

WSJ | MAGAZINE

One Jawline That Can Cut Glass, Please

With the distinction between reality and filter blurred, patients are bringing in photos of Facetuned jaws—and want reality just as sharp.

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Jan. 6, 2022 8:30 am ET

“Really grateful for that filler in my jawline...Thanks to you!”

That’s the text message Dan Belkin, a dermatologist and dermatologic surgeon at New York Dermatology Group, received recently from a 28-year-old patient who had come in for some filler before getting married. “She texted me with this great photo of her husband kissing her with her leaning back and this really sharp jawline,” he says. Belkin, whose well-known patients include Martha Stewart, says that while concerns with sagging jawlines are nothing new, there is growing awareness among his younger clientele.

Dendy Engelman, a cosmetic dermatologist and Mohs surgeon at Shafer Clinic in New York City, traces the jawline obsession back to pre-pandemic photos of Kim Kardashian West looking particularly sharp around the edges, which received a lot of social-media attention. The seed perhaps first planted by Kardashian West has grown over the course of the pandemic.

“Before we only saw ourselves in the mirror for a few quick moments a day, but now we are forced with Zoom to look at our sagging jowls or loose necks for eight hours,” says Melissa Doft, a Manhattan-based plastic surgeon who says that her patients now use selfie-editing app Facetune to show her how they’d like to look. “The lines have become so blurred between reality and filter,” says New York–based aesthetician Crystal Greene, who offers massage-heavy treatments.

Actual face-lifts have experienced their own social media–born boon thanks to sharing by people like Marc Jacobs, who was quite transparent on Instagram about his own procedure with plastic surgeon Andrew Jacono. Jacobs captioned his “after” shots with hashtags like #snatchedtightalright.

That taut or, as some call it, “snatched” appearance diminishes as we age and begin to produce less collagen and elastin, essentials for keeping skin firm and bouncy. The skin along the jawline becomes lax, and fat accumulates under the chin.

The scaffolding securing the fat pads in the cheeks becomes weaker, shifting the fat pads lower and creating jowls, says Doft. Genetics plays a significant role, as it impacts both bone structure and skin quality, says Doft, along with lifestyle choices like smoking and sun exposure and hormonal changes like menopause.

Plastic surgeons have focused on the jawline for decades, often relying on face-lifts for any hoisting needs. But there are now a host of other treatments to consider. The latest is Ellacor, a minimally invasive “micro-coring” device—a hollow needle that removes tiny cores of skin—that Engelman sees as a good option for overall skin tightening. While the procedure leaves no scars, it does require a few days of recovery.

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Dermatologist Blair Murphy-Rose is a fan of Sofwave, a new ultrasound treatment that involves minimal pain and zero downtime, though patients don't see results for at least three months. The same waiting period holds true for Ultherapy, Sofwave's precursor. While considered more painful than Sofwave, Ultherapy goes deeper into the dermis, making it Belkin's preferred tightening treatment, especially for younger patients who don't have a lot of fat and are just noticing some early laxity in the chin area.

Belkin's most frequent method of contouring the jawline is a combination of fillers and neurotoxins like Botox, injected around the jaw, neck and chin. The toxins can reduce the pull of the neck muscles, allowing the cheeks to lift, Belkin says. And for older patients with more pronounced laxity, neck and face-lifts remain the gold standard. Doft often performs them in tandem with liposuction, which removes the fat under the chin while also tightening the skin.

With the wave of in-office innovations has come a number of devices designed for addressing sagging skin at home. Engelman recommends NuFace's Trinity, while Greene is a fan of the Ziiip. With both devices, the key to success is consistency, with the most noticeable results coming from repeated usage a few days a week. But Greene believes massage can be just as effective. Her method for facial lymphatic drainage involves rubbing her thumbs along the jawbone, using her fists to massage the jaw and gliding her hands across the cheeks to drain fluid.

And the growth of facial exercise studio FaceGym underscores people's increasing interest in massage as a method of contouring. The company's digital studio, which offers at-home instruction, launched one week after lockdown in March 2020 and has grown fivefold since then, while in-person attendance is up 50 percent from pre-Covid numbers.

Skin care also plays an important role in maintaining skin's elasticity and firmness. "Consistent retinol use can help prevent and delay visible aging signs around the jaw, and also face, neck and décolleté," Engelman says. Products formulated around autophagy, a cellular recycling process, are also gaining traction. "Cells with healthy levels of autophagy produce fewer of the collagen-degrading enzymes, shifting the balance toward collagen production and retention," says University of Southern California stem cell biologist Ben Van Handel, who co-founded Heraux, an autophagy-focused skin-care line.

And if all else fails, there's always makeup to fake the look of a more perfect jawline. For a more natural appearance, makeup artist Daniel Martin suggests using cream makeup instead of powder, applied by hand as lightly as possible: "Otherwise you wind up looking dirty instead of contoured."