



beauty news

Pardonnez-moi! French Women DO Get Face-Lifts

BY JOAN KRON, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR AT LARGE, DECEMBER 26, 2013, 3:30:47 PM



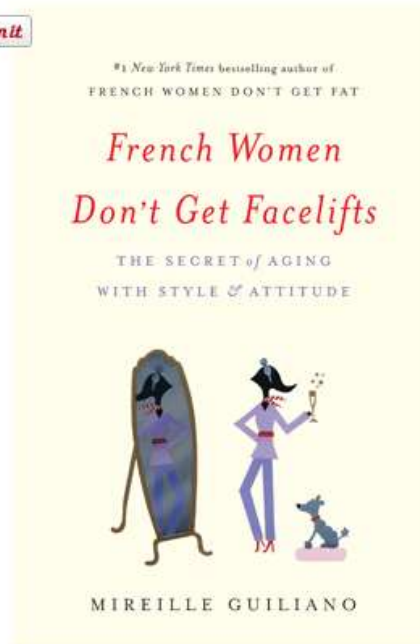
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Don't believe the title of Mireille Guiliano's new book, *French Women Don't Get Facelifts: The Secret of Aging With Style and Attitude* (Grand Central). These dames have been getting face-lifts since the Jazz Age. "Do it, don't talk about it," advised the Parisian doctor Suzanne Noel in her 1926 book *Aesthetic Surgery: It's Social Role*. Noel, a dermatologist who was considered the mother of cosmetic surgery, ran a thriving face rejuvenation salon on Paris's Rue Marbeuf, near the Champs-Élysées, where patients for her "petite lifting" procedure (removal of small ellipses of skin around the hair line) included the Queen of Belgium, actress Sarah Bernhardt, and the ordinary working woman who, as Noel wrote, "must support herself, but can't get a job selling luxury goods because she looks so old."

In fact, the landmark research that produced the modern face-lift (called the SMAS lift) was carried out in the mid-70s in a Left Bank anatomy lab two blocks from the Café Flore. What is truly significant about cosmetic surgery in France, however, is that secrecy remains the rule. "Half of my face-lift patients don't even tell their husbands," says Olivier Gerbault, a plastic surgeon in Paris. He laughed at the title of Guiliano's book. "It would be unfortunate for me if that were true, but it's not. France is a society where aging is not looked upon very well—the same as in the States."

Guiliano, a retired champagne executive, would have readers believe that one can ward off the signs of aging with a good haircut, regular facials, daily use of argan oil on the skin, several liters of water a day, and lots of spinach and bananas. French women, she claims with a soupçon of condescension, “take better care of their skin than Americans.” Moisturizing is their religion, she writes. While she respects the Estée Lauder products that are so popular “with the Chinese at duty free shops,” she chauvinistically adds, “I could have used Lancôme.”

She is not opposed to ultrasound and radio frequency treatments but scares readers by warning that Botox “might give you botulism symptoms”—perhaps, if you take 100 doses—and perpetuates the old wives’ tale that frown-relaxing injections will freeze your face and keep you from expressing emotion. As if that’s not enough to spook potential patients, Guiliano goes on to say that ordinary folks will probably have to settle for a second-tier physician since “the best doctors are often busy dealing with celebrities.” Really?

These days, face-lift surgery statistics are fairly flat in France, as they are in the United States, because fillers, lasers, and injectible frown relaxers now enable women to wait longer—until they’re over 60—before going under the knife. Guiliano hopes to convince women that a face-lift is a last resort, and many of her readers will no doubt agree. But the *cheval* is already out of the barn in Paris, where Gerbault reports that many of his patients come in at age 45. “They are well-informed and know what they want,” he says. Nose patients may bring in pictures of celebrities like Angelina Jolie, “but when they come for the face, they tell me who they don’t want to look like. Nearly all French women want a very natural result. They don’t want to look surgical.”

But that doesn’t mean they refuse surgery. French women “have as many face-lifts as Americans,” says Stafford Broumand, a plastic surgeon on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. In 1993, he spent a year in Paris training with the late Daniel Marchac, a cranio-facial surgeon who operated on a fair share of iconic faces. “We did six face-lifts a week and sometimes more. Others in Paris were just as busy,” says Broumand, who stays abreast of trends on the continent through a network of former colleagues there. He’s amused when you tick off names of European women who are reputedly letting nature take its course. “All these famous people who say they’ve never had it *have* had it. It is simply not possible for a woman in her 60s to have no excess skin on her neck unless she’s had a lift.”

In one concession to the cosmetic surgeon’s art, Guiliano does advise her readers to consider liposuction. She’s not talking about the hips, though; she likes it for reducing neck fat. It’s less expensive than a face-lift and doesn’t change a person’s expression, she writes. And it allows a woman to say she’s never had a lift. Call it what you will, counters Broumand: “Liposuction under the chin is half a face-lift.”