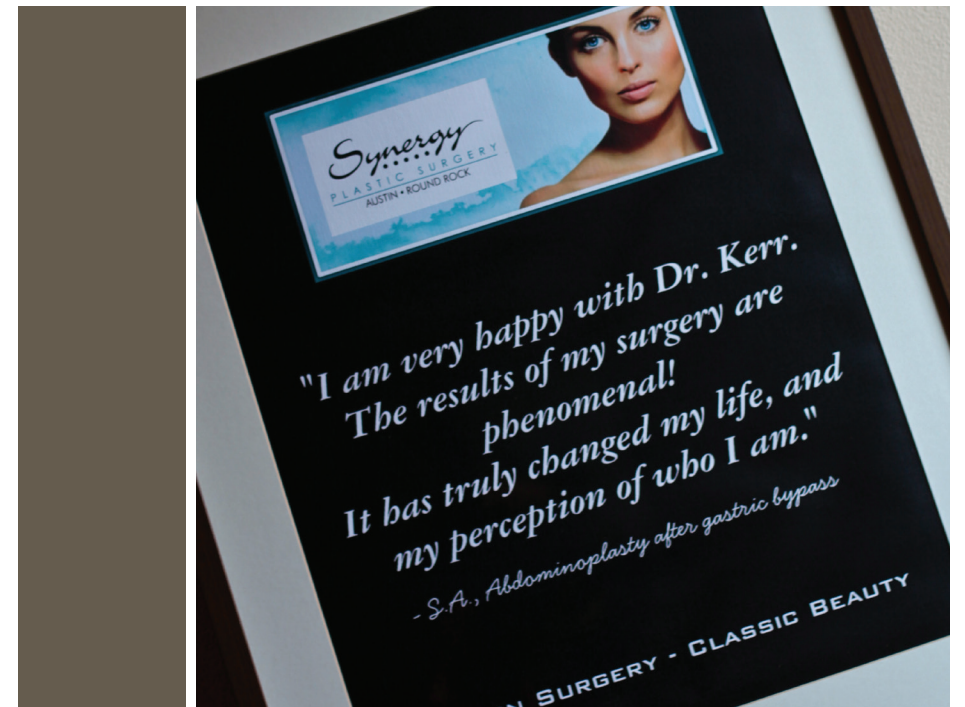




New Era IN PLASTIC SURGERY



With their keen understanding of Austin culture and extensive expertise, Drs. Mahlon Kerr and Amy Bekanich provide Austinites with modern surgery and classic beauty at Synergy Plastic Surgery.

BY DANIEL RAMIREZ
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHELLE LOCONTO

There's always something hindering a person from having an ideal self-image. Often it is something cosmetic and minute, immaterial to both who we are and how we're perceived, yet inescapable to our own regard.

Whether it is part of one's genetics, the result of a life event or the slow and deliberate passage of time, there are things nearly everyone would alter about their appearance, were it within their power.

Dr. Mahlon Kerr of the Austin area's Synergy Plastic Surgery explains the inexplicable benefit to his patients: "The psychological outcome of having plastic surgery and fixing something that's bothered you with regard to confidence is probably the biggest reward. It may seem superficial, but it clearly changes people's lives. It can change how they feel about themselves and how they interact with others. It can be profound."

And while modern medicine has made many such corrections available, plastic surgery has occasionally carried the stigma of Hollywood-driven artificiality and opulence, often executed too brazenly to easily maintain subtlety or humility. Even when the industry creates a shift in nomenclature, rebranding itself as "cosmetic surgery," the notion has lingered.

That perception, however, is eroding and giving way to a new era in plastic surgery. Thanks in part to Kerr and his partner, Dr. Amy Bekanich, excess is now giving way to subtle correction and looks that blend

seamlessly into one's natural form.

These aren't the corrective surgeries of the 1990s or even of other regions in the United States. Austin has its own sound, its own mindset and definitely its own style. And Synergy Plastic Surgery, led by Kerr and Bekanich, is addressing the cosmetic pursuits of the Central Texas area with a definitively Austin flair.

"I think that the high-glam, gaudy and overdone plastic surgery just doesn't work in this town," Kerr remarks when asked what makes Austin unique. "We do it differently here. Most implants that we do are not super-large. We work to fit the patient's frame. A lot of women are just looking to restore volume rather than be showy. It clearly reflects the difference in the Austin population."

Naturally, this makes Synergy Plastic Surgery an ideal fit for the Austin market, but the area still manages to follow national trends, as Kerr is keenly aware. The more common procedures are just as commonplace as anywhere else. Synergy Plastic Surgery adheres to its ethic of incorporating cosmetic procedures into one's natural look, but the majority of patients still scrutinize the same body regions.

"The biggest trend in Austin is breast and body. Breast augmentation is still the most common thing that I do," Kerr continues, though he is aware of the shift in rationale for such procedures. "A lot of the people in the area are doing a 'mommy makeover,' which is kind of a new trend. The concept is usually an abdominal procedure combined with a breast



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operation. People like the idea of combining multiple procedures to limit your downtime.”

The Synergy Plastic Surgery team’s expertise is not restricted to cultural trends, however, and they offer the same quality attention and care to any cosmetic procedure. Also, their arrangements with hospitals rather than isolated clinics only benefit the quality of care they deliver.

“We operate primarily out of North Austin Medical Center, but we also operate at all the St. David’s hospitals,” Kerr says. “It’s a tremendous advantage for us because almost everyone else in town is going to operate out of a surgery center, which is fine unless a patient needs an unplanned overnight stay for nausea or in the rare chance of a something goes wrong or, heaven forbid, there’s a more serious problem.”

Kerr applauds the refined processes and qualified staff of a hospital system like St. David’s. A hospital environment also allows patients to stay overnight,

a convenience not afforded in clinic settings. Kerr and the Synergy Plastic Surgery team have every reason to take pride in the arrangement. As he explains, “We have the ability to have all of the resources of a fully staffed hospital.”

Providing cosmetic procedures to the Austin area is only half of the story, just as Kerr is only half of the foundation that powers Synergy. With the help of Bekanich, Synergy Plastic Surgery is pioneering the use of an innovative method for breast reconstruction for use on mastectomy patients seeking alternatives to implants. It is currently the only organization in Texas offering the method known as BRAVA-AFT, and Bekanich is an expert in the method’s precise use.

“It uses a patient’s own fat, harvested with liposuction techniques liposuctioned from various places on their body,” Bekanich explains. “There’s no implant used and no need for an extensive surgery like there is with a

microvascular-free flap.”

The revolutionary method, first used by Dr. Roger Khouri of the Miami Breast Center, is best explained by Bekanich, who studied in Miami under the visionary doctor. She outlines the process:

“A woman in a typical scenario will have a mastectomy, and at the time of the mastectomy, after the breast tissue is removed, I do liposuction of wherever is the easiest place at that time (usually it’s the belly, as that’s how a patient is situated), and that fat is then placed in the area that is left after the mastectomy. This begins to be the reconstructive process and restores what we call a ‘social breast.’”

The BRAVA-AFT treatment has significant benefits, as Bekanich illustrates. “Vascularity is increased in the area, which is important for the survival of the fat we inject. To ‘survive.’ Still, the greatest of the process’ advantages is most likely the lack of foreign body implantation on a patient and of need for surgery in the future.

Regardless of the benefits, it is a demanding regimen to pursue this course of action, to be certain. Bekanich takes care to explain that a good deal will be asked of those who elect for the course of action.

The disclaimer Bekanich offers is simple: “It takes a little bit of a commitment on the part of the woman to wear the device 10 to 12 hours a day, usually at night.” She reassures apprehensive patients that “it doesn’t hurt, but it does take some thought.”

The BRAVA device essentially envelops the breast in a carefully maintained pressure environment, regulated by electronics and seated beneath a very sophisticated sports bra. The device is worn for varying lengths of time, depending on a number of factors, including the severity of the damage, time during the reconstruction process and the desired result. But the results are, in a word, astonishing.

As Bekanich explains, a patient

can expect that “at the end of all the reconstruction, she has a soft, natural-looking breast that is sensate, is a remarkable advantage compared to other current methods of breast reconstructions.”

In comparison, other methods that have been prevalent in plastic surgery have met with more limited success than BRAVA-AFT offers. “Often, with a lot of the other reconstructions, it feels like patchwork: The skin of the breast can’t be felt, or the area is very hard,” the doctor concludes.

Having brought the method with her to Texas, it wasn’t long before Bekanich trained her partner. Today, Synergy Plastic Surgery is steadily increasing the use of the BRAVA device.

One might think, with the attention to culture, detail and innovation that both Kerr and Bekanich offer, as well as with the enlisting of hospitals for medical procedures, the cosmetic surgery procedures would be reserved for the wealthy. Kerr responds to that presumption, proclaiming, “The goal of Synergy Plastic Surgery is to make plastic surgery available to everybody. You’re not a number or a dollar sign.”

The actions and experiences of both doctors speak directly to that maxim, as well. Both have been active in philanthropic endeavors that make the best use of their proficiencies and their ethic.

“We see patients who have limited funding for breast cancer, and Synergy Plastic Surgery is one of the founding partners of the LOTUS Circle, a group of donors who primarily fund Austin’s Breast Cancer Resource Center, which provides counseling and support for breast cancer patients, Kerr reveals.

Additionally, the duo’s charity extends beyond the city limits and even the national border. According to Kerr, “both Amy Dr. Bekanich and I have been on international missions to do cleft lip and palate work on children.”

With such a commitment to innovative techniques, a firm grasp on the Austin culture and a dedication to helping others where their abilities and time allow, the Synergy Plastic Surgery team is poised to continue building on the successes they have experienced for years to come.

For more information, visit Synergy Plastic Surgery at 170 Deepwood Drive, Ste. 102, Round Rock, Texas 78681 (Round Rock) or 805 E. 32nd St., Ste. 101, Austin, Texas 78705 (Austin); call 512-244-1444; or go to www.synergyplasticsurgery.com.



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