

TREND



recently saw it described on the net, an “Armani punani”). There’s the standard Laser Vaginal Rejuvenation – a procedure which involves laser-treating the lining of the opening of the vagina and tightening up the “relaxed” underlining support tissues and muscles “to both relieve the symptoms of urinary stress incontinence and enhance sexual gratification”, as the brochure goes. “Because here’s the fallacy,” says Matlock, “if you’re that relaxed down there, you can do Kegels until you’re blue in the face – it’s not going to change a thing.” Then there’s Designer Laser Vaginoplasty: an umbrella term for a number of procedures, including Hymenoplasty, “for restoration of the hymen” (very popular, apparently, with Middle Eastern and Latin clients), Laser Labioplasty, “for the reduction of the labia minora”, and Vulvar Lipoplasty, involving liposculpturing, “for the aesthetic reduction of the prominent or protruding mons pubis”. Then there is Laser Perineoplasty “for the aesthetic rejuvenation of the sagging vulvar structures and introitus”. And then if one wants to be really daring there’s something he just invented called G-spot Amplification: a procedure which consists of injecting a collagen-based substance called the G-Shot into the G-spot and which, as the glossy leaflet reads, can potentially make you feel jiggy even when you’re driving the car or taking a yoga class.

Is nowhere private?

The latest cosmetic surgery craze in America is for enhancing the most intimate of areas – the vagina. But whatever next? And who’s really reaping the benefits? By Christa D’Souza

The neck, the knees, the backs of the hands. That fleshy part just above the cleavage, or perhaps even the whites of the eyes. If you want to gauge a woman’s real age, these, they always say, are the places you should look to first. There’s another place too, though, which shows the telltale signs of wear and tear, but it’s not really polite to talk about it in company. Not unless you’re a celebrity and doing it on stage with cue-cards. Or unless you live in Beverly Hills, which is where I am now, just about to enter the plush, pink-marbled portals of a place called The Laser Vaginal Rejuvenation Institute of Los Angeles, an establishment set up by one Dr Matlock, *the* man, I’m told by everyone out here, for, well, “rejuvenating” ladies’ vaginas.

In the background, classical music is playing. In one corner of the light, airy room, fresh coffee is being percolated; in another is a bank

of shiny, state-of-the-art wheelchairs. “Just don’t step over the red line – it’s the sterile zone,” a pretty assistant in scrubs warns, as she leads the way past the in-house operating theatre, through to the doctor’s office – another room that looks as if it’s been lifted straight off the set of *Nip/Tuck*. An urgent, gobliny figure of a man, with the whitest set of teeth I’ve ever seen, Dr Matlock is also dressed in scrubs and sitting expectantly at a desk, clear of all objects save a large plastic model of the female anatomy and an impressive leather-bound portfolio of “Befores & Afters”.

There is, it transpires, a whole cornucopia of procedures to choose from for the woman who would like a designer vagina (or as I

“It’s an office procedure,” explains the doctor, who bears a passing resemblance to the actor Samuel L Jackson. “You walk in, I put you in a room by yourself so you know where your G spot is, and I give you an injection which lasts five seconds. You’re in here for five minutes – that’s all it takes.” What, and one can get on a plane the same day? “Get on a plane the same day?” splutters Dr “You Won’t Believe How Good Sex Can Be” Matlock proudly. “All’s you do is put a tampon in, take it out after four hours and then afterwards you

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can do anything you want, even have sex. And you can have it done right now. *Right now.* I'm telling you, this is safer and easier than going to the dentist."

G-spot Amplification. Vaginal rejuvenation. Anal bleaching, even. There is nothing – but nothing, it seems, you cannot have done in this town; no part of the body, in this day and age, which is off-limits to the plastic surgeon, where it is inappropriate to strive for ultimate perfection. Perfection, in this case, being a punani that feels and looks like it's been grafted out of the pages of *Playboy* (the magazine most clients bring in when they have their first consultation with Dr Matlock).

But then the widespread trend for porn-star style waxing has proved a major incentive for breaking this last frontier of cosmetic enhancement. As Dr Gary Alter, a urologist/plastic surgeon whose equally high-profile Beverly Hills practice offers both labial and vaginal rejuvenation, puts it, "You know, when you're into shaving as much as we are in this part of the world, it's important you look neat and tidy down there." Or as

Dianne Rosenberg, another labial rejuvenation practitioner based in San Diego, offers, "There's so much more on show now than ever before thanks to the influence of the porn industry. You can't get a bikini wax in this town without it being a Brazilian. Remember those big, luxuriant bushes we all had in the Sixties and Seventies? They hid a multitude of sins."

I know. Not in the pages of *Vogue*, right? As a friend whom I buttonholed for this piece wondered, after asking me to repeat what I had said because she hadn't quite understood the question, "Isn't that something that African tribesmen do to their women?" Or as another promptly replied when I asked her via e-mail what she thought of the idea, "Noo, thank you very much. Just thinking about it makes me go hot with embarrassment." Says another, "What would be the point? We've done it precisely three times since I had my second child two years ago. I'd much rather spend the money on a new car or permanent help at the weekend." Or as my friend Gigi, a mother of two married to a successful film producer, more brazenly offers, "I haven't seen my **** since the time I lost my diaphragm up there somewhere, and I say that's the way it should be. If I started worrying about that I'd have to start worrying about the freckles on the tops



of my legs, or the flap of skin hanging over my C-section scar... Oh Christ, don't even get me started."

Most men I managed to talk to about the subject, bless them, seemed equally unenthusiastic about the idea. As one father of three explained, "If I wanted to have sex with someone who felt like a 16-year-old, then I should probably go and do it with a 16-year-old. There's something grotesque and wrong about a woman you've lived with for years, who you've seen giving birth to your babies, looking like a little girl down there." Or as a father of four I know says, "Women assume we discuss their bits with our friends in the pub, but in fact we really don't. It's their problem more than ours, and nine times out of 10 we're just happy to be having sex at all." Which is a somewhat comforting thought if, like me, you'd always half assumed that when boys got round the snooker table with their after-dinner stickies, that's all they ever discussed.

And yet, when one thinks of how we live in an age where 40 is supposed to look like 30,

and 50 is supposed to look like 40, when thanks to the influence of Viagra there's no reason why those of us old enough to collect our pensions shouldn't be banging away at each other like rabbits; how pornography has so successfully insinuated itself into the mainstream, become such an inescapable part, via the internet, of all of our lives; and of how there's now a sex-toy boutique in Selfridges... Shouldn't we probably stop putting our hands over our ears and yelling rhubarb? After all, if every other body part can be cosmetically enhanced without inviting accusations of freakishness, is it really such an awfully big deal? What's the point, one could argue, of spending all that money on a pair of bosoms like Christina's and a belly like Britney's if you haven't got the front bottom to match?

Let it be said that operations on the area are hardly news. In 1926, a group of German and Austrian gynaecologists pioneered the idea of tightening the vagina to relieve symptoms of urinary stress incontinence, genital prolapse,

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bowel dysfunctions and so forth after childbirth. Since then the three basic operations, anterior colporrhaphy, posterior colporrhaphy and perineorrhaphy have been tailored by urogynaecologists throughout the world to match a patient's particular problem. Labiaplasty, meanwhile, has been discreetly performed for decades by British gynaecologists and plastic surgeons – in rare cases, even on the NHS – for women whose vaginal lips are causing them psychological or even physical distress. But marketing it under the term of Vaginal or Labial Rejuvenation? Doing it for cosmetic rather than functional purposes? Advertising it as such in general-interest magazines? As Malcolm Gillard, an independent obstetrician and gynaecologist with one of the largest and most successful private practices in London, puts it, "If the surgery is being done for a medical reason, that is one thing, but if it's being done purely >

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and Richard Waite

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for aesthetic purposes, I would have to question the wisdom. I get dozens of requests from patients to make things different down there. But in my opinion, if, say a marriage is on the rocks, or a woman's self-esteem is broken, then a 'designer vagina' is not going to mend it."

"I would not refer to vaginal surgery as vaginal rejuvenation," offers Linda Cardozo, Professor of Urogynaecology at King's College Hospital, London. "There's a big difference between tартing up an area to look pretty in a G-string and enabling a part of the body that has been damaged to work properly again. On the other hand, increasingly, it is all about choice. Women are bombarded with images, whether via men's magazines or the internet, and inevitably perfectly normal-looking women are going to start reaching for their hand mirrors. The other day I had a woman and a daughter come in together who wanted their labia trimmed because they 'didn't feel right in the ladies' changingroom at the gym'."

Having appeared on last year's Channel 4 documentary *Designer Vaginas*, which attracted more viewers than the news, which was on at the same time, Cardozo probably has a slightly more enlightened approach to the subject than a lot of other British doctors. At the same time, when I mention the idea of Dr Matlock's G-Spot Amplification, she snorts derisively. Gillard is equally circumspect. "The only possible benefit that could arise out of an operation like that," as he puts it, "is the amplification of a doctor's bank account."

Dr Matlock has his detractors back home, too. "It's all bullshit unless the clitoral shaft is involved," says Dianne Rosenberg. "I suppose you cannot discount the placebo effect, but if anything, all that's going to happen is that he's going to make a large fortune." "It is no secret that I make a lot of money," counters Matlock. "I am a MD, MBA and I am a great businessman and I know this business inside out. I am also an excellent surgeon. All this together is the essence of my success."

In the no-holds-barred world of front-bottom rejuvenation, someone like Dr Matlock is never going to be cowed. And besides, he's got plenty of fans. While I am in LA, I speak to a lady called Rita G, an LA glamour model with her own adults-only website, who has just had her G spot amplified in Matlock's clinical investigational study, and is absolutely *thrilled* with the results. "It's totally painless, and afterwards, it's *amazing*," she gushes. "I'd never experienced an orgasm vaginally before, I'd only ever heard about it from friends. I think of him as the Einstein of gynaecology." Taralee Minshall, meanwhile, who is also in the "entertainment industry", says, "I was like, 'Isthatit? Am I done?' I couldn't feel a thing. Immediately I noticed my climaxing was quicker, my orgasms more intense. It's wearing off now, but I swear I'm knocking down doors to get my next shot!"

Sitting in these serene, squeaky-clean environs, I myself am finding it hard not to be seduced by Dr Matlock's insistent but seductive patter. I have, after all, got an 11-hour flight in economy in front of me. And besides, if it doesn't do what it's supposed to do, whatever it does do, it lasts a maximum of four months (the same as pretty much any collagen treatment). All right, so I chicken out this time. But next time I am in LA... Who knows? ■

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