

Face values

Cosmetic procedures used to be the province of Hollywood starlets, wannabe hipsters, and trophy wives. Not any more. **Paula Adamski** unmask the local industry and discovers there's more than meets the untouched eye

The translucent fibreglass wall glows red, then green, then blue, then yellow. The rest of the room is all suede and pot lights, and a woman with perfect teeth offers complimentary juice, water, and Nutribars. Everyone here has beautiful teeth, but to be surrounded by them is not unsettling. Instead, I feel the desire to assimilate—to become one of them.

I'm in the waiting room of Daniel Daniel Dentistry in Halifax. Dr. Daniel Daniel himself, finishing with a patient, walks out from behind the glowing wall. He has a warm smile and gorgeous teeth, and this 31-year-old looks more like a longtime golf buddy than a dentist. "My whole practice is based on making people happy," says Daniel, who performs general dentistry with a strong focus on cosmetic work such as reconstruction and whitening. "I can change a person's life just by fixing their teeth."

Apparently, he has. He points to the walls of his dental offices, which are covered with what look like large black-and-white movie-star head shots. They're actually photos of his "clients" (he dislikes the word patient), all with teeth and smiles that radiate with the power of a thousand suns.

I'm quite impressed. I'd be lying to say that I wasn't a little frightened coming here. First of all, I don't have perfect teeth and I didn't want to be judged. Second, I'd been recalling the episode of *Friends* in which Ross has his teeth whitened in one session with the dentist. His smile is so freakishly white that his friends experience snowblindness when they see him, and on his date later that night, his teeth glow in the dark.



“I’ve been appalled at how it’s portrayed on TV. I’m not doing swan procedures, and I don’t—and never will—aspire to that” — Dr. Richard Bendor-Samuel

I’m not sure what I expected to find here, but it wasn’t real people—more like bimbos thirsting for glamour, robots, mad scientists, the ambient sound of circular saws and staple guns. But what I discovered was something much different. These doctors, along with the patients, challenge the stereotypes for cosmetic surgery—it’s not about the glamour, they say. It’s about having new options for looking good and feeling good.

These teeth can save your life

Daniel is one of a growing number of specialists opening and operating clinics in Halifax that offer elective appearance-enhancing procedures and surgeries. While they provide what were once hush-hush procedures but are now accepted and talked about openly, they also challenge the stereotypes for cosmetic-surgery practitioners and patients. Daniel wants his clinic to change the way Haligonians view dentistry. He calls it “want-based dentistry” and says his goal as a dentist and a businessperson is to exceed people’s expectations. He wants you to love your smile and to love your experience at the dentist. This explains the lavish waiting area and spacious surgical rooms. The dentist chair is comfortable enough to fall asleep in. The bathroom has free soaps, creams, and colognes.

Patients can wrap up in cozy blankets while they’re having work done, and flat-screen televisions hang from the ceiling for those who want to watch digital cable or a movie (yes, they’ll rent movies for you). “There’s nothing more I can give you short of a pedicure,” says Daniel, laughing. “And I’m sure I’d do that, except many people’s feet are ticklish, and that wouldn’t be good while we’re doing procedures.”

Daniel opened his office in Halifax in February of 2005. From the before and after images of patients on the wall, I can see that he has performed what looks like dental miracles. I see some bad teeth—terrible teeth—that have been turned into beautiful, white, mesmerizing smiles. Most were done

in just one or two visits. Daniel operates his cosmetic dental practice in the same way you would work with a personal trainer at the gym. “Clients come to me with their goals, and I look at where they want to be,” he says. “Then we get there together.”

Some of the people who have come to him were so self-conscious of how they looked, they would only talk or smile while their hand was in front of their mouth. “When you address their smile, it’s the first step of a larger transformation,” says Daniel. “Confidence in how your teeth look spreads over into other areas of your appearance and your life. People we’ve helped have lost 15 to 100 pounds because of this first step. Their relationships with other people have improved.”

Breasts for everyday people

Dr. Richard Bendor-Samuel believes that plastic surgery is growing in popularity in Halifax and throughout Canada because it’s growing in acceptance. “No one keeps their plastic surgery a secret anymore,” he says. “People come in with their family and friends for support.”

It’s the media, insists 43-year-old Bendor-Samuel, that has made plastic surgery more acceptable, even though it’s most often portrayed in a negative light. The stereotypical patient is wealthy, shallow, and appearance obsessed. “People ask me if I’ve seen the show *Nip/Tuck*, and I haven’t. I don’t bother with shows like that,” he says. “A few times, I’ve looked at television shows that deal with plastic surgery and I’ve been appalled at how it’s portrayed. I’m not doing swan procedures, and I don’t—and never will—aspire to that.”

Instead, the patients who come to Bendor-Samuel for cosmetic procedures are everyday people who take pride in their appearance and in their bodies. “They are average people who have had some sort of a body change,” he says, “and they want surgery to help correct it.” Take breast enlargement, for example. Ninety-nine per cent of the time,

his patients are either postpartum women who “want back what they once had” or women who have small breasts and want larger ones. “There is that feeling from them that something is missing,” says Bendor-Samuel. “I talk to them and make sure that having the procedure is about them and not about pleasing a partner.”

Breast augmentation involves the implanting of either saline or cohesive gel implants and, on average, costs between \$6,000 and \$7,000 (a facelift costs about

A little off the top, please

- In 2003 more than 302,000 surgical and non-surgical cosmetic enhancements were performed in Canada. That’s an increase of nearly 60,000 procedures, or 24.6%, from 2002.
- Canadian surgical procedures eclipsed the \$500-million mark in 2003.
- Liposuction procedures increased by 16% from 2002 to 24,337, which is 24% of the surgical market in Canada.
- Breast augmentation rose 17% to 16,973 procedures in 2003.
- Botox leads the way in injectables, with more than 100,000 treatments on 50,000 patients in 2003.
- Laser hair-removal procedures were up 33% from 2002.
- Women are seeking 85.5% of all cosmetic-enhancement procedures, the most popular of which are liposuction, breast augmentation, and non-surgical facelifts.
- Men are seeking 14.5% of all cosmetic treatments, the most popular of which are liposuction, rhinoplasty, and eyelifts. Eighty-seven per cent of all patients are between the ages of 35 and 50, while 11% are age 19 to 34, leaving 2% over the age of 50.
- Geographically, the survey is led by Ontario, where 42% of all cosmetic procedures are performed, followed by British Columbia at 26%, Alberta at 11%, and the rest of Canada with a combined 20%.

Source: Medicard.com

\$10,000). Bendor-Samuel says that the American market is more extreme with its surgeries. "Canadians rarely want to go bigger than a C cup," he says (Americans typically go for double-D). Also, in Canada plastic-surgery procedures are seasonal; breast enhancements are popular in the spring and summer, while people tend to get abdominal and facial work done in the winter.

The field of plastic surgery is diverse in nature, which is what draws Bendor-Samuel to the work. "Patients are all different, so you will never truly be doing the same thing twice," he says. "If you're a creative person, then plastic surgery is ideal. And I enjoy working for people who have high expectations from what I'm doing."

Bendor-Samuel has been practicing in Halifax for more than six years. He opened his clinic, the Landing Surgical Centre, with Dr. Louis Boileau in the swanky atmosphere of Bishop's Landing in July of 2005. The pair decided to open the clinic when Nova Scotia's Capital Health district disallowed surgeons to perform cosmetic surgery inside hospitals due to a shortage of anesthesiologists.

The clinic performs breast augmentations, lifts, and reductions; rhinoplasty (nose jobs); liposuction; tummy tucks; facelifts; brow lifts; and Botox injections. Although the Centre has only been open since the beginning of July, the doctors have performed about 200 major procedures since then, as well as many minor surgeries and procedures.

Beauty and the Botox

Dr. Mark Taylor is smiling and stirring his coffee. As the early morning sunshine illuminates his small office in the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre, he wants to put a human face to the Botox pamphlets he has given me. "Let me show you Tanya," he says, summoning his administrative assistant from her desk outside his office.

"I'm frowning," Tanya Hurshman says, making an angry face. She frowns and squints her eyes, yet her brows don't furrow and her forehead remains wrinkle free. "Nothing's moving," I say. She's happy about that.

Two weeks ago, she had two vertical lines between her eyes. After injections into the muscle in the wrinkled area with Botox—a fluid derived from purified protein—the muscles are relaxed and the wrinkles created

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from the use of those muscles are gone. The treatment will last for four to six months. For each area injected, it costs between \$300 and \$400. "When I first had it done, it felt a little heavy up there, but now I'm not even aware of it anymore," says Hurshman. "The lines I had before weren't huge, but I didn't like them. They made me look older."

Taylor, 34, points out that it's people such as Tanya who are having cosmetic

treatments done. He echoes Bendor-Samuel's sentiment that those seeking cosmetic surgeries in Halifax are not media-created caricatures. "The type of people who get the surgery are generally healthy people who take care of themselves," he says. "They look and feel great, but then they see sagging in some areas and want to do something about it." The biggest comment Taylor hears from patients is that they

think they look tired. "They don't want to be changed completely," says Taylor, "they just want to be freshened up." These people are some of the happiest and healthiest patients he has ever had.

Taylor also challenges the media's negative representation of plastic surgeons—the idea of the cold-hearted plastic semi-madman who gets his kicks from creating perfect beautiful people. His practice is head, neck, and facial surgery, with 50% facial plastics and 50% cancer surgery. He performs reconstructive surgery after cancer patients have had tumors removed. "There is such a satisfaction for me in treating cancer patients," he says. "These people have enough to deal with. Disfigurement shouldn't have to be another problem for them."

Taylor agrees that the media has greatly contributed to plastic surgery becoming more commonplace and acceptable. "People don't hide it anymore," he says. "There was a time when you would have something like this done in secret. Not anymore. Friends and family are fully involved and supportive." For anyone thinking about plastic surgery of any kind, Taylor warns that it's something that should be considered in advance. "Don't do it as a reaction to something that's going on in your life, like a new job or a divorce," he says. "Do it only if nothing has changed. Don't make a spontaneous decision."

Aside from his practice in Halifax, Taylor also works in private clinics in Dartmouth and on Prince Edward Island. He says that Botox is by far the most common cosmetic procedure. Eyelid surgery and rhinoplasty are tied for second. "Once you've had one thing done," he says, "you'll generally end up having something else done a little later on."

Tanya Hurshman smiles and confirms that theory. "I have a little too much flesh under my chin," she says, "so maybe that's something I'll have done too." It's her birthday, and I'm surprised to learn that she's 38 years old. Her smooth Botox-ed forehead does make her look younger. "I'm getting up there in age, and I wanted to give myself a little boost," she says with a shrug. "I had been watching patients coming in and out, and I saw what it did for them and I was amazed. So why not me?"

Yeah, why not? There's nothing insidious or glamorous happening here—just new options for taking care of our aging bodies. Sign me up. ☐



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