

Plastic surgeon Neil Gordon had a vision. The Westport, Connecticut-based doctor, who has remodeled his share of nobility (both the British and the Hollywood varieties), wanted to combine the medical nature of his work with the rather more sybaritic experience of a day spa. Not that pairing the two cosmetic cousins is such a revolutionary concept—more and more doctors have been adding “and day spa” to their brass plaques—but Gordon’s grand plan expanded beyond the traditional comfort zone of facials and manicures.

“People travel to get [plastic surgery] procedures, but the concern is always, ‘Who’s going to take care of me afterward?’” explains Gordon from his office at the new Split Rock Retreat in bucolic Wilton, Connecticut. “Most people don’t stay overnight in hospitals after facelifts. They either go to a hotel or go home. But even the top hotel staff isn’t specifically trained to tend to patients, and at home, family and friends can’t help but interpret how the recovery process is going. And a lot of worry stems from that interpreting.”

Gordon wanted to eliminate that anxiety while adding some serious indulgences, which is where his partner, Judith Stanton, came in. A veteran in the spa industry, Stanton knew a thing or two about stress relief. Together, they founded Split Rock Retreat, a combination plastic surgery facility and spa that, uniquely, also features guest suites. Set on a sprawling homestead that screams “George Washington slept here,” the 1790 landmark clapboard house has retained its Yankee charm. Quite a feat, considering



“Facelifts today aren’t really painful,” explains plastic surgeon Neil Gordon. “People aren’t suffering, but they’re dealing with annoyance and discomfort—which a bit of pampering can solve.”



that Gordon and Stanton have installed high-tech doctors’ offices and spa treatment rooms. (A pair of state-of-the-art operating theaters occupies a huge red barn that abuts one end of the house.) Two other surgeons have joined the Split Rock staff: Richard Restifo specializes in body procedures, and Craig Friedman, like Gordon, focuses on facial and reconstructive surgery.

“A facelift used to be based on making skin tight,” says Gordon. “Now the more sophisticated techniques involve tightening the deep layers of tissue under the skin, which doesn’t necessitate it being pulled taut or looking unnatural.” The procedure itself isn’t as traumatic an experience as it was even a decade ago. “Facelifts today aren’t really painful,” he explains. “People aren’t suffering, but they’re dealing with annoyance and discomfort—which a bit of pampering can solve.”

Stanton initially met Gordon’s worlds-colliding idea with some reluctance. “When it comes to spas in normal environments, there’s industry history there,” she says. “For this, there’s no benchmark. I had to create it as I went along.” But Stanton welcomed the challenge, designing the guest suites to be quiet and comfortable, and filling them with thoughtful conveniences like coffee tables that turn into dining tables, and luxuries such as Frette linens. There’s even a full-time housekeeper assigned to each room. Guests can also hire a private nurse, and occasionally, after the more intense procedures, the doctor will put one on call. Split Rock has only three suites, however—available for \$250 for the first night, \$500 for subsequent nights, including all meals—so patients are urged to book at the same time they schedule their medical procedures.

“We wanted to build an environment where the patient doesn’t have to figure anything out,” says Gordon. “When it’s time to see the doctor, they just walk downstairs to his office.”

The spa includes an array of treatments that cater specifically to postoperatives. The Mermaid Wassage, for example, is a massage given on a waterbedlike cushion, eliminating any need to turn over since the therapist’s hands can slip easily underneath the body. The rooms also house lymphatic drainage machines to ease fluid retention from puffy, facelifted skin or liposuctioned thighs. Of course, there are the basics, like manicures and pedicures (to accessorize one’s newly lean legs), and staff members are also trained by Gordon in the delicate art of a postfacelift shampoo.

With its discreet back staircases, cozy fireplaces and Colonial plank floors, Split Rock could make a guest forget the reason she checked in in the first place. Which may make it easier to lie to your friends when you return from your “two-week bike tour through Italy.”

—JANE LARKWORTHY



clockwise from far left: Split Rock’s charming exterior; Neil Gordon in his state-of-the-art operating theater; in the midst of a soothing facial; morning tea; spa director Judith Stanton; a Mermaid Wassage treatment at the spa

