



From the moment you enter The Cosmetic Surgery Clinic, you notice the care that has been taken to create a space that's chic and modern – from the well-aligned black-and-white photography on the crisp white walls to the sleek partitions and sliding doors. The design demonstrates the dedication to perfection and beauty that runs throughout the personal and private life of the practice's director – 46-year-old plastic surgeon, Dr Martin Huang.

Midway through his general surgery training in the late 80s, Dr Huang realised that the most satisfying part of an operation was stitching up the skin at the end and creating a beautiful scar. After much soul-searching, he decided to specialize in plastic surgery. "My philosophy in terms of how I wanted to develop my career was to be extremely interested in a particular area and just try to be really good at it, instead of being a jack-of-all-trades," Dr Huang says.

Before starting his own cosmetic surgery practice, Dr Huang spent the early part of his career focusing on re-constructive plastic surgery at the Singapore General Hospital. "In re-constructive work, we deal with abnormal conditions and try to make patients normal, whereas in cosmetic work we are helping normal people look better," he says. "In the re-constructive arena, my area of expertise is craniomaxillofacial surgery and cleft lip and palate surgery. Basically, these are birth defects of the head and face. I still have an interest in it and I still practice it, but the nature of my current practice is overwhelmingly cosmetic."

Dr Huang says cosmetic procedures, particularly on the face, breast and body, can be just as rewarding. "It's a common misconception in my opinion that re-constructive surgery is more rewarding than cosmetic surgery because many people, even people in the medical profession, think that if you're dealing with a patient born with a birth defect, helping them look normal again has got to be a lot more rewarding than creating double eye-lids for a normal patient or changing somebody's nose to make it look nicer or giving a woman breast implants. I totally disagree

with that because what makes doing a certain kind of work rewarding is the change that it causes in a patient. The positive change that can be effected in a cosmetic patient can be just as great and dramatic and significant as the positive change effected in a patient with a birth defect. So I think it's a little unfair to belittle the importance of cosmetic surgery."

That positive change, Dr Huang says, is the real goal of cosmetic surgery. "As paradoxical as it may sound I don't think we're in the business of creating beauty," he says. "We can create beautiful features and beautiful attributes but beauty is more than the sum of the parts. It's more than just a collection of beautiful features because the character and the personality of the person are very important as well. We can't create that part."

When he's not tied up in surgery, Dr Huang hopes to find some time to finish his soon-to-be published book entitled: *Make Me Beautiful: An expert guide to cosmetic surgery*. "I'm trying to give the reader a lot more insight into cosmetic surgery both in terms of the psychological aspect of it, as well as even the technical aspect of it, like what we're actually doing and why we're doing it. It's almost like a medical textbook on cosmetic surgery for the layman." He thinks people who are interested in cosmetic surgery will find the book intriguing "because it's almost like what I would explain to my patients during a consultation, except that here I'm going even more in-depth. Normally, the patient who comes to the office for a consultation will often times do their own research on the Internet and read up on the surgery that they're thinking of having, about all the risks and the complications. So that's why I feel it will be of value, because it's stuff that I tell my patients everyday except that you can never tell them everything because it would take up too much time."

Often working 12 to 15 hour days (he once spent a record-breaking 17 hours in surgery), Dr Huang finds it hard to juggle work and keeping himself fit. He plays tennis and works out with a personal trainer once a week. "I have two personal trainers actually,

# In pursuit of perfection

Dr Martin Huang might be a walking advertisement for the plastic surgery industry, but you'd be surprised by how many short cuts he takes on his personal path to beauty. By Caroline Chan Jordan

one works with me on flexibility and balance, and then the other one is more strength training for my tennis and also general fitness." Like all of us, Dr Huang struggles to squeeze regular workouts into his busy schedule. "I try hard to maintain that schedule because I feel it's very important to stay healthy and fit because if you allow your job to consume your health, and then your health deteriorates and you get sick then that's a real tragedy. So I'm very aware of that and I'm probably not the best example but at least I'm aware and I'm trying, like many people."

So what about nutrition? You'd think that as a doctor, Dr Huang's diet would be a model for us all. But you'd be wrong. "I have to admit I'm probably a poor example because every morning I have juice and coffee and all my nutritional supplements. I don't really eat breakfast as such. Then I might have lunch or I might not and then I'll have dinner so on average I eat two meals a day. It's uncommon for me to eat three meals a day. I know that there are many nutritionists who'll say that you must eat five small meals a day and I have no argument against that but I do feel also that every individual is different, everyone's metabolism is different. The reason why I don't eat breakfast is just that I'm not hungry in the morning and if I find I'm not hungry at lunch well then I won't eat then either."

To keep alert during long hours in the operating theatre, Dr Huang relies on that tried and true energy booster, caffeine. "When I'm doing really long surgery, which causes me to have to skip a meal, I keep myself going with coke and coffee," he says. "I'm a bit of a caffeine addict I have to admit."

Like many of his patients, Dr Huang has had his own struggle with weight. A short-term stint on the low-carbohydrate Atkins Diet, which Dr Huang says isn't necessarily the right plan for everyone, helped him slim down. He's now back to eating carbohydrates, but has a secret weapon for keeping off the pounds. "I eat carbohydrates, but I try to control the intake," he says. "The other thing I do, which is kind of cheating a little bit, is when I eat carbohydrates in a main meal I take two things to minimise the absorption of carbs in my system. I take something called Well Bet X PGX. It's a compound which binds the carbohydrates in your digestive system so it doesn't get absorbed into your body. Then I take a medication called Glucobay, which via a different mechanism also

## The latest cosmetic procedures

- **LASER VAGINAL REJUVENATION – LVR**  
A procedure that tightens the vagina for the purpose of enhancing sexual gratification.
- **DESIGNER LASER VAGINOPLASTY – DLV**  
DLV focuses on the external appearance of the vagina. As a woman ages the tissues become saggy so redundant tissue is removed in order to achieve a more taught and youthful appearance. The labia majora, the external lips, sometimes shrink with age and so fat is sometimes injected into those lips to make them more plump and full. However, it's not all about appearance when it concerns the external

genitals. With age, redundant skin tends to develop and covers the clitoris. This makes it harder for the clitoris to become exposed during sex and so in turn makes clitoral stimulation more difficult.

- **VASER LIPOSELECTION**  
Vaser is an acronym for ultrasound. It stands for 'Vibration Amplification of Sound and Energy by Resonance'. This has to do with liposuction, the second most common cosmetic surgery operation. The key feature of this technique is, an ultrasound probe is inserted into the fat before it is sucked out allowing the ultrasound energy to break down the fat and liquefy it so that when it is sucked out, it's in liquid form and not solid. This is important because if you liquefy the fat before it is sucked out, it can be

removed more easily, hence traumatising the tissues less and also allowing for a more effective and thorough removal of the fat. Contrary to what some people believe, the fat removed by liposuction is in many areas very tough and difficult to remove.

- **VASER ASSISTED HIGH DEFINITION LIPOSCULPTURE – VAHDL**  
An advanced body contouring technique, using ultrasound on the superficial layer of fat (the layer closest to the underside of the skin), to sculpt the torso in order to create the appearance of a very well toned and athletic figure, including a six-pack in males and a tube pack in females. Also known as High Definition Contouring of the body. A procedure not possible before the introduction of Vaser.

minimises carbohydrate absorption. The other thing that I'm learning to do is not be greedy. You're full but you just want to have another helping because the food is nice."

Dr Huang's also refreshingly candid about the extra "help" he has to maintain a youthful appearance. "Everyday I inject myself with growth hormones, but I do that because my levels were low so I inject to keep them normal" he says. "It's very common you know, as we reach middle-age onwards, for hormonal levels to drop. People are not so aware of it and they don't pay much attention to it, although there is increasing awareness as to the importance of hormones in ageing and anti-ageing."

Another anti-ageing secret is cell therapy. "I do it for patients and I've done it for myself. Basically the idea is this, we inject foetal cells from animals into our bodies and what happens is that all the cellular material from these fetuses gets incorporated into our cells and makes our cells function better. That's the concept." Dr Huang's dedication to holding back the ageing process doesn't end there, though. "I use other things too. I use medical grade skin care to rejuvenate the skin and then

I've been through some procedures. I get Botox done every now and then, I've been through two Thermage procedures and several Refirme procedures." Thermage and Refirme are non-surgical face lifting procedures where a machine is used to deliver radio-frequency and infrared energy into the skin, causing the collagen fibres to tighten.

For many of us, injecting growth hormones and animal foetal cells into our bodies to halt the march of time sounds like vanity gone awry. For Dr Huang, it's also about business. "Appearance is important to me and since I'm in the business I do try to maintain my own appearance because you know you have to walk the talk," he says. "If you're always trying to make patients look more beautiful and you're a negative example of that yourself you're just a poor advertisement for your own business. But I truly believe that it is important to look good. It adds to the quality of your life. I'm a very visual person and I like things of beauty so even in my work and home, I have to admit, I like to be in an environment that is visually pleasant."

Not surprisingly, Dr Huang played a large role in customizing his lavish office in the Paragon, another example of his very hands-on pursuit of perfection. ♥