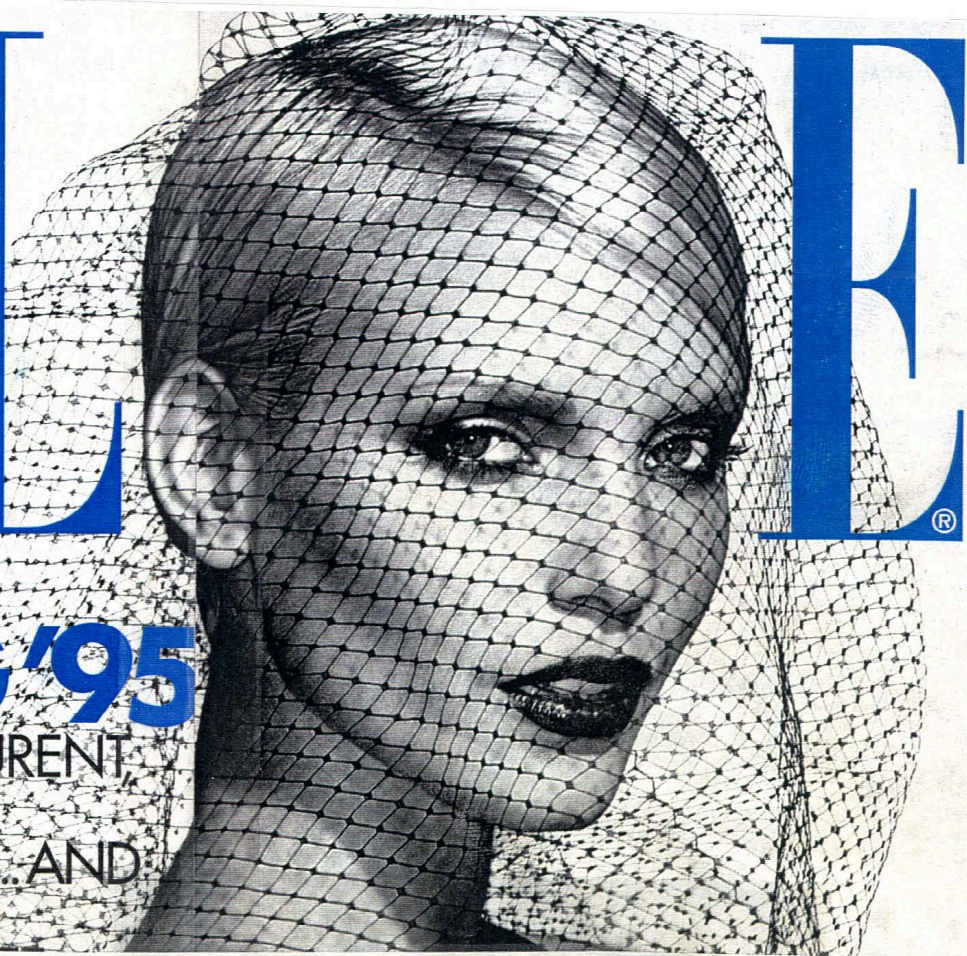


ELLE PLASTIC SURGERY SPECIAL BEFORE YOU GO UNDER THE KNIFE, READ THIS!

THE BEST OF SPRING '95

YVES SAINT LAURENT
RICHARD TYLER,
TODD OLDHAM... AND
CALVIN KLEIN



NIPPED AND TUCKED IN BEVERLY HILLS

A few months after I moved to L.A., a friend and I sat outside at Il Pastaio, a popular pasta restaurant. A black Jaguar pulled up to the curb, and the driver went into the restaurant while a woman waited in the car, wearing dark glasses and a hat: wide brimmed, with netting that hung down loosely over her face. A few minutes later, another car appeared, and, I swear, a woman in that same hat waited as her companion got pasta to go. Where did they get these hats?

It got colder. My friend and I moved to an indoor table. A woman with a huge Band-Aid across the bridge of her nose walked in. My friend looked at me. "I'm afraid," he said, "that if you go to the bathroom, I won't recognize you when you come out."

"Cosmetic surgery is a way of life here," says Maggie Lockridge, administrator at Chantique, L.A.'s premier "recovery retreat." Chantique caters to women and men who have just had their appearance surgically altered and would like nothing but "to just disappear for a little while" and be expertly coddled on the discreet sixth floor of the Beverly Prescott Hotel—plastic surgery's ground zero. It's located, appropriately, in Beverly Hills, whose remarkable confluence of money and vanity make it the elective-surgery capital of the world. General manager David Smith estimates that 10 percent of all cosmetic surgery in the U.S. is performed within a three- or four-mile radius of the hotel.

Downstairs, at the private entrance, a woman with her head completely bandaged waits while a younger woman rings for the elevator, glaring at anyone ill-mannered enough to stare. Chantique ("That's 'beauty' in Indonesian") will send a chauffeur and nurse in a limousine to the hospital recovery room to pick up its clients.

"Of course, you can't tell me who comes here," I say to Lockridge,

the chicest registered nurse I've ever seen.

"Leaf, Hoefflin, Kamer—all send their patients here," she says. I nod but show no sign of recognition. She looks at me patiently. "They do your Elizabeth Taylors, your Dolly Partons, your Chers." I think she feels sorry for me. She hesitates, as if she's going to give me something. "If Cher came here, we'd book her under an alias."

She walks me into one of the twelve private rooms. Her black stiletto heels are silent on the exquisite cream-colored carpet, with crisscrosses of moss-green leaf patterns. "The phones have fuzzy buttons on them, so you can signal the nurses' station by just feeling," she says.

We go into Lockridge's lovely office, salmon and cream and chintz. She hands me a rate card. A single deluxe room (package B), three post-op nights, costs \$1,185. A deluxe single for one night ranges from \$350 to \$425.

"There's a lot of secrecy involved here," I say. "Do you think there's any shame in getting cosmetic surgery?"

"Not shame—guilt," she answers right away. "The big doctors are now charging \$20,000 for a face-lift, and sometimes the women feel selfish for spending it on themselves."

She continues without further prompting: "When you buy a car, you pay for its upkeep. Why shouldn't we do the same with our bodies? People may be secretive in New York—not here. Women start with liposuction in their twenties. They feel great. Once you've had one, you can't wait until your next one. A slight eye tuck at thirty-five. First face at forty-two. Breasts start to droop? There's no reason for that now. Why let appearance divulge your age?"

Surgery as a woman's rite of passage—it's a concept. She looks at me. I believe she's wondering what I'm waiting for with that eye tuck.—LAURIE WINER