

“The Doctor Is In”

It wasn't too long ago that I thought I was a decent looking man. My hairline reasonably intact and my waistline well ahead of the curve, I could still look in the mirror and not cringe. But then I moved to Los Angeles, California - land of the beautiful people. The endless flow of bronze, blonde, buffed, and busty beauties roaming the streets suddenly made me aware of all my tragic shortcomings. And as this parade of perfection streamed past me each and every day, oozing fashion-catalog style, soft-porn sexuality and cookie-cutter elegance, I began to notice something eerily universal to them all – much of the beauty was too good to be true. My continued curiosity led me to the Beverly Hills office of Dr. Raj Kanodia, MD

Dr. Kanodia, a leading plastic surgeon who is featured on the E! Network's “Dr. 90210”, has been practicing for over 20-years. Born in India, he attended Medical School in Chicago. Upon graduation, he was mentored under the tutelage of Dr. Morey Parkes, a legend in plastic surgeon world, who practiced his art in the Mecca of aesthetic beauty – Beverly Hills – where Dr. Kanodia eventually set up practice himself.

Walking along the cozy, clean streets towards Dr. Kanodia's office, you can spot expensive cars, clothes, and breasts en masse. Even as you enter the whisper soft calm of his waiting room, there is the sense that you are witnessing the finer side of life. The receptionist's taught, imperfectly perfect lips hint towards a good employee benefits plan. I share the waiting room with two woman and one man – who I try to glare at out of the corner of my eye, unconsciously seeking out their imperfection, and internally hiding my own.

When Dr. Kanodia appears, I am struck by how vibrant and attractive he is. Casually elegant, he guides me back towards his office. I can't tell if he's has any work done him self, but assume that he must have, and find myself trying to plot the natural structure of his face to no avail. We sit down on either side of his desk in an office more fitting for a museum curator than a plastic surgeon. I recognize that he is a man who takes himself seriously as an artist, even as we sit a block away from the gloss and glamour of Rodeo Drive, and ask him to define beauty.

“Beauty is subjective,” smiles Dr. Kanodia. “But there is indeed an absolute beauty, although it is very difficult to quantify... you can take a single person and ask ten plastic surgeons how to enhance the face. You’d have ten different opinions. The first question I ask a patient is what do you see and what would you like. I draw with markers to suggest ways to achieve what they want to achieve in the way I think is best. I am an artist...my office is my theater, my stage.”

The fact that many Los Angelinos embrace cosmetic surgery is not news. The notion of LA as a “plastic” city is an exhausted pun if ever there was one. What did strike me once I arrived, however, was that cosmetic surgery – for years the exclusive domain of woman - was now increasingly embraced by men. And its popularity is not exclusive to LA or California, but is indeed a nationwide trend.

“More and more, men are realizing that it’s OK for them to enhance and sustain (their looks),” confirms Dr. Kanodia. “In the past, men generally relied on sculpting the muscles, and working out so that they are buff. But this causes them to lose baby fat in the face and look older in the process. Men are beginning to see that they need to take care of the face, and the skin, and not just the rest of the body... to try and keep pace with the woman.”

My fragile masculinity still struggles to understand the mindset of a man who seeks plastic surgery as a realistic alternative to accepting the aging process. I need to know exactly what these newly liberated men are getting done.

“Many of the procedures are simply replenishing the natural collagen and Hyaluronic Acids that exist in the face already but that begin to be lost at 30-years of age,” answers Dr. Kanodia. “Men mostly get filler and Botox. These are semi-permanent procedures that help restore the youthful lines of the face. Interestingly, many of the men are afraid of the needles and of pain. Once they see that the needles are tiny, and the pain not nearly what they expect, they are back again and again.”

Sounds easy. But has he had any work done.

“Sure,” he says. “Both Botox and filler.”

Dr. Kanodia provides 1cc of filler, or enough to make those cheek bones look like that High School year book photo again, for \$500-\$700. An average dose of Botox will run you \$600. Now I used to consider myself a relatively decent looking man, but I’m not delusional. When I look in the mirror, I can see the effects of two ex-wives, more than a few layoffs, and 30-years of guilt only a Jewish mother can lovingly provide. But while the cost for an average dose of Botox or filler might be pocket change for some, it’s rent money for me. So I take advantage of a free consultation, asking the good doctor what he would do to turn my sketch pad face into a Monet?

“A little filler in the cheek bone area,” he says with practiced delicacy. “Some Botox on the forehead too. You use those muscles a lot and the lines are beginning to show.”

There’s something about the way Dr. Kanodia calmly, quickly, and precisely diagnosis my face that stays with me as I make my way out of the office. His voice eases me into some sort of unison with my fellow, flawed man. It is, without question, the voice of an artist who believes in the power of his work. If only I weren’t afraid of needles...