

# A beauty fix plumps up psyche and overall heal

Ashwani Singh is a beautiful man. He has a beautiful wife and a beautiful child.

His medical offices are beautiful, from the burbling Zen fountain to the rich woods and dark leather. The sun shines here. The music soothes here. It is a beautiful place. A beautiful day.

Yet this is neither Hollywood nor heaven. These are the Jasper Avenue offices of CosMedics, the brainchild of Edmonton's Ashwani Singh, medical doctor and merchant of beauty.

He will have ambivalent feelings about that label. Dr. Singh worked more than 10 years in general medicine, including stints in the emergency room. Every two years he returns to his family village in India to donate several weeks of his time helping the poorest of the poor. He also gives his expertise freely to those who cannot afford the services of his clinic.

Yet if Singh is not shallow, his current

Scott McKeen



medical practice caters to the most shallow of human concerns — personal beauty.

"We all judge people on their looks," says Singh. "We are shallow. That is the reality. Until we get to the point where we're not, well, you deal with it."

Singh has come to believe that enhancing beauty can be integral to a person's overall health. Our looks are anchored profoundly in the psyche, influencing everything from confidence to ca-

reers. Change someone's face and you change their world.

Singh was born in India, but his family immigrated to Canada when he was a boy. He completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Alberta and returned here 14 years ago after completing his medical studies in Montreal.

Over the years, he was encouraged to start a practice in cosmetic procedures. Partly, this was because his wife, Kendyl, is one of Edmonton's most beautiful women, a highly successful model.

Three years ago he opened CosMedics with a more eastern or holistic approach to health.

So massage therapy and acupuncture are done here; yoga and Pilates, too. A naturopath works out of one office. A family doctor out of another. A psychologist out of yet another.

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Dr. Ashwani Singh runs CosMedics, a clinic catering to person

## Beauty's siren call gratified with cosmetic procedures

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Yet, much of the centre's focus is on beauty, especially facial rejuvenation. Botox and fillers are injected to soften or eliminate wrinkles or plump up lips. Lasers tighten the skin or remove spider veins, lesions or more general sun damage.

Unwanted hair is purged by laser or wax. Artisanal eyebrows are created by tattoo-like inks. Light waves rejuvenate the skin. Injected drugs spot-remove fat.

Singh has done work on patients whose looks were scarred in injury accidents or by acne or genetics. But mostly, his clients are people who want to improve their looks or slow the effects of time.

Shallow? Only if nature is shallow. Biologists now believe our beauty fixation is a reproductive instinct. Our rep-

roductive instinct. Our reptilian brains compel us to search for healthy — in other words, beautiful — mates.

Evolution taught us to lust after symmetry — a nicely balanced body and face — because asymmetry signals past illness or injury. We therefore define beauty quite elegantly, right down to the most ideal ratio of hips to breasts and upper lip to lower lip.

Singh says one study showed that people were able to gauge beauty at a subliminal level, when shown pictures for a mere one-hundredth of a second. Another study showed babies prefer pretty faces.

Ancient humans used dyes, piercings and crude jewelry to enhance their beauty. Modern humans use spas, fitness centres, diets, clothing, make up, hair stylists and now Botox and lasers.

We might rail against such things. We might argue that beauty is skin deep. We might hope prospective mates, especially the beautiful ones, are capable of loving us for our inner beauty.

"Our evolution guides us," says Singh. "We don't even realize we are guided by this innate sense of beauty."

To deny beauty's effect it is to deny truth. Enhancing personal beauty, even slightly, can change a person's world, says Singh. Up goes their confidence; their hope and their smile return.

Where plastic surgery can cost thousands of dollars, cosmetic procedures like Botox injections are several hundred dollars. Not cheap, but no longer the exclusive prerogative of the rich. Botox, says Singh, is all the rage now in Edmonton.

"I never thought I'd see myself doing this," he says, smiling a beautiful smile. "But the way people respond — the way you can change lives for the better — is amazing."

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