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Squaring Off

The humble mandible is actually critical to facial appeal—or so an abundance of new tools and procedures would have it.

Mattie Kahn puts them to the test.

Not long ago, the plastic surgeon Sam Rizk, MD, had a prospective patient come in for a consultation. Rizk aims to please; he sees solutions where others see weak chins. But then the patient showed him her ideal visage—a series of snapshots filtered into anatomical impossibilities.

“I was like, ‘You know, there are certain things under the jawline that are necessary for survival,’ ” he explains. “ ‘The windpipe? You need that to breathe.’ ”

He could not give her what she wanted—not if she wanted to be able to keep chewing her food. (She did.)

America is now in the grips of a jaws craze not seen since the summer of 1975 when a killer shark was on the loose off the shores of New England. Amazon peddles thousands of products that promise to tone and snatch. Instagram brims with gua sha tutorials and med-spa interventions. TikTok videos tout the benefits of “mewing”—a questionable practice that promises a fierce jawline to those who rest their tongues on the roof of their mouths. At the recent Alex Katz retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, at least one well-heeled patron could be overheard taking notes: “There isn’t a loose jowl in the whole show!”

Jason Diamond, MD—a Beverly Hills-based plastic surgeon whose well-traversed office functions not unlike an outpost of Giorgio Baldi with neuromodulators instead of agnolotti—maintains that “the most consistent feature of a red-carpet face is a strong jaw.” A robust jawline—from Julia Roberts’s to Bella Hadid’s—is the nonnegotiable mark of beautiful people. For the scalpel-averse, Diamond has honed a (trademarked) technique called Diamond Facial Sculpting that uses filler injected just above the bone to “augment and define” the contours of the face. And then there’s the Diamond Tripartite, which sounds like a competitive race but is in fact a combination of customized implants (involving a CT scan and 3D replica), a neck lift to create “an unseen scaffolding,” and laser skin-tightening. It’s not cheap, but Diamond warns against quicker fixes like

fat-cell-blasting Kybella; the scar tissue can complicate future procedures.

If all that sounds like a lot for someone who just wants Angelina Jolie's obtuse angles, Diamond is here to break the news: The face is not in fact a Picasso canvas. There is no augmenting one feature without tweaking another to match. Real aesthetic impact is made in proportion. "We're always focused on balance," Rizk adds. For a to-the-studs facial renovation, Rizk eschews outdated methods that can lead to the pulled look evident on certain doyennes of Madison Avenue in favor of allowing the skin and tissue to move as a unit. Rizk can turn patients around in less time that it takes some retinol purges to heal—he got Bravo housewife Jennifer Fessler on-air for her reunion episodes just six weeks after her procedure. "I had all this loose skin!" she marvels when I speak to her by phone.

Still, for those not keen to spend up to \$200,000 on a facelift, there are less drastic alternatives. One is Sofwave, which I sample at the private practice of Manhattan-based dermatologist Doris Day, MD. Billed as a noninvasive tissue-tightening device, the ultrasound treatment is meant to induce small injuries in the dermis to encourage collagen production. I'm 31, so Day treats me like a newborn. But she and I both know: The jawline I have now is as taut as it will ever be. Sofwave is supposed to be painless, and the experts coo over both its no-downtime turnaround and its single-session effectiveness. I did leave the office within 45 minutes and almost missed my station on the 2 train because I could not stop taking selfies,

but Sofwave is about as comfortable as a series of curling iron burns. At least this: Weeks out and with nasolabial folds that look vastly reduced to me (and mostly the same to my husband), I have deemed it worth it.

Of course, the work of collagen stimulation is never done. The celebrity facialist Joanna Vargas recently retooled her Triple Crown Royale Facial to boost its jaw-refining capabilities. ("I have never seen better results than this," she says.) Raquel Medina-Cleghorn—cofounder of the instacultish Raquel New York Studio in Tribeca—leans heavily on lymphatic drainage to give women what she calls "the Carla Bruni Special." The impact from both treatments is immediate and impressive, but no match for a sushi dinner. Not even the most practiced hands can compensate for the ruinous effects of salt and alcohol. I say: Take lots of photos at cocktail hour to maximize the investment. And then learn from someone like the esthetician Taylor Worden, who teaches clients to achieve the "Kim Kardashian jaw" of their dreams—"defined, no swelling, drained, clean"—with buccal massage. (Imagine kneading the sides of your face like you're shaping sourdough loaves.) You may not be able to turn yourself into a French chanteuse, but you will feel pleasantly sculpted.

I've long used the microcurrent tool NuFace in the run-up to events to make the most of whatever cheekbones I do possess. In the name of research, I decide to see what the much-ballyhooed Lyma device could do. The at-home cold laser with LED wand bears a striking resemblance to a Scandinavian pepper mill and costs

around \$2,700. I did notice a certain HD sharpening after weeks of consistent use, but shelling out for one also necessitates being the kind of person who will not let the device languish in her medicine cabinet. Not me!

The point is, there is no sure path to mandible nirvana. Nadia Mostovych, MD, a facial reconstructive surgeon, emphasizes to patients that results are not guaranteed. “We have a pretty good idea of things that will make an improvement, but it’s not an exact science, and healing is not an exact science,” she says. “With surgery, people understand that, but when it comes to some of the less invasive things, people think, This is not a big deal. But it can be.” There is a difference between fillers and filters.

So how about an aesthetic boost via self-improvement? Fumiko Takatsu operates in the teach-a-man-to-fish school—or rather, teach-a-woman-to-face-yoga. Her method grew out of a trial-and-error approach to healing from a car accident two decades ago. Now she instructs clients in the relationship between face and neck and posture through a series of exercises, face yoga programs, and live online classes. Takatsu theorizes that we move our bodies to tone and build muscle, but tend to stop at the neck. I’m prepared to call it all snake oil until Takatsu flickers onto the screen for our Zoom interview. Lineless. I tell her I’m writing about the new trend and she smiles: Have jaws ever been out?