

MAGAZINE LAUNCH OF THE YEAR

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PLUCKING!  
BLEACHING!  
DYEING...

# BEAUTY SPECIAL

MIMI SPENCER AND  
HER MOUSTACHE  
AMERICA'S KING  
OF THE FACELIFT  
RACHEL COOKE AND  
HER COLONIC HELL  
WHY WE DESPISE  
BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

+ LYNN BARBER MEETS  
KERRY KATONA

WIN A SMYTHSON BAG  
& MAXMARA COAT

A photograph of three medical professionals in white scrubs standing in an operating room. Two men on the left and a woman on the right are holding silver trays with surgical instruments. The background shows medical equipment, including a large circular light and shelves with supplies.

# THE FACELIFT KING OF AMERICA

He's the A-listers' favourite plastic surgeon, but his wealth and fame have not come without controversy. Dr Sherrell Aston tells Polly Vernon the secret of a good face-lift and why, if pushed, he'd happily take the knife to his own daughters

PHOTOGRAPH **GAVIN BOND**  
Dr. Sherman J. Austin in his New York surgery,  
surrounded by some of "Austin's Angels."



**D**o Sherrill J. Aton, MD, has grown rich from face-lifts. Fabulously rich. He charges in the region of £25,000 for each lift; a further \$30,000 to lift the eyes, and \$100,000 more to lift the brows. His thought-lifts included the eyes and brows? In cosmetic surgery terms, a lift focuses on the lower part of the face. In Aton's terms, it includes everything from the collarbone to the corner of the eyes, and everything above that point is a facelift. He performs up to three procedures in a day, achieving around 40 hours of surgery a week – which means, according to my calculations but not entirely shared estimates that even allowing for the fact that he isn't constantly performing big-money lifts, Aton runs a pretty profitable little business.

He is certainly rich enough to pursue truly barbaric lifestyle choices. He owns a fleet of hand-colored Bentley Continental convertibles. He has been called the British Marlon of the far-world, he now leads "twenty-three cars of which are not, not the typical ones." His cars are customized, as are his homes. He drives Porsche and he, like most of us – the brilliantly named British Potter Aton, a philanthropist and one-time executive vice-president of Virgin (not a Apple) – and their three-year-old twin girls Bruce and Abigail, split their time between a house on Park Avenue and a comfortable estate on Long Island – a medieval manor where Aton rides the Irish horses he rides for his state, and he breeds horses in Virginia.

Yes, face-lifts have made Aton extremely rich. But then Aton is said to be the best face-lift in the world. It's his passion, his passion, he says. It's the story-telling aspect of what Aton is called the "face-lift" – he goes into Virginia and he speaks with a well-coordinated, genteel Southern drawl that makes you think of Robert Redford and pinches of loneliness. He says "Aton" instead of "Tid". "I get introduced by him doing the procedure, then seeing the results afterward," he says. "Really tremendous job."

**You thought face-lifts were over? Killed off by a combination of botox, and fear of winding up looking somewhat like an old woman? Not so.** On the contrary, the face-lift is enjoying a renaissance, following the introduction of newer and newer techniques involving smaller scars and shorter recuperation periods.

There's definitely been a big shift from breast surgery towards facial surgery," says Dr Laurence Kline, a British surgeon who operates in London and New York. "I think what's beginning to happen is that age is becoming irrelevant. Some people have face-lifts in their forties because they're aging prematurely, but some people just never looked that great in the first place. As you think the two young face-lifts that you just want them looking great. Face-lift and facial surgery will not be disappearing in the future; they'll be about aesthetics. I just got Botox to a 24-year-old girl this morning."

The UK's relationship with plastic surgery is shoring up a slightly pace. The latest available figures, compiled by the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, attest to a 60 per cent rise in face-lift procedures between 2004 and 2006, and a 60 per cent rise in related, as we now know, eyelid

surgery and brow-lifts. Dr Kline notes a demographic shift in the demographics of his patients. "Not just in age range, either. You've got a lot of very high-powered people. City people who are working their 90 hour weeks, making all their money and, by 40, they look like hell..." Big cosmetic surgery companies such as the UK-based TCF form offer the kind of face-lifts opportunities on lifts that Kline calls with order. "Thought you were done, nothing to go until 2006, summer sun extended" rates the longer ad-on their website. Maybe this whole cultural movement wasn't kick-started by Aton alone. But he's certainly a major contributor.

His credentials are astounding. He does beautiful face-lifts," says Wendy Lewis, the leading independent plastic surgery consultant, whose new book *Plastic Make Perfect* is out later this year. "Absolutely no doubt about that." He's pioneered a technique called FACS, which stands for Fingerprint-Assisted Tissue Lifting. It involves the repositioning of exactly the skin of the face, but the soft tissue beneath it, and the end-product is exceptionally natural results. He's also renowned for a uniquely indigenous brand of aftercare; he and his co-model nurses and assistants (Kline's Angels) are invariably devoted to their patients.

Aton is the surgical director and chair man of plastic surgery at New York's super-hospitals Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital (MEETH); he is professor of plastic surgery at New York University. New York magazine rated him high in its annual Best Beauty Docs list. He's regularly featured in references to his work. But then maybe that's not surprising – among the very many big names removed in have profiled themselves in his services for had an Aton's are a new *Woman*, the editor of *US Vogue* and also Tipper Gore, Catherine Deneuve, Julia Roberts, Celine Dion and Mary McCormack. Aton, of course, neither confirms nor denies having treated to these people, saying: "Yes, I treat celebrities, but you know, I treat every one of my patients as though he or she was the most important person in the world... they are all celebrities to me." However, it's worth noting that Aton's website achieves a succession of magazine articles, some of which refer to these rumors. He clearly isn't desperate to quash them. He's a recurring specialist on Oprah. Earlier this year he wound up on the cover of Italian style bible *L'Espresso Vogue*. He's regularly featured on Page Six, the New York Post's notorious gossip sheet. Aton is, in short, the world's first superstar face-lift.

I went to Aton in his Park Avenue office to gain insight into the perfect face-lift, what Kline calls, how long it'll take it to arrive in the UK, whether it's even really socially defensible – and whether or not I need one.

He's late, and I'm nervous. I've researched some gossip about him. Aton polishes people he is either adored or loathed. He once was taken to court about him – either in New York, or London – and he'll be libelled. "He makes either love, or war and then, he's taken into the heart of Manhattan," one beauty insider told me. "I would tell you to go and talk to his colleagues about this, but they'd be too scared to tell you what they really think," says another. "All because time, all those society women let's make beautiful, all that incredible TLC he



**'I don't see myself as a celebrity but as a plastic surgeon who's trying to get it right'**

dislike out in a city that doesn't normally have time for that kind of thing... well, that's more him a lot of powerful friends." He's the society surgeon," says a third. Big, big-name clients – the biggest – people with a lot of power.

Furthermore, at the time I met him, Aton is implicated in a scandal. He's two weeks away from giving evidence in a huge court case. In February 2004, 46-year-old Susan Malin, a woman on whom Aton was scheduled to operate, died on an operating table at MEETH after reacting badly to the local anesthetic Libralene, which had been administered by an anesthetist Dr Gary Melton.





every major city, there are gymnasiums all around, people have gymnasiums in their home... And people, many times, they tell me they just want to look as good as they feel. I think, you know, as far back in recorded history as we can find, and in all cultures, people were interested in making themselves look good with various make-ups and paints. In some cultures scarification of the body, stretching the earlobes out, putting rings in the nose, stretching the neck... so people have always been interested in looking good. But it's gotten very sophisticated.'

There are practices in his industry that don't play well with him. He has concerns about Botox. 'I think for people that do it over and over, this is worrying... we have seen some of these people already. A lot of these injectables were available in Europe, you know, about six years ago. So I've seen ladies now, who started at that time, who are having some skin changes.' His voice drops, as if he's predicting a major tragedy. 'And that's what's going to make us start to look very carefully at everybody who is showing the effect.'

He has, he says, turned people down for surgery. 'Oh sure. Oh sure. I tell people go away, all the time. Yeah. It's my feeling that this is not good for you, and I don't want to do it.' And they beg you to reconsider. 'Sometimes. Oh yes. And some people will just go somewhere else and have it done anyway, I suppose. But I can only do what I feel is going to be good for the individual. It's got to be a good result for the individual, to be good for me.' And he appreciates that there are bad plastic surgeons at large. 'Well, you know... cosmetic surgery is like any speciality in medicine. Or like, like artists. There are some who have better vision, and are considered by the public for whatever reason to be better than the next one. And that's why we go in our museums, there are a limited number of artists showing, and then there are others, who are selling their paintings on the streets outside the museum...' He laughs. 'There are some people who just have better judgment, better sense, or with surgeons, better hands or better judgment than others. And I just consider myself as being fortunate that some people think that I have a... combination, that makes things work out.'

I point at a silver-framed picture of his beautiful baby daughters. I ask him how he'd feel if they wanted plastic surgery. He doesn't flinch.

'I think if, you know, when they get old enough... if they had... features, that they would feel better about if they were refined, then I would see no reason why they shouldn't do it. Certainly if they need go see the orthodontist, if the need to go straighten their teeth, when they're teenagers, well...' he laughs. 'We're gonna do it! And while you wouldn't think so today, if one of them had a nose that was too prominent or too wide or whatever, I would certainly, er, want her to do that.'

Would he do the work himself?

'Oh yes. Absolutely. Absolutely.'

Will Aston's face-lifts find a place in high profile, upmarket British society, setting the standard for all other face-lifts, cranking the whole face-lift frenzy in the UK up a gear? It's possible. New Yorkers share a cosmetic-surgery aesthetic with the British, according to Wendy Lewis. 'Unlike LA, where no one cares about looking natural or being secretive about having surgery, New Yorkers and the British are secretive, they want subtlety in the



Aston and his wife Muffie with two of their Arab horses, on the lawn of their Long Island home.

## Dr Aston knows immediately how to improve a face, what will droop, sag or bag

end look, and privacy throughout.' Furthermore, increasing amounts of UK clients are flying to New York for their surgery, because the dollar exchange rate makes it worth their while. Dr Kirwan says he charges market rate in both London and New York, and that that represents a 30 per cent discount in New York.

None of which makes a face-lift morally defensible; nor does it mean that a culture which is increasingly accepting of cosmetic surgery, is remotely healthy.

Aston says he takes one look at a person's face,

and knows immediately how to improve it 'in the way, I guess, a fashion designer looks at a dress, and knows if it is well-cut, or if it is badly cut, I think it's like a sixth sense... Plastic surgery is part art, and part science. And the artistic part is extremely important to me.' I ask him what he'd do to me, he says: 'Oh, I don't think you need anything right now', which is kind of nice – I have in the past spoken to cosmetic surgeons who did suggest work – but then, there's that 'right now', which is ominous. Aston's assessed me, he knows what's going to droop first, what going to sag and bag and pouch out. He knows where he'd cut first, how he'd insert the first blade, and in exactly how many years' time he'll need to start the cutting...

Would I 'have an Aston' when the time came? Would I let him slice into the flesh on my face, peel my skin back like a Halloween mask, rootle about with tissue beneath it, repositioning and readjusting it? All because I can't face the fact of ageing? Would I? I actually don't know. I'll get back to you. ■

[www.draston.com](http://www.draston.com); [www.drkirwan.co.uk](http://www.drkirwan.co.uk);

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