

# HEALTH

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QUARTERLY



Jill Hessler, M.D. of  
Hessler Plastic Surgery in Palo Alto



# *revolutionary* BEAUTY

One of the Bay Area's most highly skilled cosmetic surgeons, Dr. Jill Hessler, discusses state-of-the-art procedures and minimally invasive breakthroughs.

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STORY BY CORRINE E. MEHIGAN

**F**or the better part of a decade, Palo Alto's Dr. Jill Hessler has been sought after for her expertise in surgical refinement and plastic surgery. Not only is she blessed with both inner and outer beauty, Hessler is a double board-certified plastic surgeon, an adjunct assistant professor at Stanford University, and one of the most highly skilled plastic surgeons in the Bay Area. While she specializes in the latest advances in aesthetic facial surgery, her comprehensive approach has also earned her a well-deserved reputation as a renowned beauty expert. With the recent debut of her new state-of-the-art 4,000-square-foot aesthetic and surgery center, Hessler has expanded and relocated her fountain of youth to a new location in Palo Alto. *Gentry Health* explores Hessler's rise to success and her popular, yet still very discreet, beauty destination.

A Midwestern native, Hessler loved math and science and knew from a very early age that she wanted to be a doctor. As the first in her family to be drawn to a career in medicine, Hessler originally considered fields such as pediatrics. During her medical school rotation in the operating room, though, she discovered her true calling. Hessler received her training at the top-ranked Otolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery program at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. "Once I saw the power of surgery, I realized that that's what I

really love—having such an impact and making a significant difference in people’s lives through transformation and healing, I spent all my spare time in the operating room.”

While she enjoyed complex and varied operations, Hessler was drawn to the sub-specialty of facial plastic surgery and had the honor of being selected for a highly competitive fellowship in Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at the University of Michigan. During that time she developed a refined appreciation for the subtleties in aesthetic facial structure and proportion, and she perfected her surgical skills in cosmetic surgical procedures, laser treatments, and skin cancer reconstruction. Training under renowned leaders in the fields of plastic and reconstructive surgery and dermatology at the University of Michigan, including Shan Baker, MD, and Timothy Johnson, MD, she was fascinated by reconstructive surgery and became passionate about changing skin cancer patients’ lives for the better. “After the skin cancer is removed, patients would come to me for the reconstruction. They were scared and afraid while facing a large deficit on their face. I would do everything in my power to make it look like it was never there. One transformation after another was extremely rewarding to me.”

Hessler met her husband, Dr. John B. Sunwoo, during their residency years back in St. Louis. As their training progressed over time and distance, they fell in love and married years later during their time together on faculty at Washington University. When Sunwoo received the irresistible “call” from Stanford University, they decided to move their family, including their six-month-old son Reed, to Northern California. Upon arrival in the Bay Area, Hessler’s career morphed into a new endeavor in Palo Alto—her first private practice. “I chose private practice because of my ability to prioritize my work and my family. More importantly, I have the freedom to tailor my practice to ensure we provide the very latest in cutting-edge aesthetic technology, procedures, and services in a very discreet environment.”

Hessler’s style is straightforward and transparent with clear communication with her patients. When a patient walks into Jill Hessler’s office, their mind may be racing with wonder and doubt. Do I really need this procedure? How will it work? Will it hurt? How quickly will I heal? And so on. Then the soft pastels of the waiting room and the cocoon-like atmosphere begin to put the patient at ease. Upon meeting Hessler herself, there is a natural sense of confidence and calm as she provides individualized attention dur-

ing her client’s consultations. Not only is she skilled at subsiding fears, she is adept at creating a clear understanding of what to expect before and after surgery, including the realities of recovery, and how often the process is far less aggressive than they may have imagined. This includes discretion and a talented team that is constantly available and responsive to the patient, as well as their family and friends. “I have such a wonderful team working with me. They are amazing and we’ve grown so close over the years. My patients just love them.”

Hessler’s love of the Bay Area and her private practice in Palo Alto is obvious. “When we first moved here, I didn’t know a single person. Now, almost six years later, I have a very loyal and wonderful group of patients who have become friends, and it just keeps growing. I’m very blessed.” The best part of her day is working with a sophisticated population that continually goes beyond treating the symptoms and prevention of aging. Hessler has a partnership with her patients and she enjoys working with such an educated population. Her patients easily understand and get excited about the latest treatments.

Together, Hessler and her patients maximize a wide variety of new technologies and treatments to achieve a natural transformation. “I love doing plastic surgery in the Bay Area. Everybody works hard here to look and feel healthy and natural. I love how active everyone is here until well past their 70’s. The energy level of my patients at every age is amazing. In general, they tend to want to look enhanced and refreshed. They want their face to match their energy level and the way they feel internally.”

In addition to her respectful and devoted clientele, Hessler’s peers and the medical community at large have also paid attention. She has received many awards, including the Janet Glasgow Women in Medicine Award and the honor of being selected by her peers of plastic surgeons and physicians as one of the Best Doctors in America. She is also frequently requested to lecture nationally on surgical techniques, specifically her natural approach to blepharoplasty and facelift surgery. In addition to her recognition as a surgeon, she has also been selected to train other physicians in the use of injectable products such as Botox and Restylane.

In February 2014, Hessler completed construction on her new state-of-the-art aesthetic and surgery center, which she designed from the ground up. Her more than 4,000 square feet of custom space has allowed her to expand her services. Hessler takes great satisfaction in helping her patients achieve their desired goals. This

includes a comprehensive approach and being comfortable with the notion that surgery is not necessarily the answer for everyone.

“I continue to offer the latest in facial plastic surgery, facelifts, eyelid surgery, rhinoplasty, brow lifts, and skin cancer reconstruction,” notes Hessler. “But now the new location enables us to offer more services, including advanced hair restoration with the opening of our new hair transplant center.” Hessler is a highly recognized authority in the field of surgical treatment of hair loss in which she performs the individual follicular unit transplant technique for the most natural results. “This is a great technique for men and women,” she stresses. “We take hair from the back of the scalp and transplant it, one hair at a time—using anywhere from 500 – 3,000 individual hairs.” Although hair loss is traditionally associated with men, women have become much more active in the treatment of thinning hair as part of the aging process.

Not only is this technique state-of-the-art, it is rare in the Bay Area. Prior to Hessler’s new center opening, patients would have to fly all over the country to get this kind of procedure. The number of procedures varies depending on the degree of hair loss or thinning that has occurred. For women, generally a single procedure is sufficient. It might be 5 or 10 years down the road when a woman would need another procedure. It is interesting to learn that once a person is prone to hair loss, they will continue to lose more hair over time. Hessler is dedicated to ensuring each patient’s situation is evaluated very specifically and treatment is extremely individualized. “The days of unnatural hair transplant ‘plugs’ are over,” she notes. “Now we can anticipate and really study the natural progression of hair loss. This includes the need to plan and anticipate future hair loss. You don’t want to create a 20-year-old hairline overnight on somebody who is 50. “We can transplant hair from the most resistant areas before it falls out,” Hessler says. “And it will likely stay there at the new location forever.” Results include a natural looking hairline and thicker fuller hair that is your own. “Nobody can tell that my patients have had their own hair transplanted,” she continues. “It’s incredibly natural because it is your own hair for a perfect color and texture match.”

Hessler’s expansion has also allowed for more non-invasive treatments. For the body, this includes a new non-invasive body-contouring center with treatments, including COOLSCULPTING that freezes unwanted fat for stubborn diet resistant areas on the body. “New advances in non-invasive body contouring, and remov-

ing those hard to conquer problem areas without surgery is incredibly popular with an active population,” she notes. Skin care remains an important aspect of her practice as well, with constant reminders to her patients that any treatment, surgical or otherwise, always looks better on someone with great skin. Her center is comprehensive, including a Medical Spa with an esthetician who does medical-grade facials, micro-dermabrasion, and many of the newest techniques in medical aesthetics. Hessler has advanced understanding of techniques from fractional CO2 laser options and chemical peels to facelifts and filler treatments. This includes the VampireFace Lift, which uses one’s own blood to create collagen that is injected to fill sunken areas, and other unique treatments.

She is quick to note that living and working in the Bay Area, where many laser companies began, also helps, as these companies often come to her to evaluate their products. Patients like that. If they’ve heard about something new, they can come to my practice knowing that I’ve already learned about it and have often tried it out as well, so I can give them the latest information.”

Although she offers laser treatments and other techniques to repair sun damage, she believes that preventative care is the best way to stay youthful. Hessler is not only involved in plastic surgery education in the Northern California Bay Area, but also serves at the national level with active involvement in the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

All this success has not changed Hessler’s determination to have balance between work and personal life. She and her husband each work full-time while raising their son Reed (6) and their daughter Parker (4). In addition to receiving National Institutes of Health grant funding for his research on cancer stem cells and cancer immunology, Sunwoo’s clinical practice, treating thyroid cancer and melanoma at Stanford, continues to thrive. Together, the family loves to go hiking and be outdoors, including regular trips to explore the Bay Area. “They are true California kids. They’d wear shorts all year if we let them,” she smiles. Hessler prioritizes her practice and her family, yet still makes time to engage with the community. Whether volunteering at their children’s school or with Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, Hessler and Sunwoo continue to make a difference together, ensuring that their children are aware of the diversity of the area and that they recognize the importance of making such a difference. ♦

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