

THE ENHANCERS

MEET THREE PLASTIC SURGEONS
WHOSE PROFESSIONAL MISSION IS
TO MAKE MIAMI MORE BEAUTIFUL

BY KIRK NIELSEN PHOTOGRAPHS BY NAVID

Few men enjoy more reverence upon the thresholds of Miami Beach hotspots. They are like shamans, unmarried, confident, rarely seen in public except by night. They know one key to opening the velvet rope is to appear with at least a small bevy of feminine beauty that miniskirts and décolletage can't contain. But these are medicine men of a special power, forged of glistening cleavage itself. They are developers and preservationists of the area's most precious asset: outrageously sexy women.

This just in: an upsurge in Brazilian butt-lifts. The operation involves liposuction of fat from a patient's waist, hips and upper thighs, and reinjection of it into other parts of his or her buttocks. Most of the recipients are women.

"It's getting exceedingly popular, gluteal augmentation," Dr. Sam Gershenbaum confirmed one recent Monday morning at his office at the end of a commercial strip just a stone's throw from the Aventura Mall. The blue-eyed 47-year-old has the poise, chiseled good looks and athletic build to play a doctor on TV, but this is for real. He spoke slowly, deliberately. "When we can take fat from around the butt, which will in itself make the butt more shapely, and transfer that to the gluteal region, to the buttocks, it can make for very pleasing results," he assured.

It already was shaping up to be a big butt month. Since last summer, he has been performing the Brazilian butt-lift—also called fat augmentation of the gluteus—at a rate of two per month. It typically takes four to six hours. Price: \$12,500. He had one scheduled for the next day, and another for Thursday.

But Dr. Gershenbaum's practice extends well beyond butts. The previous week he logged two abdominoplasties, one breast augmentation, one breast lift, one liposuction and one rhinoplasty (gross billing for the week, about \$35,000). His repertory also includes breast reduction, chin augmentation, cheek implants, labiaplasty (vaginal-lip reduction) and more. He recently inserted pectoral implants into a young man from London who pumps iron but couldn't expand his upper chest to his liking (cost: \$7,000). Men also come to the doctor for calf implants (\$7,000 per pair) and love-handle liposuction (\$4,500).



Gershenbaum, who hails from Livingston, New Jersey, spent his undergraduate years at the University of Miami, then received a D.O. (Doctor of Osteopathy) degree from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in 1987. He earned his surgical chops during three years of general-surgery training in Brooklyn at the Wyckoff Heights Medical Center, which he said included emergency operations on members of “the knife and gun club” and people who tended to ignore tumors way too long. That was followed by two years of plastic- and reconstructive-surgery training in Des Moines, Iowa at the College of Osteopathic Medicine.

“I did a lot of training in microsurgery and free-tissue transfers,” he told me. “Whether it was cancer defects or traumatic injuries, you’d be taking soft tissue, muscle or muscle and bone and be able to cover those defects and hook up the arteries and veins in the microscopes, taking muscles and skin from one part of the body to cover up other parts of the body.

“I like the hands-on,” he continued. “Even when I was younger I was always building and creating, building furniture. I like to work on something and see the results. I wasn’t one of those in medicine who enjoy going around and just ordering tests and more tests. I wanted to get in there and do something.” But why plastic surgery? “I was always drawn toward a more creative type of surgery. Early on, in med school, I just sort of knew that’s where I wanted to go,” he replied.

Later that week, at noon on Wednesday, Gershenbaum had just finished the second of two surgeries scheduled that day, both on the same male patient. One was a liposuction, the other a correction of a depressed neck scar caused by a traumatic injury.

He looked at the schedule on his computer. “Not a big breast week,” he observed. But breasts were on the horizon. That afternoon he was slated for consultations with seven women: one seeking labiaplasty, two seeking abdominoplasties and four seeking breast augmentations, or BAMs, as his staff calls them. Almost half of all his operations are BAMs.

“If you go back into literature, women have been trying to enlarge their breasts since early times, back when they were doing crazy things like injecting fluids and placing sponges [in breasts] in the medieval era,” he propounded. “Women dress and try to look nice for other women just as much as they do for men. Hopefully they’re doing it for

themselves. Anybody who does cosmetic surgery should be researching it properly and doing it for their own self-esteem and their own reasons. They should never be doing it for somebody else.”

He takes a “conservative” approach and tends to prefer “a more natural look. If you can see that it’s a breast augmentation, to me it’s not a wonderful breast augmentation,” he said. “There’s only a certain size implant that will fit in the framework, within the breast tissue and under the muscle. And once you start using an implant that’s too big to accommodate that, then it’s going to look more like an implant. I mean, certainly you have to try to fall within the guidelines of what people want and try to meet their expectations. But a lot of times you have to educate people. I’ll ask them, ‘What’s more important to you, how big or how natural?’”

For his office’s 33-year-old aesthetician, Elizabeth Cardin, the answer to that question was big and natural enough to get selected at casting calls. Cardin, who is also a dancer (and TV host on the Beach Channel), realized one day seven years ago that casting directors were opting for girls more buxom than she. So she had Gershenbaum elevate her from “a real small B to a full C,” she excitedly explained. “The minute I got my implants, I was cast in a Ricky Martin video. They’re beautiful.” Indeed, appreciation of this art form among Cardin’s curvaceously liberated sisterhood couldn’t be fuller. “We touch each other’s breasts to compare,” she offered, grinning and squeezing the air in front of her with her hands.



Dr. Sam Gershenbaum, 47, may look like a television doctor, but his practice is booming. He prides himself on his “conservative,” “natural-looking” approach to cosmetic surgery.

Such passion for cosmetic surgery has allowed Gershenbaum to enhance his own life, with a waterfront house on the Venetian Islands, a Range Rover and a 40-foot Donzi fast boat. It also endows him with uncanny mojo inside nightclubs. His 38-year-old patient coordinator, Erika Fliegenspan, who augmented from a B to a D cup six years ago, recounted arriving at Suite for a birthday party she had arranged for a female friend: “Even though I was hooked up through [Dr. Gershenbaum] with somebody in the club, I got there and they gave me a terrible VIP table. The moment [the doctor] walked in, he was like, ‘What kind of table is this?’ He said two words and we were moved to the best

table on the floor. It was like magic! And I'm usually pretty bitchy. I can get the best table in any restaurant. But I couldn't do it there."

On another occasion she called the club to facilitate VIP entry for a plastic surgeon visiting from out of town. The Suite reservation liaison inquired as to the age of the doctor's female companion, to make sure she wasn't more than 40. "I said, 'She's in her 20s.' They said, 'Oh, okay. Anytime.' The plastic surgeon's age, they couldn't care less. They don't care if he's 80," Fliegenspan assured.

Still, Gershenbaum actually prefers a gathering at, say, a billionaire's private penthouse at The Setai. "That's really much more enjoyable," he said during a chat in Fliegenspan's office.

"How do you get invited to those?" she asked him.

The doctor smiled wryly. "You get invited by people you know," he replied.

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