags—and I reject easily 25 percent of the people I see because I

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can't help them or I shouldn't be helping them, because what they want is unrealistic or beyond the scope of what I think is possible. A 60-year-old woman can't look 30 years old. But if a 60-year-old woman wants to look like a hot 50-year-old woman, she should, and a 50-year-old woman should look an indeterminate age. When a woman comes in and says, 'My husband wants me to do this,' I say, 'Then let him do it.' It's not going to make him happy or make him not wander, and it's not going to save a marriage."

As Catherine Deneuve once noted, at a certain age every woman has to choose between her fanny and her face, and Imber's recognition of the role fat plays in beauty is practically permission to go ahead and have dessert. "At first glance, beauty is about cheekbones and chin," he explains. "Any man or woman who has big cheekbones and a strong jaw looks terrific at first. Then you notice the wrinkles; then you notice that you hate them. But the angularity and the shadows that angularity brings suggest beauty and youth. Fat injections give you angularity."

Tiramisu and Imber's number on speed dial—sounds like a plan. ♦

Dr. Gerald Imber's practice is located at 121A E. 83rd St.; 212-472-1800; drimber.com.