

# The Most Delicate Art

Plastic surgeon *Jon Turk* knows how to improve your self image, one stitch at a time.

photography by Mark Shaw production by Camilla Olsson interview by Christopher Austopchuk

## Why did you decide to become a plastic surgeon?

My mother was a sculptor and my father an attorney, so I guess I inherited a creative gene from one and a practical gene from the other.

## Do you attach any particular philosophy to the art of plastic surgery?

No, but any philosophy can be attached to the art of plastic surgery. If I had to pick one I would choose Vedic philosophy, since I try to apply that to everything I do.

## What is the art or talent needed to be a desirable plastic surgeon?

One does not have to be an artist to practice plastic surgery but plastic surgery, is as much art as it is science. In fact, I think of it more as a craft than an art, since it so intimately connects the hands and the brain and the syncopated meticulous dance they do in the operating theater. Art is more original while surgery is more derivative. Three-dimensional visualization and a developed aesthetic sense are essential components, but repetition, experience and judgement provide the skill set that is necessary for this particular discipline.

## What types to procedures do people come to you for?

Since I am an aesthetic surgeon who specializes in the face, I see people for eyes, noses, faces and necks. The procedures range from non-invasive injections and skin tightening to major surgeries. Botox and fillers lead the pack of injectibles while rhinoplasties are extremely common in my practice.

## Do you have a signature procedure?

I would have to say rhinoplasty. I think I have done close to 2000 noses in my twenty-three years in practice. It is the operation I perform most often and the one that is far and away my favorite. Nasal surgery demands strict attention to

both form and function and calls for the surgeon to wear all of her or his hats. Engineer, architect, scientist, craftsman, sculptor and fine artist. It is extremely unforgiving and equally gratifying, and a never-ending road to refinement.

## How do you prepare for each surgery?

I meditate and then I operate. The preparation for any surgery is an accumulation of all the knowledge and experience that precedes it. All the plans, techniques, maneuvers and aesthetics are already in my cerebral database and are accessible during the procedure. The trick to preparing for surgery is already being prepared for the surgery.

## What is the longest amount of time you have worked on an operation?

Fourteen hours. It was during my fellowship in Bern, Switzerland. We were repairing the badly smashed face of a young male heli glider who had a high-speed encounter with one of the mountains bordering the Engadine.

## How do your patients break down along gender lines?

Women are, without question, the stronger sex and make the best patients. I do seem to be treating more men these days, and I think it is reflective of a more open, less inhibited and stereotypical society. Men heal very well, but they are not the best listeners when it comes to following instructions.

## What represents conventional beauty?

This is a very interesting question, and it deserves a longer discussion than we have room for here. In short, there are certain classical norms of beauty that do not change over time; aesthetic formulas for facial proportion and symmetry that are as intuitively pleasing as an Atlantic sunset or moonlight reflecting on the Mediterranean. And then there are ever-changing definitions of beauty based on cultural norms, fashions, sensibilities and personal

taste. It is important to be aware that both are operating in every patient that walks through the office door.

## When patients come to you, do you feel that they are trying to enhance their image or fit into a range of conventional beauty?

A shift has taken place in the cosmetic arena from patients seeking a reversion to the aesthetic mean to people seeking to retain their individuality while “editing” certain unpleasing components. In other words, some relatively minor tweaks as opposed to a total overhaul.

## We are a society which is obsessed with age. As we get older, what are the first things we usually ask for?

The eyes go first, then the jawline and finally the neck. So patients start with some Botox between the eyebrows, then beg for filler in front of the jowls and ultimately book surgery for the neck because of a bad selfie.

## What are the things we should do to stay younger?

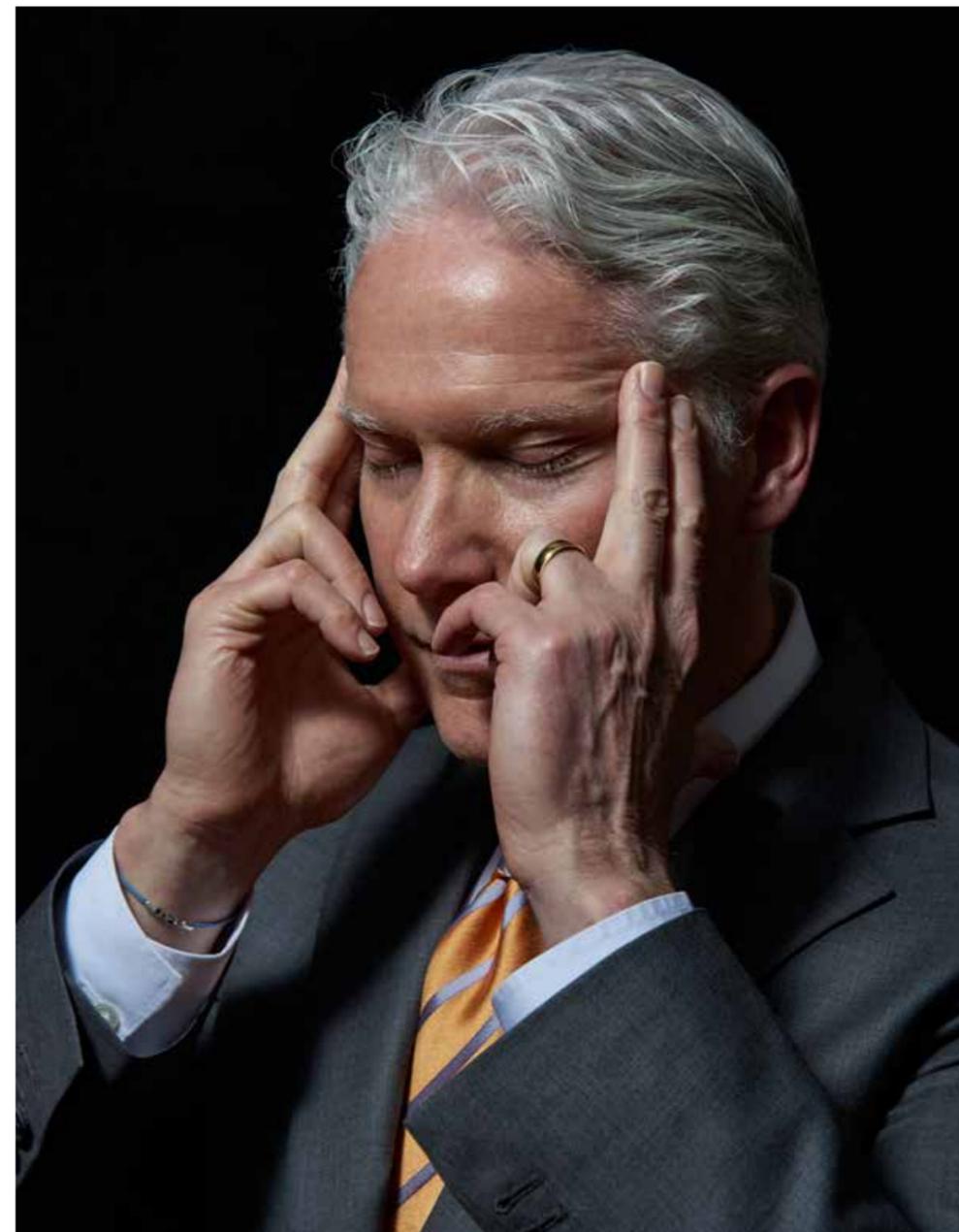
Meditate, exercise, laugh (but not enough to get laugh lines) and drink wine.

## What is the oddest surgery that anyone has asked for?

A patient complained that they were breathing too well and asked me to make their nose more obstructed. Another was referred to me by the FBI before entering the witness protection program, and a teenage girl wanted “horns” implanted under her forehead skin.

## Where do you draw the line? Have you refused to perform procedures and why?

The first two questions I ask myself during a surgical consultation are: is the problem that the patient is complaining about visible and proportionately bothersome, and will surgery



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friends and family shouldn't I exhibit those same qualities to my patients and staff? I am the same person anywhere I am.

## You collect art, please tell us about your collection, and why would you be drawn to these particular pieces.

I don't really collect art. I have a number of pieces from a few artists, most notably the gifted and cerebral Matt Satz. Nobody can describe Matt's work quite like Matt, but I think of it as “physical” painting. We are good friends, and I don't know anyone more artistically gifted than him.

## What are your charities of choice and why?

Primarily, I am involved with and sit on the board of the Princess Grace Foundation-USA, an arts foundation created as a legacy to the late Princess Grace of Monaco after her untimely death. We award scholarships in theater, dance and film to emerging artists in need of funds to finish their schooling or special projects. Prince Albert, Grace Kelly's only son, was a fraternity brother of mine at Amherst College and later enlisted me to work with the foundation over thirty years ago. We have remained so close over these many years and both strive to continue his mother's work of supporting the arts in a very personal and meaningful way.

## Would you say surgery is your calling?

A calling feels like something that is pulling you towards it. Yes, I was drawn in by the field of plastic surgery but, much to my delight, I have found that it has permeated my entire professional life and is a near perfect match for my skills, demeanor and personality. Beyond the surgery itself, the daily interaction with so many interesting people from around the world, the relationships that are built out of the intimacy of the doctor-patient relationship and the opportunities to constantly grow and learn are facets of this occupation that I could not have imagined before entering the profession. That, to me, seems like a recipe for happiness.

have a very good chance of being successful? If the answer is no to either of these two questions I recommend against operating. It does happen, but not very frequently in my practice. In fact, it is rather remarkable how accurate most patients are about their “deformities” and understanding when surgery is not a viable option.

## How do you keep yourself content?

This year, I have been doing a lot of work on “acceptance.” I practice a form of meditation that stems from the ancient Indian Vedic tradition. It allows one to “unwind” stress that is built up over a lifetime. It is also promotes consciousness, awareness and acceptance. I would liken it to decreasing the amplitude of my highs and lows allowing for a more consistent contentedness.

## How do you spend your personal time?

These are a few of my favorite things. I like getting

out of work early on a Friday, watching Netflix on my iPad with the dogs sleeping on my legs, sitting behind my drums, the New York Rangers (most of the time), a really well conceived Rye Old Fashioned, surprising my wife with a gift, and an outdoor Dave Matthews concert with my kids.

## You have a special lab coat, please tell us about it. What it is and what does it represent?

Haha! Indeed I do. The literal story is that I was tired of wearing a generic white lab coat over a custom tailored shirt and suit. So I asked my tailor, the incomparable Nigel Curtiss, if he could design and make me a bespoke lab coat. What it represents is something a bit different. One way to explain it is that I think people should strive to live what is referred to as an “authentic life.” What I wear is an extension of who I am and how I choose to present myself to the world. If I prefer elegant clothes in my private life then why should I wear anything different at work? If I am generous and kind to my