

## Giving You the Face You Want...

The Retreat at Split Rock

by LOIS H. ALCOSSER

r. Neil Gordon stood behind me, both of us facing a large mirror in his office. He gently put his hands at the side of my cheekbones, pulling up my face and instantly my neck looked smooth, my face looked more or less the way it looked twenty years ago. He was demonstrating what he does with each of the men and women who come to him for a consultation to decide whether to have a facial rejuvenation.

He explained: "Ordinary facelifts, which pull the skin up, tend to look taut and artificial, mask-like. My procedure, a Deep-Plane Facelift, doesn't pull the outer skin. It goes deeper, into the soft tissue underneath the skin, which is then tightened and any excess tissue removed. It's not like an injection that plumps up the face temporarily, and it's definitely not what one ordinarily thinks of as a facelift."



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Dr. Gordon says most people don't come to him saying they want to look younger. They want to look "rested." With time, the muscles in all our faces stretch and drop, pulled by gravity and usage. Faces get squarer, jowls develop, frown lines deepen, and the skin over eyebrows droops, making the eyes look smaller.

"Techniques of the 21st century are different than they used to be. By the late 1980s, it was realized that pulling on the skin was inadequate. People always looked like they'd had a facelift. So we went deeper into the tissues, and with this technique, the impression that you've had a facelift is totally gone."

Dr. Gordon's surgery takes place at The Retreat at Split Rock, off Danbury Road, in Wilton. The building is a 1740 farmhouse, totally restored, and is registered as an historical site by the Wilton Historical Society. It's on a beautiful site, with a pond, walks, and a peaceful, rural ambiance.

Within the building is an accredited surgical facility and accompanying spa, where clients can get massages and healing facials, and where they can stay in a charming guest suite or cottage for a few days or a few weeks. The retreat aspect intentionally makes the whole experience more private, restful, and protective.

As a student at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Dr. Gordon thought he would go into orthopedic surgery. He loved sports, was very active, and realized the many possibilities of injuries. But he found the idea of facial surgery more appealing. "The idea of facial surgery is not only technically challenging, it requires artistry. I gravitated to the artistic aspect of surgery, which is faces." He earned a fellowship to study with a pioneer facial plastic surgeon, Dr. Carl Johnson, at Tulane University School of Medicine.

"What I do is not purely technical," he says. "A brow lift is not about making brows higher, it's an art, and so is deciding whether a hairline should or should not be adjusted, or making ears fit perfectly. I use the mirror in order to image the person, to show them that this is what you will look like."

Dr. Gordon says he has seen the field of cosmetic procedures explode in the last decade,



*“We’ve had people from all over back on a plane in five days, and some famous television celebrities back at work in ten days.”*

but not in techniques that give people a long-lasting natural result, but simplistic shortcuts. “The way it’s being marketed,” he says, “is as a quick, easy fix. If people have trepidation about facelifts, it’s because when it’s done sub-optimally, it screams to you from across the hall.”

The Deep-Plane procedure is very precise and demands total attention and focus; a surgery by Dr. Gordon can take four to six hours and he only does one a day.

“We use the same surgical instruments that were used in the past, but the procedure is actually much less invasive. There’s less bruising and less trauma.”

80% of his work is cosmetic in nature, 5% is reconstruction after accidents, and 15% is nasal surgery. “As long as we have noses, it will be popular,” he smiles.

“Clients say, ‘I like my face, I just don’t like the changes that have happened over time.’ Making them look great is only one spoke of the wheel. Care before, during, and after the procedure, is part of the process.”

The spa, which provides a caring retreat, and a predictable outcome, enables patients to focus all their energies on healing. “We’ve had people from all over back on a plane in five days, and some famous television celebrities back at work in ten days.”

Dr. Gordon hears, over and over again, “People keep telling me I look tired when I’m not tired” and “I don’t want to look like I’m ready to retire when I’m not.”

When patients return to their usual life, Dr. Gordon says, people just think they’ve had a great vacation. “Yes, it’s a luxury and it’s elective, but it’s your face. You don’t need this, you don’t have to drive a Bentley, but it’s fun.”

Dr. Gordon has lived in Wilton for nine years, with his wife Stephanie and daughters Rachel, 9 and Leah, 2-1/2. “I’m surrounded by women,” he says. He previously had offices in New York and Westport. He is on the clinical faculty of

the Yale School of Medicine, and has just written a book about all the aspects of facial rejuvenation.

“The skin is elastic. The old-time facelift can’t last because the skin will stretch out. My procedure tightens up a deep layer nobody ever sees, and the tissue that is being tightened has no elastic properties.”

The cost, between \$15,000 and \$30,000, Dr. Gordon insists, is not that expensive when you realize you’ll not have to come back for revisions. “Much of my practice is revising facelifts that have not looked right or have not lasted. So it’s more cost-effective than injections that mask a few signs temporarily, but require re-visits twice a year.”

I asked the doctor: “Could you fix up Joan Rivers?” “If I’d gotten to her and Michael Jackson earlier,” he answered. “The face is, after all, the gateway to our inner soul.” 