

Victoria

Tide turns as surgeons bone up on sea life

Lawrence Money
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Cosmetic surgeon Bryan Mendelson, at his practice in Toorak, says the latest development in facial "rejuvenation" is restoration of the bone structure by injecting coral into the bones. Photo: Justin McManus

ESMERELDA was a dog who lived in Texas - but you could also call her the guinea pig of breast implants. "It was in the early 1960s," explains Melbourne plastic surgeon Bryan Mendelson, "and a medical team in Houston tested a silicone implant on the dog to see if it was compatible. A surgeon friend of mine was there at the time. A few months later they announced the new 'natural-feel' implant and silicone has been used ever since."

Esmerelda has long since gone to that kennel in the sky but her cleavage-enhanced legacy lives on. According to Mendelson, there may be 6 million women in the world right now with some surgical help up top and, oddly, these can be divided into two groups.

"There are those who want to have larger breasts because it makes them feel 'more like a woman'," he says, "and unfortunately there are a few young ones now who actually want breasts that look artificial like some of the film stars. Of course, that is deplorable to a surgeon because we are trying to make everything look natural."

Either way, cinematic pirates have just broken rank. Last week, the Disney corporation stunned the world of bulging bra cups by banning any actress with fake breasts for its next *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie. "Between size 4 and 6 and must have real breasts" was the edict for *On Stranger Tides*, the next in the swashbuckling series. There is even a rumour of a "jiggle" test as part of the auditions.

Mendelson says this goes against the worldwide trend. "Over the years that trend has been for women to want bigger and bigger breast implants," he says. "It's interesting. In the 1930s Margaret Mead, the famous sociologist, went into the highlands of New Guinea and found previously undiscovered tribes where the status of women in the community was in direct proportion to the size of her breasts. The bigger, the more powerful, and it still applies in our society to a degree. They were not being influenced by Western values, by media stereotypes, it was an innate biological thing."

The surgical stairway to bigger breasts began in the 1950s. "Wedges of fat from the buttocks were the earliest breast implants," says Mendelson, who is one of the most experienced breast and face specialists in town. "For the past 10 years we have used a tremendously improved generation of silicone gel implants."

But it is the face where surgery strives hardest to ward off the march of time and Mendelson, who performs up to four "major facial rejuvenations" a week, says coral is the latest weapon in his armoury. Granules of coral from the south Pacific islands, produced by a company in California, are mixed with the patient's own blood for bonding and applied by syringe to the bones of the face to replace the natural wastage that occurs over time.

In earlier days, facelifts were performed by tightening the skin then, more recently, surgeons tightened the ligaments under the skin. Now says Mendelson, they are restoring the facial bone structure. "It is something we have only recently considered," he says. "Facial bone shrinks as we age, more in some places than in others. Each side of the nose, especially. We have used coral for 20 years but it is only now that we have discovered the ageing of the facial bones and used coral to repair it. Under a microscope the coral can be seen to be structured in the same way as the bone itself. It is inert so there is no possibility of rejection by the body and, before blood is taken from someone's arm, a dose of intravenous antibiotic is given, so infection is not a concern."

It so happens that surgeon Mendelson has a fast-deepening crease in his chin due to bone wastage. Would he have the coral treatment himself? "I would love to have some placed in my face," he says. "I'm just waiting for someone I trained to have more experience."

