

DR. JAN VERMEYLEN

# Youthful FACES Unmasked

An Honest Guide to Modern Facelifts,  
Fillers and Natural Anti-Aging

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Youthful Faces Unmasked

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I would like to thank all my patients for the trust they have placed in me over the years. Their confidence has been both an honor and a responsibility—one that has continuously pushed me to refine my techniques and to seek better, more natural results.

Their stories, their questions and their pursuit of authenticity have inspired me to look deeper, think differently and never settle for less than excellence. This book is, in many ways, the result of that shared journey.

— Dr. Jan Vermeylen



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# Introduction

**What no one tells you  
about looking ageless**

## WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

What if I told you that many of the youthful faces you admire—on screen, in magazines, maybe even in your own social circle—are not the result of creams or genetics, but something else entirely? Or that most people have no idea what truly lies beneath?

In today's world, aging has become something we are expected to *hide*. But what if the procedures we have come to rely on—fillers, filters, quick-fix treatments—make us look stranger, not younger? As a plastic surgeon with over 35 years of hands-on experience, I have seen the evolution of facial rejuvenation firsthand. I have also seen the quiet regret in the eyes of patients who went down the wrong path—chasing youth with the wrong tools, in the wrong hands or at the wrong time.

This book is not a sales pitch for surgery. It is not an anti-aging manifesto filled with unrealistic promises. It is an honest, inside look at the modern facelift—what works, what does not, and what *nobody* is telling you.

You will learn how to separate fact from hype, how to recognize the difference between natural rejuvenation and overdone disaster, and most importantly: how to make the right choices for *your* face, your life and your confidence.

Whether you are just starting to notice changes in the mirror or have been contemplating surgery for years, this book is your guide through the noise.

Because behind every youthful face, there is a story. And it is time you heard the truth.

...

I decided to write this book because there are still many outdated ideas about facelifts—especially the fear of looking unnatural, stretched, or “done”. These images linger in the minds of the public, largely shaped by what people saw in the media in past decades. The truth is: modern facelift techniques have evolved dramatically, and so have the results.

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, facelift surgery mainly involved dissecting under the skin (subcutaneous), pulling the skin tight and trimming off the excess. While this resulted in some lifting, it often created an unnatural or overdone look, because it did not address the deeper layers where real aging occurs. The focus was on tightening the skin, not restoring the natural architecture of the face.

In the last ten to fifteen years, surgical techniques have shifted significantly. Instead of stretching the skin, modern facelifts work by repositioning the underlying support system of the face—the SMAS (Superficial Musculo-Aponeurotic System). This deeper layer is responsible for facial structure and expression, and when repositioned properly, it allows the skin to simply follow, without any tension or pulling. The result is a refreshed, more youthful appearance that looks entirely natural.

As a plastic surgeon who has specialized for decades in facial rejuvenation, and who has developed his own facelift technique, I want to help people understand what is possible today. Facelift surgery, when done with precision and insight, can be subtle, elegant and truly transformative—not just physically, but emotionally as well.

This book is for anyone interested in learning how to restore a youthful appearance, whether you are considering a facelift, exploring non-surgical options or simply curious about the truth behind modern facial rejuvenation. My goal is to offer clarity, honesty and professional insight so that you can make informed, confident decisions about your face and your future.

## Common myths and fears about facelifts

### Fear of looking “stretched”

One of the most common concerns I hear from patients considering a facelift is the fear of looking “stretched” or unnatural. It is a remark I have encountered countless times over the years—often accompanied by a hesitant glance in the mirror or a reference to a celebrity with an overstretched face. This myth is deeply rooted in outdated surgical techniques and media portrayals, but it still shapes how people view facial rejuvenation today.

Not only patients express this fear. I have seen many women come in for a consultation, enthusiastic about looking fresher and more rested, only to reveal that their husbands are completely against the idea. The typical objection? “I do not want her to look like someone else.” This is a common concern, and not without emotional weight. People are not necessarily afraid of pain—they are afraid of the result.

I recall several women who came in for facelift surgery without their husbands’ approval. One case that stands out was the wife of a general

practitioner. She knew her husband strongly opposed facelift procedures, having seen unsatisfactory results in some of his own patients. Then, on the morning of her surgery, she announced she was going ahead with it—and that I would be performing the operation. There was nothing he could do about it.

Weeks later, during a follow-up visit, she told me with a smile that her husband had not only come to accept her decision but was genuinely impressed by the outcome. In fact, he admitted he was delighted with the result.

Let me be clear: a well-executed facelift should not change who you are. Instead, it should make you look like a more rested, refreshed version of yourself. You will still look like *you*—but as if you have returned from a long, peaceful holiday, or slept exceptionally well for the past six months. I always tell patients: you will look the same as you did five to ten years ago. Look at a picture from that time and you will see the result of the lifting procedure. Of course, the skin quality will be different but that is something we will work on after the procedure. We will advise you about which products to use to rejuvenate your skin.

Because you look like “the younger you”, other people will not notice anything unnatural. Instead, they will tell you that you are looking great.

## Pain and recovery: the truth

Another persistent myth is that facelift surgery is unbearably painful. In reality, most patients are pleasantly surprised. Discomfort is typically mild to moderate and mitigated with pain medication during the first few days. Of course, the extent of discomfort depends on the type of facelift performed, the individual pain threshold of the patient and, most importantly, the skill of the surgeon.

Recovery time also varies. In less invasive procedures, like the MACS Lift or other short scar SMAS-correcting techniques, patients can often return to social activities within one to two weeks.<sup>1</sup> These techniques offer a shorter downtime, more natural results and a faster overall recovery—making them a favorite among both surgeons and patients.

In contrast, procedures such as the deep plane facelift have gained popularity in recent years, encouraged by social media and certain high-profile practices. However, those of us who have been in the field for decades remember when the deep plane facelift first emerged. It was considered promising at the time, but experience quickly revealed its downsides: higher complication rates, longer recovery times and, often, less natural outcomes. While some surgeons today still advocate for deep plane facelifts in selected cases, it is important not to confuse popularity with superiority.

## Fillers vs facelifts: knowing the difference

Social media is flooded with before-and-after photos implying that fillers, lasers and skincare can achieve the same results as a facelift. That is simply not true. Non-surgical treatments absolutely have their place and, when used correctly, can provide excellent results. But they are not a substitute for surgery when there is significant tissue descent, deep nasolabial folds, jowling, or loss of neck definition.

Good aesthetic practitioners know where the line is—where fillers, threads or skin tightening will no longer be effective—and surgery becomes the only realistic option. When that line is crossed and non-surgical options are still pushed, the results can be far from rejuvenating. We have all seen it: overfilled faces, the wind tunnel look, pillow cheeks and sausage lips. These are not the outcomes of good rejuvenation: they are the consequences of trying to avoid surgery at all costs.

<sup>1</sup> Alpert, B. (2009). Identical Twin Facelifts with Differing Techniques: A 10-Year Follow-Up. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (PRS)*, 123(3), 1025–1033.

In my practice, about 90% of facelift patients are women, 10% are men—a statistic that mirrors global data from the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS). Although women still make up the majority, more men are seeking out facelift procedures to maintain a refreshed, masculine appearance. The stigma is fading, and rightly so.

## Why the modern facelift is misunderstood

When most people hear the word facelift, they picture a tight, windblown face, unnaturally smooth skin and a frozen expression. These images have become deeply ingrained in popular culture—from celebrities whose surgeries became tabloid fodder, to movies and sitcoms that portray facelifts as something extreme, or even comical.

Take Donatella Versace. Once admired for her striking features and timeless elegance, Ms. Versace became a global fashion icon, not only for her designs, but also for her appearance. In her younger years she radiated natural beauty. But over time, in pursuit of eternal youth, she underwent numerous cosmetic procedures—multiple facelifts, excessive fillers and other interventions. The result was not rejuvenation, but transformation. Her features became exaggerated, her expressions unnatural. Donatella's journey serves as a powerful example of how too much aesthetic intervention, without restraint or harmony, can lead not to enhancement, but to distortion.

These common perceptions are based on outdated techniques, and a misunderstanding of how facial rejuvenation really works.

In the early days of cosmetic surgery, especially from the 1960s through the 1980s, facelifts were mostly *skin lifts*. The surgical method was to dissect beneath the skin, pull it tight and remove the excess. While this did create a more youthful appearance temporarily, the results often looked unnatural

because only the surface was being altered. The deeper causes of aging—such as the descent of the facial fat pads and weakening of the underlying support structures—were not addressed.

Over time, the skin alone could not hold the lift, and patients either looked overstretched or needed frequent touch-ups. That era left behind an enduring impression: that facelifts make people look fake.

Modern facelifts are based on a completely different understanding of facial anatomy and aging. The face ages not just on the surface, but also from within—with changes in fat distribution, loss of bone volume and the descent of deep tissues. Today's best techniques focus on restoring these underlying structures, not simply tightening the skin.

Instead of pulling, we reposition. Instead of stretching, we restore. When performed correctly, a modern facelift respects the natural proportions and expression of the face. The result is not a new face—but the same face. Renewed.

Despite this evolution, the public remains largely unaware of how much has changed. Many people delay or avoid surgery altogether out of fear they will look “operated on”. They continue to spend large sums on non-surgical treatments—fillers, threads, radiofrequency devices—hoping for results that surgery could achieve more effectively and, in some cases, more naturally.

Facelifts today are not what they were thirty or forty years ago. The art and science have advanced—and so have the results.