



BEAUTY  
HEALTH &  
FITNESS

# instant gratification

Until now, dark circles and hollow under-eyes were a cruel twist of fate. Sarah Brown witnesses dermatology's best new nonsurgical fix.

DREAM TEAM  
PLASTIC SURGEON  
TREVOR BORN AND  
DERMATOLOGIST  
LISA AIRAN

**B**ehind the pink frosted-glass doors of examining room 1 in the Manhattan office of dermatologist Lisa Airan, M.D., Alison\* is comfortably arranged in a plush white leather reclining chair. "Look at these pictures," says Alison, a pretty Upper East Side blonde, flipping through a set of straightforward black-and-white "before" portraits taken by a medical photographer.

"I feel like I always look really tired, and it's starting to make me look older than I am." She's 35. "I never look rested," she continues as her husband, Greg\*, a stockbroker in his 40s, nods supportively from his seat in the corner. "I'm always putting on literally half a tube of concealer under my eyes, which does nothing."

Alison has come to Airan's office today, straight from the airport after a business trip, no less (I told my husband, "Don't pass GO. Just drive") to fill out the hollows beneath her eyes with Restylane, the recently FDA-approved injectible filler made of hyaluronic acid (a naturally occurring substance that can constitute 50 percent of the skin) and commonly used to plump up fine lines in other parts of the face. Airan will inject it along Alison's lower orbital rim (the area we associate with "bag") in order to restore volume, lessening the look of the dark circles and general hollowness that she feels makes her look "tired" and "old" — despite her striking clear-blue eyes.

Alison's complaint is a common one, registered by men and women alike. The absence of fat beneath the eyes, which may be (but is not always, as in Alison's case) due to age, makes the area appear deflated and gaunt, and also contributes to dark circles—which are often attributed (incorrectly) to fatigue. In fact, those purplish rings are

caused by blood vessels coming to the surface (the skin is very thin here), as well as what some doctors term "the shadow effect." The deeper the hollow—which appears reflected as shadow—the worse you look. And since the problem is more about a lack of volume than simple discoloration, there is little that concealer can do to fix it.

A handful of dermatologists and plastic surgeons across the country have been experimenting successfully with Restylane around the eyes for the last year or two, but Airan and the Toronto-based doctor Trevor Born, M.D. (a plastic surgeon who testified before the FDA during Restylane's approval process back in 2003, and who is Airan's fiancé, coincidentally), are the first to coauthor a formal paper about this new application, technically referred to as a "deep layer augmentation." ("Non-Surgical Lower Eyelid Lift" will be published in the November 2005 edition of the journal *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*.) Though Born characterizes it as "an in-office procedure that's very straight-forward," the results are far from routine. "The eyes look completely rested. There's no hollow at all. Someone can look like they've had eyelid surgery," he says. Airan explains why it's so unique: "We're laying Restylane down on a bone—the orbital rim—which means it lasts longer than in other parts of the face, where it generally lasts only four to six months."

Born, who performs the procedure six to twelve times a week ("I did four today"), has found that as you repeat injections—in the beginning, patients are asked to come back for touch-ups as the Restylane diminishes—the results last longer and longer. "I saw someone a year later who still had lots of product left," he says. Since the area injected is so close to the eyes (and many crucial blood vessels, which, if

ruptured, could cause major, potentially permanent complications), it's a risky procedure — requiring a doctor who is skilled, experienced, and confident. "The anatomy of the area is sensitive and the placement of product is important," says Born, sounding very serious.

According to Airan, there are three reasons we lose contour and dimension in our faces: genetics ("I saw a three-year-old the other day who was hollow—obviously it's genetics"), significant weight loss ("When you lose weight, you lose volume in your face. It can be very prominent around the eyes"), and the most common culprit, aging, which can be accelerated by sun damage ("If you think about it, everything loses volume as you age"). Thought depleted facial fat affects the entire face, "people are obsessed with their eyes," says Airan. "The idea behind this procedure is to restore volume to the lower lid. No cream can put volume back there."

**A**iran—dressed for work in coordinated YSL polka dots and sensible shoes (flat Manolo slingbacks), her shiny dark hair casually looped through a rubber band—takes a purple surgical marker and makes several marks in a semicircle along the rim under each of Alison's eyes, much like a dot-to-dot. She picks up a large, metal nonsense syringe (so scary-looking it's cartoonish, actually), gently cocks Alison's head back, and inserts the needle deep inside her mouth. You're probably going to feel a little pinch. I'm numbing you along the bone—this is to help with bruising," says Airan. *(continued on next page)*

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(continued from previous page) “I felt zero,” says Alison, her hands relaxed on her lap.

Next, Airan injects the dots under Alison’s eyes with still more anesthetic. It will take ten to fifteen minutes for the nerve blockers to take full effect.

After several more minutes spent chatting about the important issues of the day—Amy Sacco’s new restaurant, Bette; Brad and Agenlina (poor Jennifer)—Airan announces it’s time to get started. “If you feel anything, tell me,” she says. The syringe slowly disappears into one of the purple dots on Alison’s face.

Airan eases in along the bottom of her left rim, gently nudging each injection site and smoothing it over with a gloved index finger. Alison is talking the whole time. In fact, she is so relaxed, Airan offers to turn on some music, dialing a wall-mounted speakerphone with her elbow, syringe still cocked in one hand. “girl from Ipanema”—ish music is instantly piped into the pristine white room through invisible speakers. “Where’s my Chardonnay?” asks Alison.

As Airan works—swiftly, carefully—Alison talks about how excited she is to see the results, how “no matter how great my makeup is, I never feel like I look good.” She says, “I’ve had this problem all my life but was afraid to do anything about it.”

In the past, the best method for rejuvenating the under-eye area was fat transfer. It worked well—indeed, many people still opt for it—but it was a bigger undertaking that required multiple visits (including the no-so-pleasant harvesting of fat from the patient’s own body). Since the needle used was much larger, it caused bruising that could last up to two weeks. As with most cosmetic techniques, the results of fat grafting (which have the advantage of being permanent) depend largely upon the expertise of the doctor. “It’s a more difficult process,” says New York dermatologist Howard Sobel, M.D., who used fat and collagen to treat hollow eyes until he began experimenting with Restylane a year ago. When done incorrectly,

results “can be lumpy bumpy,” because of the inherent thickness of fat and the thinness of lower eyelid skin. “With Restylane, it’s easier to make it even right away. It’s a free-flowing substance,” he says. For Airan’s part, she describes herself as “a fan of fat” but says, “a lot of people want to try something that’s not permanent first. They want to see what they’ll look like first. Restylane’s a less scary procedure.”

According to Born, right now the most interesting advances in plastic surgery and cosmetic dermatology—practices that are increasingly intersecting as the fields evolve—are being made by enlightened doctors who are not afraid to be creative with new technology. “Restylane seemed

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interesting to me because it had applications in places where I couldn’t perform surgery,” he says.

In that spirit, both Born and Sobel have been complementing their under-eye Restylane work (Born also uses the hyaluronic acid filler Perlane, approved in Canada but awaiting FDA approval in the U.S.) with Botox injections by the crow’s-feet. “A lot of the line and depth of crease around the eye is caused by muscle contraction,” says Sobel. “You get better improvement using them together. You can increase the longevity of the Restylane.” Park Avenue dermatologist Neil Sadick, M.D., has been combining Restylane (around the orbit) with the newly FDA-approved synthetic filler Sculptra (under the orbit, to build up the cheekbone, and by the temple) to achieve what he calls “three-dimensional filling.” He caps it all off with a laser like Polaris or Cool Touch to stimulate the entire area to produce more collagen.

Alison’s right side is done. Airan sits her up, hands her a mirror. “Oh, my God. That whole thing is gone,” she says, shaking her head in disbelief. The skin beneath her right eye, which used to appear darkened, deflated, is now filled out, flush. One side of Alison’s face actually looks younger—noticeably younger when compared with the untouched other side. It’s a transformation that took hold instantly—in the 20 minutes during which each injection was delicately administered and smoothed over by Airan’s expert fingertips.

“People aren’t going to think you had work done—they’re going to think that’s how you should look,” says Airan. And with that, she starts moving her way across the left side of Alison’s face. When she’s done, she has used four vials of Restylane.

Four vials, costing Alison \$900 each. Alison gazes at her finished face for the first time. “You have little marks on your skin, just from the needle,” says Airan. “You may look worse tomorrow. And the bruising could last up to ten days.”

Alison is too mesmerized by her own, newly tweaked reflection to care. “I can’t even express to you what this feels like,” she says. “It’s night and day. My eyes look different. Your attention’s not drawn to all that other stuff, those indentations. It’s not a dramatic difference, but it makes all the difference.”

Greg—who had beat it all at the first sign of a needle, retreating to the waiting area’s quilted beige couch (a replica of the one in Coco Chanel’s rue Cambon apartment, made by the same design house)—returns timidly to the room. “I can see it! It’s a major difference! Your eyes come out now. All you can see are big blue eyes. It looks like you slept,” he enthuses. “You look like you’re in your 20s.”

Alison lies back for a moment, closing her big blue eyes. “I’m going to look pretty,” she says softly. *\*Names have been changed.*