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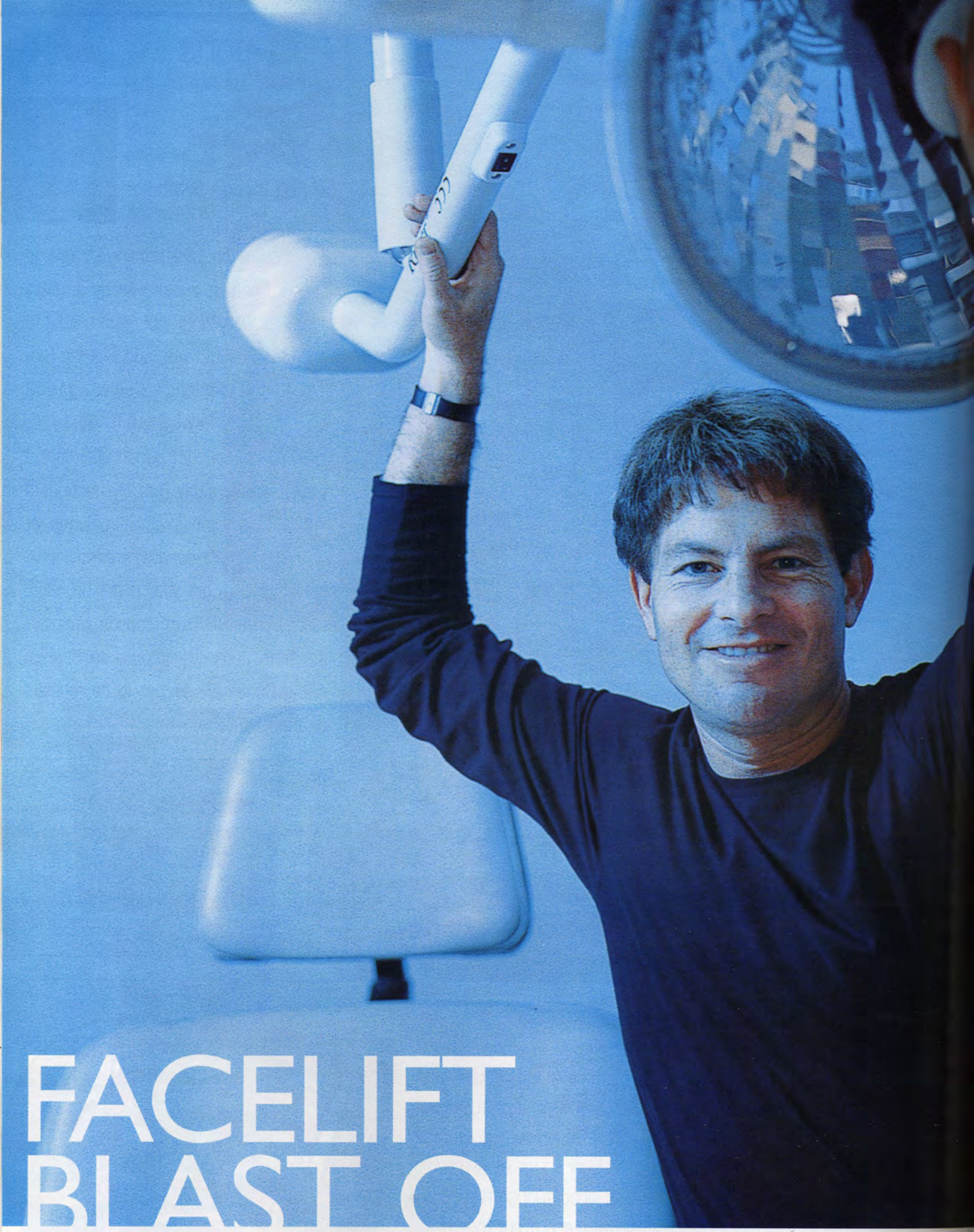

FACELIFT BLAST OFF

ATLANTA WOMEN LINE UP OUTSIDE THIS MAN'S DOOR. HERE'S WHY.

So, I guess you have to chalk this one up to "it was just time." Until the week I considered making the call, I can honestly say I was always of the "thanks, but no thanks" mentality when it came to plastic surgery. When I began mentioning my proposed procedure to friends and family, I couldn't believe the response. No questions or concerns about me, thank you very much — just all about what they would have done if given the cash and opportunity. Even my very conservative mother-in-law rattled off several procedures in order of priority. We are, in fact, a community obsessed with the idea of a cosmetic quick fix.

Let's begin with the cash and opportunity. If I were going to do anything – I mean anything at all – it had to be with the right Doc. I found perfection in Dr. Larry Lefkoff. Friends bragged about his celebrity clients and his amazing practice in Beverly Hills. After practicing in bi-coastal mode for several years, he and his wife decided Atlanta was far superior for raising a family than the bewitching environs of Beverly Hills. When I say friends raved, I mean this guy got plus, plus marks. I set up an appointment, tucked my ego between my credit cards and went in for the consult.

The first thing you notice about Dr. Lefkoff is his energy. He's always on. The conversations I overheard (because everything is very discreet) were warm and comfortable, like friends chatting. He has an amazing charm. I have read several articles about patients falling for their surgeon, and there is no doubt that Dr. Lefkoff gets his share of mid-age crushes. He studied with famous face man Dr. Frank Kamer at the Lasky Clinic in Beverly Hills. Now he holds court here in the pristine medical offices off Mt. Vernon Highway in Sandy Springs and performs almost all surgeries at an Emory Medical Center. Furthermore, Dr. Lefkoff only does procedures relating to the face. Not to say other "do-it-all" docs aren't competent, but I somehow found comfort in knowing that I'd picked one that quite possibly knew it all when it came to my face.

When you arrive for your consult, don't be surprised if you're solo in the waiting room. Privacy is revered, so appointments are scheduled not to overlap. You are then invited to a well-lit room were the obligatory compliments are made to help neutralize the criticisms that are an inevitable part of the consultation. Lefkoff compliments my bone structure and skin density. I learn how thick skin handles surgery better and some amazing other tidbits regarding my face. Somehow I had missed, in 30-plus years of looking in the mirror, that my asymmetrical angles favor my left side. Trust me, at this point all these revelations are truly fascinating. By the time Dr. Lefkoff asks the all-important question – "What is it about your face you'd like to change?" – I know the response to this one, and yes, it is my final answer. I want to get rid of a huge crease right smack between my otherwise relatively wrinkle-free eyes.

You know the saying "compliment before critique"? Well, this is the part where I'm happy to have thick skin. Dr. Lefkoff gently explains that the crease is not so much a crease but rather the result of a drooping brow. He makes me perform a little test, which I challenge you to try in the privacy of your home. Sit and look in the mirror and completely relax your face. Close your eyes, completely relax, almost sleep-like, and then, with no expression, open your eyes. When I did this, I was amazed. There it was – a completely heavy, droopy brow with accompanying big dark circles underneath. I was devastated. At that moment I realize how critical it is to have someone like Dr. Lefkoff, who reassures me that after all is said and done, I'll be fabulous and look like myself in my twenties – a phrase that makes all the pain goes away. I schedule my Endoscopic

PHOTOS BY C. NOEL AND THOMAS BIRDWELL

I really can't notice a difference. It's like losing five pounds — not enough to ignite the "Boy, you look skinny" routine, just the "Wow, you look great" line. I don't notice a difference until I see the "before" pictures. I cannot believe the change.

What does the über surgeon do in his spare time? How about give his house a facelift? This primitive '70s styled ranch was transformed into a Tuscan country home by Dr. Lefkoff and his wife, who did most of the design and décor. Pictured: Lefkoff, his wife, Bundi, and children Blake and Jenna.

Browlift and Lower Blepharoplasty for the very next week.

The browlift in layman's terms is performed similarly to arthroscopic knee surgery. A surgical camera on the end of a probe is inserted into three incisions made just behind the hairline. Your forehead is then, for lack of a better term, "hiked-up." My dark-circle problem will disappear after Dr. Lefkoff removes the fat from beneath my eye where when water pools from stress or over tiredness, it gives a shadowing effect that causes the dark discoloration. It all sounds simple enough, so off to the hospital I go. After a brief visit at registration, I head upstairs to meet with my anesthesia team. They ask routine questions, followed by some bloodwork and pre-op instructions. All of the people I meet are very nice, very understanding and very compassionate.

I guess it's the woman in me or the person I am, but somehow, the closer to surgery I get the more guilt I feel. If you're not a person who can take a day off every once in a while or have a massage just because you deserve it, cosmetic surgery may prove to be very challenging. First of all, it does cost, and insurance doesn't pay a penny. My two procedures, including oper-

ating room, anesthesia and the most talented cosmetic artist available, will cost a total of $7,851.00. Needless to say, no new shoes for a while. Then there is the guilt of leaving the children and husband and the off-chance of complications. This decision to have cosmetic surgery in order to recapture my youth is not an easy one.

Thankfully, Dr. Lefkoff has an ace when it comes to chickening out and her name is Nell Bennett. Ms. Bennett was recently recognized in *W* magazine as one of the top cosmetic surgery nurses in the country. She calls herself the patient's Valium. The days leading up to the surgery you'll feel a little nervous, which is totally normal. But believe me, the day before, you'll seriously contemplate canceling. Call Nell. She'll reassure you and talk you through the details, which brings me back to the surgery. I'm scheduled at 8 a.m. and decide to take a cab to the hospital. This may sound strange, but it's both too early and too personal to bother friends; and with no surrounding family and a husband willing to watch the baby, I decide to go it alone. Waiting for the cab in the pitch-black hour of early morning is agonizing and seems to take hours.

I walk in, meet my crew, put on my gown and get really, really nervous. The nurse tries to calm and reassure me, but it is all just too much at this minute. Then in comes the magic-maker and I am totally fine. Dr. Lefkoff washes my face with betadine and alcohol and marks my face just like the documentaries of facelifts we've all watched or read about in magazines. I remember absolutely nothing after this point until I wake up in recovery. My nice anesthesiologists are also very good at what they do.

Nurse Nell Bennett has a special program offered to patients of Dr. Lefkoff as well as some other surgeons she works with: Your very own private nurse picks you up from recovery and takes you around the corner to a side entrance of a nearby hotel. There you will be iced every hour and given precisely the right amount of Demerol to keep you out of misery for 24 straight hours. It's absolutely crazy to max out your credit cards or wipe out your savings and not pay the extra $650.00 for this personal care. Especially if you have kids, you'll be in no shape to even try and have a conversation with them, let alone take care of your family. Hear me and hear me good: stay with Nell Bennett and her staff of nurses, you can thank me later.

My head is fully wrapped in gauze and my face, despite icing around the clock, is considerably bruised and swollen. As I wobble to the bathroom I notice a woman in the adjoining room is recovering from a facelift, which is ironically comforting. I like knowing that someone else has also made this decision. I am seated in the tub, and my bandages are removed and my hair is gently washed. I get dressed and after a quick visit from Dr. Lefkoff, my husband picks me up and I'm off to home. I keep my sunglasses on, so I won't scare the baby (or my husband, for that matter) and discover that I'm relatively pain-free. Pain was never a word I would associate with any of the procedures or recovery, just discomfort. I ice religiously but I am still really swollen and bruised. The standard prognosis for recovery is surgery on Friday followed by sunglasses and back to work on Monday. I, like a small percentage of you candidates reading this, bruised far worse and was far more swollen than most.

I have an office visit the following week with Dr. Lefkoff, and am told everything is progressing fine. I really can't notice a difference. It's like losing five pounds – not enough to ignite the "Boy, you look skinny" routine, just the "Wow, you look great" line. I don't notice a difference until I see the "before" pictures. I cannot believe the change. The initial complaint crease between the eyes is gone and – thanks to some frown muscle work, the creases will never return. I now completely understand why regular folks like me get addicted to the surgical process. I am asked over and over would I do it again, and I definitely would. Swelling and bruises were a small price to pay for a face that looks ten years younger.

What typical face procedures cost with Dr. Lefkoff

- THE FACELIFT/RHYTIDECTOMY - $10,000
- UPPER-LOWER BLEPHAROPLASTY (EYE-EYELIDS) - $4,000
- ENDOSCOPE (BROW-FOREHEAD) - $4,000
- RHINOPLASTY (NOSE RESHAPING) - $5,000
- LASER RESURFACING (FULL FACE) - $5,000