



Jan Sonnenmair for The New York Times

Maggie Lockridge at the gift counter of Chantique, the plastic-surgery recovery retreat she runs in Beverly Hills.

## Après-Face-Lift Spas Are Thriving in California

By CAREY GOLDBERG

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — "Please whisper," the sign at the little door of the Hidden Garden warns visitors. "The princess is sleeping."

The problem is not really that she is sleeping but that she is swollen, bruised, nauseated and, all in all, unpresentable — as tends to happen in the immediate aftermath of the surgical magic that keeps some people looking so uncannily princesslike.

Fortunately for her — and for hundreds of women and scores of men who have themselves tucked, scraped and suctioned in Beverly Hills every year — they do not have to go home feeling that way. (And be seen by the doorman or by neighbors, who can ever after give them knowing looks.)

For the cosmetic-surgery culture runs so deep and broad in California that it has spawned not one but two postsurgery hideaway hotels, where for \$400 or so a night (or more), the newly plasticized can be pampered and watched over.

The flesh-carving business is doing so well these days, with varying estimates of more than a million procedures performed nationwide each year, more of them in Southern California than anywhere else, that both establishments are booked weeks in advance, their owners say.

At the Hidden Garden here some regulars check in to heal for three or four days at least once a year. "One regular said, 'Darling, it's like going to the dentist,'" said Nola Rocco, the Hidden Garden's owner and self-described housemother. "She comes back all the time, and it really is like going to the dentist. It's maintenance, and that's how they see it."

And at Chantique, a "recovery retreat" that occupies a floor of 12 rooms in the tony Beverly Prescott Hotel, just off Rodeo Drive, Maggie Lockridge, a registered nurse who is a co-owner, said she planned to open an even fancier place soon.

There is rivalry between the two: Chantique is more nurse-dominated than the Hidden Garden, which has a gentle whiff of the New Age about it. For every three patients, Chantique has one nurse checking them every half-hour, day and evening. The Hidden Garden helps patients arrange for nurses. Neither is licensed as a medical facility. Rather, said Dr. Norman Leaf, a Beverly Hills surgeon who refers patients to Chantique, patients go to recovery retreats to seek "security and pampering and comforts."

The mainstays of a postoperative palace, it seems, are excellent soups that need little chewing by sensitive jaws, ice for the swelling and plenty of hand-holding, particularly reassurances that the ugly-duckling phase will soon give way to surgically enhanced swanhood.

At Chantique, the phones have fuzzy cloth stuck to the speaker button and the summons button so that patients

can feel their way to call; the heads and feet of beds elevate electrically like the hospital versions, and a fresh rose awaits each new arrival to the rooms overlooking Los Angeles. A Lincoln Town Car or Continental staffed by a nurse ferries patients from the offices where they have been operated on, and their privacy is maintained by a lock on the elevator that does not allow other hotel guests to stop on their sixth-floor sanctuary.

Similar ferries and roses are provided at the Hidden Garden, which opened here in 1988 and now runs its main establishment out of three 1930's English-style cottages in the Westwood section of Los Angeles while Ms. Rocco refurbishes the Beverly Hills town house.

The Hidden Garden's décor is fine antiques and Oriental rugs, plantings and Ralph Lauren linens. But if the bedsteads are antique, the mattresses buzz up and down to keep raw faces and liposuction spots at the right angles. The Charlie Suite for two (husbands and wives often get operated on at the same time) is \$650 a night; most others are \$425 or \$450.

Ms. Rocco, who looks 20 years younger than her actual 56, greeted a visitor the other day a bit sheepish about the bruising and swelling of her upper lip, which she had just had injected with a dollop of fat to get rid of lines she noticed coming in.

"I love fat — it is the greatest thing," she said of the relatively new techniques to use a patient's own fat, rather than collagen, to fill out lips and other areas.

Ms. Lockridge, too, preaches the glories of plastic surgery: "It's wonderful surgery, it's magnificent surgery. It's very positive, it's very enlightening and a real help for those who do go through emotional loss — it does help them get up and go on."

Most patients arrive in surgical dressings resembling shower caps and chin-strapped napkins, retire to their rooms and hole up until they dare venture out in hats and sunglasses. She said that 95 percent of the women whose husbands do not join them under the knife would not let their husbands come see them while they recuperated.

Ms. Rocco noted that men are now having so much cosmetic surgery done that they often fill half her beds. Both postop clienteles include younger and younger guests, with the average age now nearer 45 than 65.

While Texas, Florida and New York are also capitals of plastic surgery, spokeswomen for national associations of plastic surgeons, of which there are several, said they had not heard of such establishments thriving anywhere but Los Angeles.

In New York, Dr. Darrick Antell, a Park Avenue plastic surgeon, said that he saw no need for a special retreat because he can send patients to any of three top-flight hotels within a block of his office to recuperate — with a private-duty nurse near if need be — until they are ready to face their