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SMOOTH OPERATORS

The men embracing the aesthetics revolution



BEAUTY AESTHETICS

Skin in the game

Men have joined the quest to look young, writes Divya Venkataraman.



It started with a single line, straight down the centre of his forehead. Fuzz Ali, 39, wasn't impressed. "I just didn't feel like I looked like myself." Ali was no stranger to aesthetic treatments – he'd dabbled with lactic acid peels and facials in the past – but the Line prompted an appointment for anti-wrinkle treatment. He lay back and allowed the needles to prick his skin. Two weeks later, he was back to his old self.

That was three years ago. Now, Ali, a Sydney-based chef and food presenter, gets top-ups of Botox every quarter. He also gets injections of Rejuran, a treatment extracted from salmon DNA that rejuvenates skin – "the one everyone was calling 'salmon sperm'." Most of his sessions have gone without a hitch. One notable time, though, he emerged from a "salmon sperm" session looking "horrifying".

"It looked like I'd been punched in the face," he says. "I had this gigantic bruise under my eye, my eyeball looked like it was falling out. I looked like Quasimodo for a week."

"But it was worth it." Ali is part of a growing cadre of men taking their wrinkles into their own hands. (Or rather, inviting aesthetic medicine practitioners to take them into theirs.) Stars from Simon Cowell to Gordon Ramsay have spoken about their experiences with Botox. In 2022, Joe Jonas began touting a "natural" alternative to botulinum toxin called Xeomin, and became its paid face. Online, TikTok sleuths who once dedicated themselves to scouring famous women's faces for evidence of aesthetic modification are NOW taking the likes of Brad Pitt and George Clooney into their purview.



Left: Brad Boyde. Above: Fuzz Ali. PHOTOS: EAMON GALLAGHER, LOUISE KENNERLEY

Some injectors noticed a sharp spike of patients – both men and women – during the so-called "Zoom boom" following the pandemic, fuelled by the hours of on-screen close-ups that marked many of our working days. For many, it's only continued: global market forecasts for aesthetic medicine expect growth of between \$US90 billion (Fortune Business Insights) and \$US252 billion (Precedence Research) by 2033. Locally, a 2024 YouGov survey found that among Australians aware of non-surgical cosmetic procedures, men had forked out for more laser and injectable treatments over the previous 18 months than women (excluding Botox).

Most men don't want to look younger per se – they want to look sharper, healthier and well-rested.

Dr Michael O'Gorman

"Men are realising, more and more, that there's a role for early intervention," says Dr Michael O'Gorman, who has been practising aesthetic medicine in London and Melbourne since 2004. Men come to his clinics for Botox, fillers, resurfacing treatments, lasers, exosome therapy and more. In the UK, he says, men make up around 22 per cent of his customer base, while in Australia, the number is almost 25 per cent.

He believes the figure was "closer to five per cent" when he started practising more than 20 years ago. "There's much more awareness these days – men are getting in

before the ageing process really starts."

It's a similar story for Dr Phoebe Jones, co-founder and medical director of Beauty by Doctor in Sydney's Bondi Junction. "Twenty per cent of our patients are men, and that proportion has steadily increased over the past five years," she says. Jones' male patients are, by and large, seeking "subtle, undetectable improvements": laser treatments for sun damage, anti-wrinkle treatments, collagen treatments and surgical procedures. "There's been a steady rise in upper eyelid surgery," she says.

For the celebrity facialist Melanie Grant, the number sits at 15 per cent. "While it may seem modest," she says, "it represents a massive cultural shift. It's no longer a niche or outlier segment, it makes up a core part of my client base."

The stigma around men's aesthetics is receding. But is that a sign of progress or are we only pulling more vectors of society into a Sisyphean quest for ageless perfection?

For some, aesthetic intervention is just another part of a "holistic" regimen. Many of O'Gorman's clients – aged between 30 and 80 – see it as self-care. "In the way people go to the gym, they look after themselves, they want to do this, too," he says.

That's definitely how real estate director Brad Boyde feels. Boyde, 41, trains most days; he runs triathlons; he has his whole body checked for moles and precancerous cells each year. "You have to look at [skin] as a whole organ," he says.

Boyde started experimenting with aesthetic treatments through Botox in his forehead and around his eyes. Over time, he added hyaluronic filler to his lips, nose, cheeks and under-eyes.

"I have less wrinkles now than I did when I was 27," he says.

He's been getting injectables for a decade and often goes to appointments with his mother and sister. "They love it too. We have a nice day out."

For Boyde, who lives in regional Victoria, the goal isn't to radically transform but to preserve. "I'm definitely not trying to turn mutton into lamb," he says. "I don't want to look as young

as I can." And this preservation isn't just about vanity. In Boyde's line of work, presenting well yields tangible outcomes. "I mean, I'm in real estate," he says. It was, in fact, a colleague who referred him to his now injector. (When I ask if he is open to being photographed for this story, he agrees, and then takes a beat. "Once my Botox kicks in.")

Jones' male patients sometimes reference their work lives during consultations. "Men in their 50s, 60s and thereafter, particularly in corporate or client-facing roles, often express concern about looking tired or older than their peers," she says. "That said, most men don't want to look younger per se – they want to look sharper, healthier and well-rested."

Historically cosmetic medical treatments were quite stigmatised, especially for men, she says. "But people often forget that men have insecurities about themselves and self-image is an important pillar of health."

On an individual level, whether for men or women, says O'Gorman, the logic behind getting cosmetic work done is the same: "People – all people – want to feel better about themselves. If it's a guy who wants his under-eyes filled or a woman who wants her cheeks lifted, it's all the same. We're just here to help them feel better, more confident, more like who they feel like on the inside."

And while many of the procedures are also the same across genders, there are differences in the end goal – and therefore in the techniques involved. "Men are a little different to women: the focus is on 'masculining' – so angles. Chins, noses, jawlines. Whereas with women, it's often about softening and plumping."

I ask Fuzz Ali how much his aesthetic regimen costs a year. He pauses. "That's a very good question."

"The treatments are expensive," admits Boyde when asked the same query. "But what do you do? Not get Botox for 10 years, and get a facelift when you're 40? It's like going to [sportswear brand] 2XU and dropping two grand on workout gear," he says. "It's an investment. Or that's what I tell myself, anyway." **L&L**

"No one uses the C word," says Eddie Wong as he gives me the grand tour of MS The World, the floating home of an ultra-wealthy elite who pass their days circumnavigating the globe. Sydney-born Wong is the ship's residential director – responsible for its 165 apartments – and social spark plug. He greets and exchanges pleasantries with every resident we meet while strolling from the main plaza on deck five to the expansive spa and fitness area, the four restaurants, theatre, library, pool deck and up to the full-sized tennis court (the only one at sea) on deck 12.

At first blush the architecture and amenities do feel rather like a cruise ship, even if no one uses the C word. But a three-day voyage from Melbourne to Sydney in January reveals the many extraordinary ways in which The World differs from commercial cruising.

Any prejudices I had about the stuffiness of the ship's affluent inhabitants vanish on night one when Austrian general manager Thomas Legner, a silver fox in a chalk-stripe suit, ushers me below decks to the mess where crew are enjoying one of their regular "enhanced dinners" sponsored by residents. There are carving stations of ham, salmon and beef, a triple-deck tower of king prawns and abundant wines. Seeing mega-millionaires dine alongside their employees in the vessel's underbelly was not on my bingo card.

Afterwards in the split-level Marina restaurant, which transforms into an actual marina in ports, Legner explains The World is "a combination of so many different things ... it's a homeowners' association, a country club, a ship, a five-star hotel".

Today's special is Sydney rock lobster, served grilled or steamed with buttery sauces. I have the Ibérico ham and a spicy prawn kedgeree, Legner has the barramundi, and we share a terrific Rosengartl gemischter satz from his

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native Vienna, one of 1400 premium labels stocked in the award-winning, 15,000-bottle cellar.

Choice is a cornerstone of the charmed life on The World. Staff maintain a 2200-strong list of food and beverage preferences ranging from allergies to what shape ice cubes owners like in their cocktails. "We are working with very high net-worth customers," says food and beverage director Armand Louw. "It's about personalised services and creating memories for them."

For example, Max – one of the ship's youngest residents (two families live on board more or less permanently) – turns seven during our voyage, so staff prepare a menu of his favourite things: Alaskan king crab, Italian truffles, and a chocolate salted-caramel birthday cake.

When the ship was in Curacao, executive chef Sebastian Gnida had a 250-kilogram tuna flown in because one guest eats only cold-water fish. "We have a very wealthy budget. As long as we stay within it, there's no problem," says Gnida.

On the same day I come aboard at Melbourne's Station Pier, a couple from Monaco arrives to test-drive the ship to Sydney and over to New Zealand. They are "very familiar with private yachts", Wong assures me, but want to see if this is the right fit for them. Prospective buyers can sail three times before making up their minds. Residents' friends and family are also welcome on The World, as are guests of Exclusive Resorts, an invitation-only holiday club that owns four apartments.

Wong says he sold around 20 apartments last year. Prices range from \$US3 million-\$US15 million (\$4.3 million-\$21.5 million); annual maintenance (similar to strata) fees average \$US500,000 to \$US600,000.

There are still a handful of original residents and some 20 crew from The World's conception. Launched in 2002 by

the Norwegian shipping magnate Knut Kloster as a hybrid homeowner-hotel model – deck six was bookable cabins, sold to help cover running costs – it sailed into bankruptcy a year later. Residents rallied to rescue the ship from insolvency (one bought 10 apartments) and have owned and managed it since.

[The World] is a combination of so many different things ... it's a homeowners' association, a country club, a ship, a five-star hotel.

Thomas Legner, general manager

Itineraries are planned by committee years ahead to secure anchorages in an increasingly competitive cruise market. Port stays tend to last several days so that residents can explore properly via 'destination experiences' (nothing so gauche as a shore excursion), overland adventures and thrice-yearly, expeditions to remote parts of the planet.

After touring New Zealand, The World set course for Antarctica, hoping (but ultimately failing) to reclaim its 2024 record for voyaging the furthest south of any vessel. The last time it was in Antarctica, board member Andrea Newman camped on the continent with 14 fellow residents at the ultra-exclusive Three Glaciers Camp, whose past guests include Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page.

After flying to the geographic South Pole, they spent a week snowmobiling, skiing, hiking and "having a wonderful time," says Newman, who worked in the Reagan White House and as a lobbyist for various US-based airlines.

"And it was all set up by the ship!"

This is my third stint on The World. The first was in Auckland in 2003 (pre-bankruptcy) for the America's Cup. It was more formal then. Jackets and ties at dinner. Zero social media. Doggy internet (Elon Musk's Starlink satellite constellation has been a gamechanger). My contact with residents was strictly controlled, but I met one Australian man, the pseudonymous Bob, in his elegant deck-10 apartment. Bob had been recently widowed; this time I dine with him and his new wife – let's call her Katherine – at the sleek pan-Asian eatery East.

Bob agrees the vibe onboard has changed noticeably in the past decade. The community is younger – the average age is early 60s – the mood more relaxed. Nevertheless, Katherine took some convincing to first join him on the ship in 2019. Like every resident I speak to, they both single out the importance of the onboard community. "The friendships are incredibly deep," says Katherine. "I always use the expression: 'Disparate backgrounds, common interests,'" says Bob. "You share these pretty incredible experiences that add to the dialogue and the memory building."

As we cruise, spectacularly, through the heads into Sydney Harbour on a Saturday morning, residents sip champagne on deck 12 while Wong's on the mic pointing out major landmarks and the harbourside homes of various World residents. Among them are the philanthropist and gallerist Judith Neilson, and others I can't name with homes in Mosman and apartments at Woolloomooloo Wharf and One Barangaroo. He shows no discretion whatsoever. It's a whole new world. **L&L**

The writer was a guest of The World.



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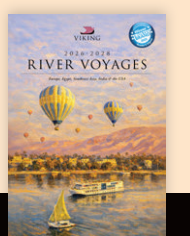
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