



The balance between appearance and quality of life, body and soul.

An interview with
Dr Wolfgang Funk

> Dr Funk, you have been working in aesthetic plastic surgery for many years. During this time, fashion and design have gone through some very extravagant changes. How do you personally define the term 'beauty', and is aesthetic plastic surgery itself subject to trends in fashion?

No. As I see it, there are no changing fashions in aesthetic plastic surgery. That's so simply from the fact that you cannot and should not change a person's basic form or make-up. Beauty is also always a matter of inner and outer harmony. It's a far too individual and complex subject to be based on the banal criteria of whatever happens to be the prevailing fashion.

> In the sixties, however, Twiggy – to name just one unusual example – was the absolute ideal of beauty for many women. Based on traditional criteria of beauty, this seems rather incomprehensible...

I regard pigeonholing people and tastes in general as problematic in approaching the issue of beauty. If you look at it carefully, for example, Twiggy was never a beauty icon in the classic sense. She had a certain shape that was just different, perhaps

a kind of sign of the times, in tune with women of that decade no longer wanting to look like their mothers.

> Clearly though, there is at least a trend in that it's becoming relatively normal now to see a cosmetic surgeon. With this being the case, can't cosmetic surgery be accused of catering for a rhythm of change in the same way, for example, as clothes do?

I think that good consultants will always gear themselves more to the individual patient's needs rather than to any general fashion, while perhaps also allowing some influence from current trends.

Personally, however, I would never wholly follow any particular trend. On one point, though, you're right: If you look at it over the centuries, beauty has many faces. But each of us only has one, and more than all of the criteria of what is and isn't feasible, that's something we should never forget!

> Does it bother you if patients bring in photos as examples of how they want to look?

No, not at all. Although I know that people often discourage this. The photo, after all, is just a way of showing with a picture what it is the patient wants. It's not a case of me giving the patient exactly the

same nose as in the picture. Every detail has to fit harmoniously into the existing outline, that is, into the patient's face, and ultimately into their entire appearance. Even the most beautiful nose looks out of place if it doesn't match the face.

> Do we really have no other choice, in your view, than to always become more and more beautiful?

Beautiful is just an empty expression for what people strive to be. Its concrete meaning is variable and ultimately depends on people's individual ideal. Looked at this way, the question of whether you always have to become more beautiful doesn't even arise.

> How often do you have people coming to you wanting to have their entire body reshaped?

Actually, surprising often.

However, to me this is perfectly understandable, as many patients often don't know themselves what's making them so dissatisfied, and so they think it would be best if they looked completely different. A good consultant will then ask them, what it is they want to achieve by such a change.

What are they aiming for? In the course of the conversation, it then often becomes clear that instead of a total overhaul, small corrections

to individual features are all that is needed, or that the problem can be remedied in some other way altogether.

> **Coming now to a more specific question. What makes the perfect breasts?**

Perfect breasts are the best breasts achievable for the lady in question.

> **That now brings us directly to the much-debated term of 'absolute beauty'. Staying with our example, is there such a thing as the 'perfect outline' in terms of shaping breasts?**

In theory, yes. The perfect breast has a certain softness, a lower shape, an upper shape, a certain swing, a certain fullness. As a surgeon, you should achieve these criteria in all breast operations. However, how the bosom then looks in the end also depends on its basic, original form. This determines how close I can get to an ideal shape. Another key factor, of course, is also that the breast should please the patient. The decision ultimately comes down to what is medically possible and the surgeon's own taste. However, there is ample evidence in practice of discrepancies arising here from the medical expert and patient talking at cross-purposes. Consultation discussions are therefore very important for both parties – for all types of aesthetic plastic surgery. As a patient, you can therefore never be demanding enough in your choice of surgeon!

> **What risks have to be expected with breast augmentation?**

In qualitative terms, the risks haven't changed – however, they now arise far less frequently. You can see this well by taking the formation of capsules as an example. These days

the risk is 1.4 to 1.5%. In the past, it was 30%.

The bounds of possibility in aesthetic plastic surgery now seem to be getting pushed further and further. What's your position on leg lengthening, for example? Don't you find such operations somewhat excessive?

If it helps people, I don't think anything's excessive. If a man is 5' 3" tall and we manage to make him 5' 7", then I don't think there's anything that could give him more happiness than that. Indeed, all operations that improve someone's outer appearance, also have an effect on their inner being.

The WHO defines health as a state of comprehensive physical, mental and social well-being. What is illness? Is illness being unwell? Does illness mean feeling bad? Feeling bad because of your appearance? It's clear that with the services they offer, health insurers only cover a fraction of the forms that illnesses actually take.

If someone constantly feels unwell, the effectiveness of their immune system is reduced and they become susceptible to illnesses, including life-threatening ones. To me, aesthetic medicine is therefore also a form of preventive medicine. Preventive for body and soul.

> **So it's not at all just a matter of having a smaller bottom or larger breasts...**

Of course not. Which is why the media hype about beauty and the ability to achieve it also has its murky side. The depiction of this has become far too superficial. Which is understandable, as that makes it easier to argue its case and thus

in turn to market what is certainly a difficult and controversial aspect of our lives. However, the picture that is painted of aesthetic surgery certainly doesn't do justice to its complexity.

If it was really the way that the media now portray it, if it was only about chasing some superficial wish, then I would have long since lost interest in my profession. I never found it satisfying changing outer appearances alone. On the other hand, the feeling of elation when you've carried out an operation successfully is really something else. Then when you see your patient's happy face, their new radiance, their new sense of well-being – that's a better gift than anything else!

> **A kind of beauty operation for the soul, in other words?**

Exactly! I don't just operate on the patient's body - by doing so I also change their soul. It really is a great responsibility that we bear. We have an obligation not only to perform the operation well in a purely technical sense, but every intervention should also make the patient even more complete and perfect than they are, perfect in their whole appearance. It's quite possible to perform a flawless operation, but for the result nevertheless not to look good. The demands placed on surgeons here go well beyond mere handiwork. We have a responsibility for the well-being and happiness of the people who put their trust in us.

That is something of which I'm very aware, it's what drives me on. Beauty is a form of happiness we can create. And what's more beautiful than a happy person?