

P U R S U I T O F

Ageless Beauty

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“Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth, that are written down old with all the characters of age? Have you not a moist eye, a dry hand, a yellow cheek, a white beard, a decreasing leg, an increasing belly? Is not your voice broken, your wind short, your chin double, your wit single, and every part about you blasted with antiquity? And will you yet call yourself young?”

—Shakespeare
“Henry IV” Part II; Act 1

Beauty...What is It? How Do We Achieve It? And How Do We Maintain It?

Aging, appearance and vitality can be a deep source of anxiety in our fast-paced and highly competitive society. It is important to have a positive self-image leading to positive self-esteem. Sociologists have learned from their studies that physical appearance is extremely important in dating considerations and mate selection.

Furthermore, attractive people are frequently more successful in their chosen careers, which equates with financial success. The confluence of beauty, power and wealth is universal, but perhaps more so now than ever before as evidenced by popular TV shows such as “West Wing,” “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” and “Bay Watch.”

The term ‘beauty’ can be difficult to define. It has oft been said that “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” and certainly this is true. In contemporary society, beauty has become synonymous with ‘good looks’ or outstanding physical attributes as defined by icons of beauty in the fashion and movie industry. Precepts of beauty can vary by culture, ethnic group and era; and certainly ideals of beauty have evolved throughout the history of mankind. Examples include stylized make-up application in ancient Egyptian culture and body adornments and tattoos in African tribal culture.

Current concepts of beauty in our own culture are derived from Western civilization. St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century believed man’s interest in beauty was of a sensuous origin and that the prerequisite for beauty was perfection, appropriate proportion and clarity. In plastic surgery literature much credit is given to Leonardo da Vinci who sketched and measured many faces and figures to determine geometrically—the so called ‘divine proportions’ of the human body. Perhaps this ideal was best expressed in the male sculpture “David” by Michaelangelo during the Renaissance. By the 17th century, large hips and robust bodies were considered desirable, as beautifully depicted by the Flemish painter, Rubens.

In more recent years, models and movie stars, both male and female, with slender, well-defined bodies and perfectly-proportioned facial features embody our societal standard of beauty. Pursuit of 'perfect' physical beauty can and has reached pathologic proportions, as has been well described for females in "The Beauty Myth" and for males in "The Adonis Complex," both, best-selling books.

Fortunately, this phenomenon appears to have peaked in the late 20th century; and presently the trend appears to have shifted to 'natural beauty.' In other words, the prospective patient today is more desirous of improving or enhancing his or her own natural attributes and 'being the best he or she can possibly be.'

As we enter a new millennium there are compelling demographics explaining the explosive interest in cosmetic plastic surgery and complementary medical areas of interest including anti-aging and alternative medicine. Some have referred to the confluence of disciplines as 'cosmetic medicine.' There is a ground-swell of interest in incorporating the best of 'scientific' Western medicine with 'holistic' Eastern medicine.

There are approximately 80 million 'baby boomers' in America and one turns 50-years-old every seven seconds. Today the average life expectancy of a woman is 79, and man 73, compared to 47 in 1900. The predicted life expectancy 20 years from now will be 100.

Therefore, we are witnessing major changes in our social fabric—increasing numbers of women are opting for careers out of the home, thus competing for jobs. Approximately 50 percent of marriages end in divorce, leading to new relationships and selection of new mates—frequently considerably younger or older. In this social milieu, the 'biological age' (the relative physical condition of the body) is a term more relevant than the 'chronological age' (the actual number of years lived).

Simply put, people in 1900 did not live long enough to be concerned with wrinkles, Alzheimer's dementia, etc. Americans are now living longer and overall enjoying better health thanks to improved medical care and preventive

health care. It is not uncommon for a prospective cosmetic patient to express a desire to "look as good as I feel." In other words, prospective cosmetic patients come to plastic surgeons seeking out lasting or 'ageless beauty' and vitality. They want to 'stop' or 'reverse the clock' so to speak.

Stop the Clock

- *Cosmetic plastic surgery.*
- *Regular medical care.*
- *Preventive health care (may include alternative health care).*
- *Anti-aging medicine (may include hormonal replacement).*
- *Good nutrition (may include supplements).*
- *Stress management. Examples: yoga, meditation and massage*
- *Humor—laughter is the best medicine.*
- *Spiritual fulfillment.*
- *Support system—remaining connected socially.*
- *Reduction of risk factors: stop smoking and avoid excess alcohol consumption.*
- *Medical skin care: Retin A, skin peels, micro-dermabrasion.*
- *Physical Exercise.*

In summary, beauty reflects an assemblage of aesthetic properties that commands approval in a specific culture at a particular point in time. In a greater sense, beauty is not strictly physical, but also incorporates internal and spiritual well-being. Beauty is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end.

With this psychosocial stage set, enter plastic surgeons, the 'psychiatrists with scalpels.' The term 'plastic' derives from the Greek word '*plastikos*,' meaning to shape or mold. The origins of plastic surgery date at least as early as 600 B.C.E. in India where nasal and ear reconstruction were practiced. The 16th century Italian surgeon, Tagliacozzi, is generally considered the father of modern plastic surgery. In 1597 he wrote, "We restore, repair and make whole those parts which nature has given, but which fortune has taken away. Not so much that they may delight the eye but that they may buoy up the spirit and help the mind of the afflicted." Sadly, he

was damned for his surgery, which was considered illegal and against nature in those times.

Nonetheless, the field of plastic surgery continued to advance with a reconstructive emphasis until the 19th century when articles began appearing in the European medical literature on cosmetic procedures of the nose and eyelids. By 1937, the American Board of Plastic Surgery was formed and recognized as a distinct medical specialty. As a result of their extensive reconstructive experience dealing with traumatic injuries of WWI and II, plastic surgeons applied these principals to safely perform elective cosmetic procedures.

Unlike reconstructive surgery which attempts to return an abnormal condition to normal, cosmetic plastic surgery attempts to modify or surpass those features patients find unappealing. The cosmetic surgeon must have a sense of form and an innate ability to make an aesthetic judgment.

Aristotle stated, "Art, indeed, consists in the conception of the result to be produced before its realization in the material."

This ability is a most important prerequisite to becoming a quality plastic surgeon.

It is hoped that this inaugural article in a series on beauty and vitality has provided a background for the ever growing demand for cosmetic surgery. This form of surgery can benefit people from all walks of life and not just 'the rich and famous.'

"Beauty in things exists in the mind which contemplates them."

—David Hume (18th century)

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