

Restylane to the Rescue

AN AGING NOVICE TAKES THE PLUNGE AND DISCOVERS THE HEADY WORLD OF INJECTABLE FILLERS.

BY ARLENE SCHINDLER

Now that the AARP is harassing me habitually and Father Time has stamped crow's feet around my eyes, I've decided to enlist a new soldier in my war on wrinkles. I've found a sympathetic surgeon with an eagle eye, a steady sculptor's hand and the precision of a delicate Southern woman who excels at the fine art of needlepoint.

Why am I at war with getting older? I live in a city where women aren't allowed to show their age or their unretouched face after 40. Just ask Raquel Welch or Meg Ryan or the woman sitting next to you in any restaurant that has valet parking. Befriending a good cosmetic or dermatological surgeon is as important as having a good relationship with your trainer or hairdresser. He or she will keep you looking your best when you face the world — you know which one, the one that's getting younger every day.

My goal isn't to go under the knife like a cat-eyed scalpel-slave or a certain shopping-channel pitchwoman. I seek light freshening for my high school reunion. No knives, just a cornucopia of needles and lasers, otherwise known as the lunch-hour facelift. I don't want to look like a movie star, just a fresher version of me...when I was 39.

The most important step was finding a doctor whose work I admired. All I had to do was look at friends' faces and determine who looked youthful and not frozen. (Some women follow a don't-ask, don't-tell policy, while others are veritable reference books.) I found a forthcoming face who raved about her doctor, and I was intrigued. First, I visited his website. (Every good doctor has one, and I've become wary of those who don't.) The doctor's site highlighted where he went to school (Harvard) and his experience teaching other doctors how to use injectables for rejuvenation. Also on his website were before-and-after photos with the kind of "after" I was looking for — the hollows under the eyes filled in, diminished nasolabial folds and a smoother jaw line, minus jowls. The site had a picture of his friendly face. He looked ageless and glowing, like I soon hoped to be. Last but not least, the site featured discounts for first-time patients. I dialed and made an appointment.

When I arrived at the doctor's office, I noticed many treatment rooms and a staff of friendly, fresh-faced women in powder-blue lab coats with gold name tags. One of them ushered me into a small room and took my medical history. Twenty minutes later, the doctor entered, looking even fresher-faced and more handsome than the photo on his website. The second he touched my cheek, right under the hollow of my discontentment, and raised it up a scooch of an inch, I was as hooked as I was the first time I heard Paul McCartney sing, "I Want to Hold Your Hand."

Without my prompting, he told me where he wanted to inject Restylane, a dermal filler made of hyaluronic acid which restores volume and fullness to the skin. I asked about a photofacial for brown spots and aging. He countered with a Vbeam laser for redness. He saw what I saw and was going to improve it. After less than 15 minutes he left the room. Another blue-coated woman entered, carrying a clipboard.

"You'll be receiving two syringes of Restylane and a Vbeam treatment. How will you be paying for that?" she asked sweetly. I pulled out my credit card and a discount certificate I'd printed from the website. She did some math and said, "For every visit, we give you a 5 percent credit toward your next visit. Today's visit will be \$1,200."

I gave her my credit card. A half hour later, another assistant came in to slather the injection area with a topical anesthetic. My face felt cool, then numb. After another 30 minutes, the doctor returned and proceeded to inject the filler under my eyes, while yet another assistant followed his moves with ice packs, resting them on the freshly injected area for about 30 seconds. I felt no pain, and the procedure was over in minutes. The two escorted me to another room for my Vbeam laser treatment. After my eyes were covered, the doctor switched on a machine that resembled something a dental technician might use to clean teeth. After about 10 quick zaps to my cheeks, the treatment was complete.

I examined the instant results in a hand mirror. The hollows looked plumped. Some of the redness had faded. I thought my mirror image looked five years younger than the woman who had entered the doctor's office earlier that day. I was thrilled.

On my way out, I was presented with instructions to ice my face that evening and the following morning. Later, holding a bag of frozen peas to my face as instructed, I marveled at how pain-free the procedure was. The following week I wore less makeup, because there were fewer flaws to cover, and I felt as sexy and vital as I did the first time I went dancing — disco dancing, that is. **AM**

