

# french lesson

As American cosmetic surgery gets more extreme, the French are rebelling. **Stacy Gregg** learns how

**I have been shown** some scary images at beauty functions, but nothing that compares to a giant-sized Joan Rivers. Honestly, we're having lunch here, I am trying to digest my salmon and peach salad and there is Joan – taut as a drum, with her eyebrows hitched up in a permanent state of surprise, her mouth in a rictus grin. There is not a line on her face and she is 72. It is terrifying, it is extreme – and it speaks volumes about the way Americans view the modern pursuit of beauty.

A photo of Cher pops up now. Her cheek implants and facelifts have stretched her skin so tight you could bounce a 50 cent piece off her face. Dr Teresa Cattin flashes the video wall back and forth, showing an image of Cher as a sweet, doe-eyed 20-something and the new surgically improved version who will turn 60 this year. I can't tell the difference.

"For Americans," says Cattin, "the ideal of beauty is to recapture what you had. They want to look the way they did when they were in their prime."

Now photos appear on the screen of famed French beauties – Catherine Deneuve, Juliette Binoche, Françoise Hardy. Compared to the Americans, who appear disturbingly, preternaturally youthful, these women look, well, natural and mature. They also look good for their age. Cattin talks us through their faces and explains that the natural look actually involves a little Botox, perhaps some dermal filler, maybe even surgery.

There is no question that both the French and Americans have all been under the knife and the needle. The difference, says Cattin, is cultural. It is about the subtle personal style of French women, compared to the garish extremes of American beauty. It is also about the *je ne sais quoi* of their French surgeons. The Americans have been administering Botox cosmetically for well over 10 years while the French have had the licence to use Botox for appearance medicine for a mere three years. And yet, in that limited time they have, as Cattin says, "displayed typical fabulous French arrogance by turning their backs on the rest of the world, and gone off and developed their own style".

As France's cosmetic surgeon to the stars, Claude



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Le Louarn, puts it, "They (the Americans) are doing ready-to-wear – we are couture."

Cattin, who runs the Faceworks appearance medicine practice in Auckland, is Allergan's surgical trainer for the Botox brand in New Zealand. She is a convert to the French style (she has only just arrived back in New Zealand from attending the Parisian Masters of Botox conference), which she says is "all about symmetry".

To illustrate this she shows us an image – not of a face, but of the gardens at Versailles. The trees and fountains and pools stretch for miles through the mist, a perfect display of proportion and line.

"The longer I look at this image, the more beautiful it becomes," Cattin says. "For the French, the aim as you age is to retain that symmetry, not to recapture your youth."

That means making sure all the elements in the face play together happily. To do this, French-style practitioners like Cattin will use Botox in tiny doses, not just between the eyebrows where those classic vertical frown lines plague us, but all over the face. Cattin's favourite new spot for injecting Botox is right around the socket of the eye – in minute quantities to quell those tiny wrinkles that make you look worn out. In the industry this is referred to as using Botox "off label" – which is to say that the drug can still only be advertised directly to the consumer for use between the eyebrows.

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And Dr Cattin still does use Botox between the brows – she just uses far smaller quantities than many of her colleagues who favour the American look. The result? If you have Botox the French way chances are no one will know, because you'll still have some limited facial movement. The other end of the spectrum is a visage as emotionless as Bree in *Desperate Housewives*.

We see more pictures now – not of celebrities but of real women, Cattin's own

patients. One has had a minute quantity of Botox injected at the corners of her mouth to correct a downturned lip that made her look grouchy in repose. With her muscles relaxed by the Botox her mouth naturally tweaks up into a gentle smile. We see another woman with deeply grooved smile lines in her central cheek area, then an "after" image of these

lines softened by a shot of Botox. "I find I am using Botox more for these things and using dermal fillers less and less," Cattin explains.

Botox, Cattin says, is shifting from pure medicine to an artisan product. "There is no right way or wrong way. The nice thing about Botox now is that you can be so creative with it."

And in her experience, what sort of look are New Zealand women after? Are we Joan Rivers or Juliette Binoche? "We're still developing our own culture, but I'd like to think we are on the French side." *Mais oui!*