

So you want to look better but don't fancy the plastic surgeon's knife? **JANE SHILLING** and **LUCIA VAN DER POST** try the alternative — a non-surgical facelift with Botox, fillers and vitamin shots

Ring! went the telephone. It was my editor on the line. "Do you want," she asked, "to go for a treatment with this fabulous new York dermatologist Dr. Victor, who specialises in non-surgical rejuvenation? Apparently, he's the model for the term *à la Sergeyev Brudnie*."

At my age, the answer to a question like that has to be "Yes, please!" But it's an extra-enthusiastic Yes if, like me, you are in the delicate territory of just-quite-50-but-close-enough-to-60 that the call of that difficult age. What's more, last summer I suddenly noticed that I'd gone from looking pretty good for my age to looking quite my age, and then some.

I did my best to reverse the process. I started going to bed at 10pm sharp. I gave up alcohol altogether and subsisted on water and green tea. I felt almost miraculously healthy, and sprang out of bed each morning, like a teenager, only to look in the glass and see this haggard old bat peering back. I began to suspect the electricity sub-station next door of emitting ageing rays. I was ripe, as you can tell, for the attention of a top New York skin unit.

Arriving late and flustered at the David Galvin salon in Marylebone, Central London, from where Dr. Victor will practise, I found him lying gracefully on a sofa. He is extremely handsome, with startling, hazel-fringed blue eyes and a sweep of platinum hair. My editor reckons Blake Carrington from *Dynasty*. Someone else said Steve Martin. I was thinking a non-crazy version of Karl Lagerfeld. At any rate, you get the picture. He has fabulous looks, shares like melted chocolate and, as he points out himself, he can raise his eyebrows.

The thing about the eyebrows is meant to be reassuring — he won't turn you into the Bride of Wildenstein, @ the point. The trouble was, until this moment on the sofa I hadn't realised that I would be in need of reassurance.

My editor said I hadn't talked about the details of what was going to happen, and I'd vaguely thought some kind of über-facial instead of which, here was Blake Carrington peering into my sensory facial saying: "Just a little Botox here, perhaps some Restylane around the mouth, maybe some silicone in the cheekbones."

Now, I have a fervent horror of plastic surgery, under which heading I count Botox and the rest of it. See "No!" I said. "No Botox. No Restylane. No silicone." But even as I said it, I knew that it was as pointless as scolding an assignment in Afghanistan and then complaining that there are guns.

"I'd have to go through with it. 'Don't be scared,'" said Dr Victor's (slightly rusty) assistant. "You won't feel a thing."

Too right. You never hear an Inogen in my

The smooth operators



Dr Victor at work on Jane. Facing page, our volunteers compare post-facelift notes

life, not even for really bad things as the dentist's. My whole face went solid as Dr Victor and the photographer chatted merrily over my head. "See the difference there?" said the doctor. "Oooh YEGS!" said the snapper, worryingly. I kept my eyes tight shut, and the instant they let me out of the

fingered like the Dark Mark for the next three weeks.

Back from holiday — and the frame gone — I searched the mirror for signs of change. I had had Botox in my forehead, which now looks wonderfully untreated (though I can,

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chair (it took a pain-free half-hour), bolted like a rabbit.

At home I appeared to have acquired the cheekbones of Jodie Kidd and the lips of Emmanuelle Béart — very desirable when attached to the faces of those ladies, but distinctly odd when stuck in the middle of my middle-aged piz. What's more, I had a fearsome bruise on my upper lip, which

like Dr Victor himself, still raise my eyebrows.

Something has changed around the eyes, too (presumably the silicone cheekbones), though it's so subtle that it's hard to say what. The purple shadows are still there, but in their rejuvenated setting they seem less haggard. The work around the mouth is almost imperceptible.

In short, I'm not sure that anyone but me would notice that I've had anything done. So far, the only people to see the new look have been men who frankly wouldn't notice if I'd had a head transplant ("Um... new dress, darling?") What I need is a cold-eyed girlfriend whom I haven't seen for a while. I thought that perhaps the saleswoman on the Fenwick Shindig counter, where I've been going for years, might say something when I dropped in on the way home from the "after" shoot, but I think she was so startled by the sight of me in full-on drug-queen slap that she dutifully forbore to comment on my appearance.

On the other hand, since returning from holiday I think that I notice a slight shift in the way the world treats me. It's nothing major, just a return to what life used to be like before I had my coup de visage. This could be for all sorts of reasons. It could be that I have a nice honey tan and sun streaks in my hair. It could be that I had a great holiday and came back much happier than I went away. At any rate, the biggest change, I think, has been not in my appearance but in my attitude to cosmetic tinkering.

And here, I can see, I might have to take care. Lots has been written about the addictive effects of non-surgical rejuvenation — Alex Kuczynski's book, *Beauty Junkies* (Doubleday), charts her own steep progress down the Botox path. And I can see how, if I hadn't a child and a house to keep, I'd be very tempted indeed, when my own tinkering wears off in a couple of another time, to go back for more. And then my teeth could do with sorting. And then my twice-broken nose. And those purple under-eye bags. And then, and then....

In short, it was a fascinating experiment, and a successful one. But I'm almost glad that I haven't the means to continue it.

JANE SHILLING

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