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BEAUTY BEAT

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PORTRAIT BY DONNA VICTOR

THE MAGIC CITY'S FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

The Miami Institute Is Changing Attitudes About Cosmetic Surgery

Like it or not, we're living in an age of aesthetic imperialism. Thanks to the widespread popularity of cosmetic surgery, we're witnessing a period of what can only be described as thin, young and beautiful hyperinflation—the new “old” look, if you will. The flat forehead, sun-spotless, plump-lipped, C-cupped, size twos are establishing hegemony over urban sprawls throughout the world, forever shifting the pretty paradigm as we know it. With innovations ranging from injectable wrinkle reducers Botox and Restylane to ultrasound-assisted liposuction and cohesive silicone-gel breast implants available to everyone who can afford them, “growing old gracefully” sounds like a quaint, outdated 20th-century idiom as relevant to today's society as the abacus.

These days, it seems like the “having work done” stigma is gone, and there is something powerful and prestigious about those who have chosen to take a proactive approach to looking younger and/or better. And spa-like medical and surgical facilities, such as The Miami Institute for Age Management and Intervention at The Four Seasons Hotel & Tower in downtown Miami, are turning it into a comfortable, peaceful and even glamorous experience.

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In late 2004, board-certified facial plastic surgeon Julio F. Gallo, M.D., FACS and successful business entrepreneur Stephen Watson, founded what they call “a medical facility gift-wrapped like a spa,” a one-stop shop for everything related to preventing and reversing the effects of aging. The facility offers skin peels, photo facials, laser hair removal, breast lifts, injectable fillers, cosmetic dentistry, rhinoplasty, laser hair reduction, vein treatments and more. Between the soft background music, tea and water bar and décor—walls of graded Turkish limestone, floors of Sicilian lava stone, and orchids on every table—the only whisper of “clinic” is the abundance of board certified medical professionals (including four cosmetic surgeons, internists specializing in age management, a cosmetic dentist, an oral surgeon, a periodontist, a psychologist and a nutritionist) donning white lab coats. Even the entrance to “The Institute”—as it's known to its patients—is unconventionally discreet: The third floor of The Four Seasons' self-parking garage features a subtly positioned red carpet that leads to a private door and buzzer. While there's nothing



Above, clockwise from top left: The Miami Institute for Age Management and Intervention staff members Dr. Julio F. Gallo, Dr. Leonard Tachmes, Jelena Petkovic, Dr. Suzel Vazquez, Dr. Julio E. Hernandez, Stephen A. Watson and Dr. Robert L. Simons.

Right: The Institute's luxurious entrance.



THE MIAMI INSTITUTE

Right: A guest bathroom and adjoining sitting area, which offers access to informational brochures.

Far right: A treatment suite.

escorted to an individual consultation suite; there is no group waiting room.

Before we talk nip and tuck, it's important to touch upon what could be the most fascinating aspect of The Institute: how it is quietly ushering in a new era of cosmetic-surgery patients—that is, the kind who never envisioned themselves as cosmetic-surgery patients. See, the path from teeth whitening and microdermabrasion to breast augmentation and liposuction—all offered at The Institute—can be somewhat of a slippery slope. Once a client starts coming in regularly to see the dentist or have a medical facial, he/she gets to know the friendly staff, falls in love with the green tea, feels relaxed in the environment, and starts flipping through brochures (or using the touch pad on the informational monitors installed on the walls in the



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consultation suites). It doesn't take long before The Institute itself turns into a comfort zone, and one's mental wheels start to churn. An entire world of beauty—from slender thighs that never touch and eye-popping breasts that spill out of your shirt to a thin, graceful neck and flawless, even-colored complexion—is, indeed, within reach. We are living in glorious times.

But as The Institute's internist, Suzel Vazquez, M.D., explains, it's important to look at the whole body, inside and out. "If you're tightening the skin and doing liposuction on a body with bones and muscles that are degenerating internally, how are you helping the aging process? Our approach is preventative," she explains. Vazquez gives patients an initial consultation, which can include blood and salivary tests to check the body's hormonal balance and metabolic processes, and a bone-density scan. "Not everybody gets the same test; it's very individual—just like the people and their symptoms. If you have a deficiency early in life and you check it and catch it, you can find out how to treat it, preferably with natural supplements and lifestyle changes and hopefully prevent the onset of chronic disease."

Vazquez stresses that overlooked problems such as dental bacteria and gingivitis can be at the root of a

patient's overall health problems. Cosmetic dentist, Julio Hernandez, D.M.D., says the mouth is a window to the rest of the body. "We'll see a lot of [problems] show up in the mouth before they show up somewhere else," he says. That is, after he gets the patient in the chair: "Ninety percent of the people who come in tell me they hate the dentist," he says. "This is because of a previous experience when they were a kid or just things they've heard. Dentistry has changed dramatically over the past several years, and we can do so much more to make the patient comfortable—especially in a spa setting like this." Patients can be treated in The Institute's dental suite with comforts that include virtual-reality glasses, relaxing music, hand and foot massages and sedation—nitrous oxide and/or antianxiety medication that helps those who are especially nervous. Hernandez, along with periodontist Dr. Mark Gutt, can also do "Teeth in an Hour"—a cutting-edge procedure that allows dentists to replace missing teeth using CAT-scan technology that takes a three-dimensional image of the patient's skull, teeth and bone; the lab makes the teeth before anyone even touches the patient. Common requests include laser whitening, veneers and smile lifts, a combination of bonding veneers or crowns that helps build out the person's

lip and restore the face's contour without the need for surgery to make it look like it did when the patient was younger. Hernandez gets a fair share of Angelina Jolie and Julia Roberts smile requests, as well. "Angelina has big, broad teeth and Julia has a broad smile. We can't copy their teeth onto someone else, because smile designs are very specific to the patient. But I try to focus on what it is about the smile that the person likes, break it down and incorporate those elements into the patient's own smile."

Many first-time patients come for the noninva-

BREAST AUGMENTATION costs \$6,000 for saline and \$7,000 for silicone.

LIPOSUCTION runs from about \$4,800 to \$8,000, depending on how many areas are included.

A TUMMY TUCK (ABDOMINOPLASTY) is \$9,995 and includes liposuction of the abdomen and hips.

BREAST LIFTS AND REDUCTIONS cost about \$7,000. If an implant is included it can run to about \$11,000.