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Spring/Summer 2005

A close-up portrait of a woman with long, wavy, light brown hair and green eyes, wearing a bright pink sleeveless top. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

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America's Leading Fitness Expert

Physician Profiles

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ABC's Extreme Makeover

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The Making of ABC's EXTREME MAKEOVER

Story by Bree Walker

If I had a dollar for every pitch I've made in Hollywood over the last three years, I'd never have to do a pitch again. As a producer myself, I should be jealous of a guy like Howard Schultz, who made one phone call to ABC-TV to pitch the idea of Extreme Makeover and was given the green light.

Photography by Martin Mann

EXTREME MAKEOVER



What makes this reality show a reality?

"It was the right idea at the time."

Howard Schultz, Show Creator and Executive Producer





This just never happens, but creator and Executive Producer Schultz told me "Astounding as it is, even for a guy like me who's been doing this my whole life, I'm telling you, they just got it. It was the right idea at the right time."

Having spent endless hours in pitch meetings myself, I had to ask Howard if he expected this would be given the go-ahead so easily. He laughed, "No way. As you well know, Bree, you never expect yes, you always assume it's going to be no. I was shocked and elated at the same time." True, Howard is a veteran of reality TV, but finding the right idea at the right moment is still a hit-or-miss proposition, particularly at the Big Three networks. Then I had to ask about the liability. What if something went wrong? "This is why we had to find that perfect Dream Team for the show. Once our production machine was up and running, the integrity or the tone of the show would be no problem. But there was no way to guarantee something wouldn't go wrong. This is, after all, medical practice, and that's what makes it even more extraordinary that Extreme Makeover landed on one of the mainstream networks. It's phenomenal."



The longer we talked, the more I came to respect the man whose success would usually be written off as good timing and luck in a place as fickle as Hollywood. "I was skeptical about doing this, and worried that viewers would see only the shallow side. I knew my challenge would be to create a show that would help eliminate false notions about plastic surgery, and create something much deeper than a physical beauty platform. If drastically improving individuals looks through cutting-edge cosmetic surgery could be the catalyst for changing their life for the better, I knew we could be doing something really great."

With over two years of success on the show, does Howard, a hard-driving entrepreneur with a reputation of taking big risks, still find the show challenging enough? "There are still so many inspiring stories to be told and medical miracles to be witnessed, this show could go on forever and I'd never grow bored."

Finally, I wondered whether he has time to stay in touch with the patients, the stars of his show. He grew quiet for a moment before telling me this is exactly why he'll never grow bored of Extreme Makeover. The patients call and email

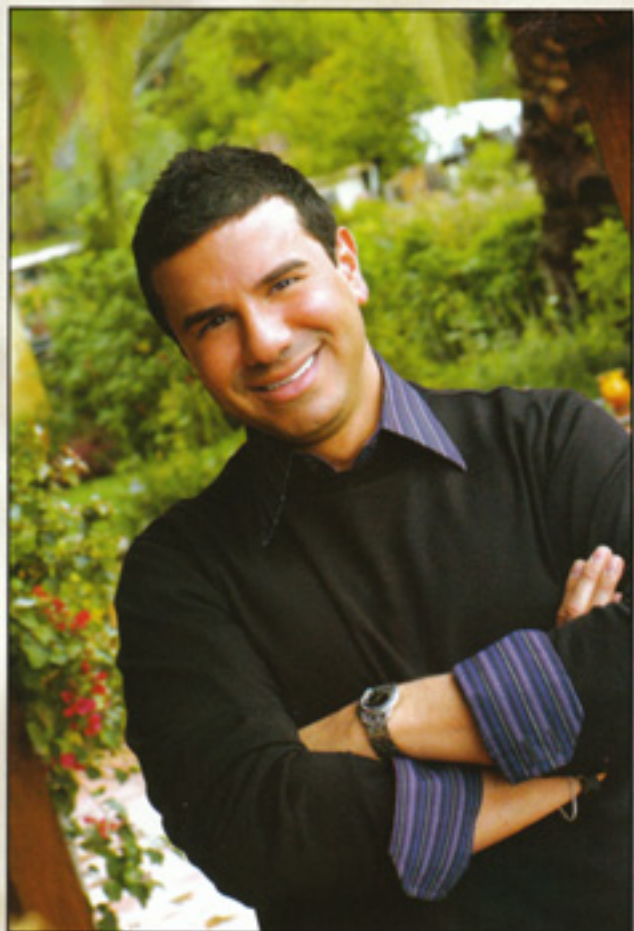
him constantly thanking him for how their lives have changed for the better. As a producer in an industry where you usually have to make so many compromises just to get a show on the air, this is a dream come true. I couldn't wait to meet the members of Howard's Dream Team, the people actually responsible for all dramatic transformations.

I wish I could 'extremely makeover' this rainy day in Southern California, I thought on my way to Los Angeles with co-publishers Jeffery Anderson and Martin Mann. At least I got to be just a passenger on this trip up the 405, a trek I take at least twice a week for my production company.

The moment we pulled up in front of the "extreme mansion," a Mediterranean architectural wonder set back from the street on a hillside above Sunset Strip, the rain stopped and the fun began. You'd never find this place without 'extreme' directional ability, so I was happy Jeff had his touchpad GPS. No wonder the producers of ABC's hit TV show Extreme Makeover chose this location, away from prying eyes but right in the heart of Hollywood. Owned by film producer Andrew Lazar, the network leases the house just to do the styling makeover segment of the show. As reality TV goes, it's a very big budget show.

The success of the show is what allows ABC to lease these deluxe digs. It's a comfortable setting for the patients who have to sit for hours on end, take after take, while 'extreme' stylist Sam Saboura works his magic on hair, makeup, and wardrobe. In some cases, Sam's transformations are all that's needed to prove a point. Extreme makeovers can occur even without a single incision.





This is just the day's starting point for Jeff, Marty and me. We speculate that ABC wants us to see the gentler stuff first. Gentle is exactly the right word to describe Sam Saboura, former stylist to the stars (including Jen and Brad when they still got dressed together) who is now so busy with this hit reality series he barely has time to get dressed himself. "I wear a lot of black just because it's easy, so how can I possibly be one of those fashionistas who tell people to get out of the black clothes already? Uniform dressing makes life simpler and on most complexions, it just works" he says. Good news for me on this rainy Monday, when I simply couldn't imagine letting any of my pastel spring wardrobe get pavement-thrashed. For this story, I knew we'd be schlepping all over those mean streets I love so much. I already liked Sam although I half expected that a stylist would be admonishing me for my boring black blazer and slacks.

Sam is not your average Hollywood stylist even though he works for *Extreme Makeover*. "Since the show has become so popular, I find myself being stopped on the street by people who want advice on how to put themselves together to look just a little more unique. That's why I wrote my book." In stores this summer but available at Amazon.com now, *Sam Saboura's Real Style*. "I intended to communicate specifically to women from size ten to sixteen, what I call 'real women.' I've written this book to tell why to wear a particular piece of clothing, and how to find inspiration from the fantasy that is high fashion. Style happens when you dare to make a mistake. If you take a risk you'll find your own special style emerging. Makeovers are attainable for everyone in this area."

Sam has two very useful tips for *New Image Magazine* readers. "Go shopping for an entire day, to as many stores as you can and don't, I repeat, don't spend a penny. Just absorb. This is how you educate yourself to become your own stylist." Even though he has worked as a personal shopper for the world famous Fred Segal store and many Hollywood stars, Sam urges readers not to copy a celebrity's style. "It won't look right for you. You have to develop your own intuitive look."

For both men and women, the single most important tip he passes along is that your eyebrows can always use help! "Eyebrows, more than anything else need shaping and grooming at least once, professionally. When a candidate is chosen to be made over on the show, they must agree to let their eyebrows grow out for at least six weeks to give the producers a shot at proving this point. It's incredible the change people see after eyebrows are plucked and groomed to perfection. On some faces, nothing more drastic is necessary to affect an 'extreme makeover.'" When it comes to hair and face makeovers, Sam adopts a conservative approach for everyday people. "Don't go for drastic changes all at once; it's too shocking for your self-confidence."

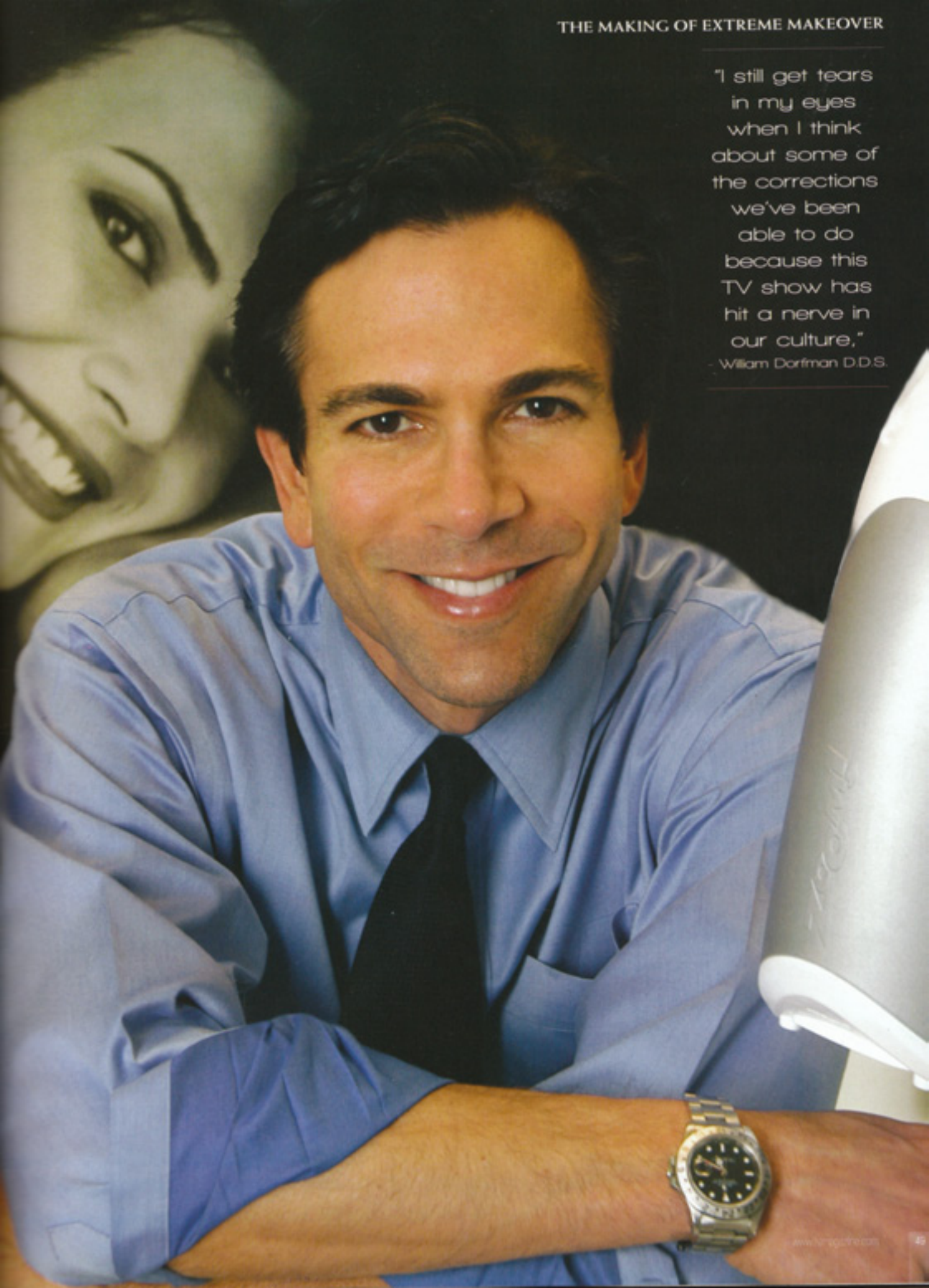
If there's just one thing people can do to significantly change their appearance for the better, it's to have their teeth whitened. Even better, have teeth realigned and whitened, but not too much. This, according to *Extreme Dream Team* doctor William Dorfman, is what most people discover when they make that one single investment in themselves. For Dorfman, seeing these changes has been the most gratifying thing that has happened to him since becoming a star on the show. "What's so great about *Extreme Makeover* is how much awareness of dental health has been created by its success," says the dentist responsible for some of Hollywood's brightest smiles. In 1989, when Dr. Dorfman was just thirty years old, he created his own company called Discuss Dental, Inc., a worldwide leader in tooth whitening technology and other aesthetic dental products.

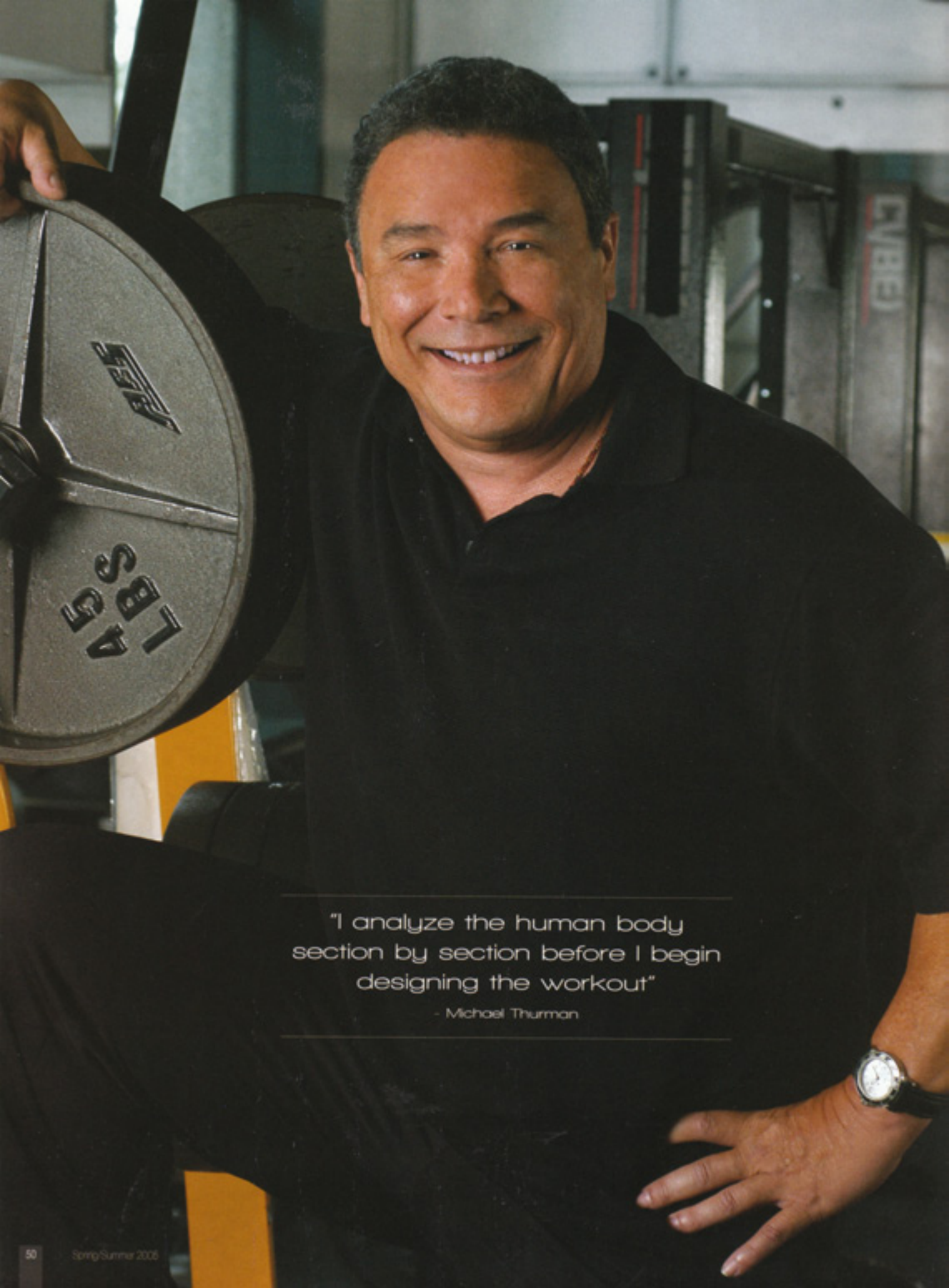
"The simply cosmetic stuff is easy, but the real rewards come from cases on the show that are truly extreme." When a patient has function and good health restored through expert



"I still get tears
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- William Dorfman D.D.S.





"I analyze the human body
section by section before I begin
designing the workout"

- Michael Thurman

dentistry, it changes the show's tone for the entire episode. "Here we are, essentially a cosmetic enhancement television show, and then this moment happens where we are able to correct a jaw, mouth or lip deformity and it's life changing and inspiring for everyone involved. I still get tears in my eyes when I think about some of the corrections we've been able to do because this TV show has hit a nerve in our culture." He specifically recalls two sisters who both had cleft palate conditions, patients with whom he still communicates. "Once you've had that much interaction with another human being, there's no way you want to sever the tie," he says.

Throughout his career, Dr. Dorfman has tried to give back in ways that enhance public awareness of overall dental health. In association with the Crown Council of Dentistry, he has provided the whitening materials for its charity campaign, Smiles for Life.

Dr. Dorfman offers free dental restoration services to the Los Angeles Battered Women's Shelter, a downtown refuge which helps survivors of physical violence. He knows that giving these women a chance to smile will help them heal and provide a better opportunity for employment. "I'm the father of three girls so I know how important it is to have confidence. A good smile can do that," he adds, flashing that big white smile of his, a famous smile now and a famous smile maker, too.

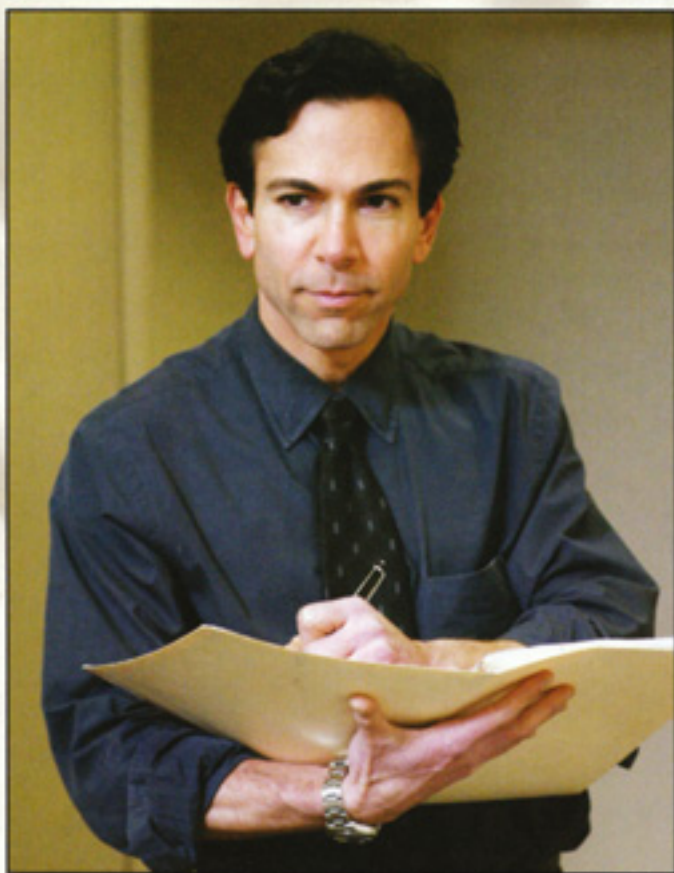
Next I'm off to get "buffed" with Michael Thurmond, bodybuilder and inventor of the highly successful infomercial empire known as the Six Week Body Makeover System, who thinks of himself as more artist than fitness expert. Make no mistake about it though, to watch him 'work' a body is to observe discipline in action. Perhaps it is the 'Zen' approach he takes to the human anatomy that makes him an artist. What surprised me most was his friendly, non-aggressive style. I expected a drill sergeant but met a spiritual, well spoken healer instead.

"I analyze the human body section by section before I begin designing the workout," he says, noting that it is definitely possible to lift or rebuild a single contour, regardless of conventional wisdom on the subject.

The Extreme Makeover patients get a complete health evaluation as he does with all his clients. These days, he's too busy managing his fitness empire and producing new bodies for ABC's hit series to take on new clients. To that end he says that he turns clients over to one of his trainers who have spent six months working one-on-one with him. "I have to observe in minute detail exactly how my trainers are using my system of 'deep underlying muscle tissue building and sculpting,' since it's my unique system that differentiates my training from the thousands of other good trainers out there." He employs over 80 trainers in 25 locations throughout Southern California and takes on new trainers only through personal recommendation.

Much of what he does in his reprogramming and reshaping program is done through diet, which helps create his so-called "blueprinting" effect. This, he claims, is what allows a body to re-sculpt and burn weight rapidly without causing health problems. He does not believe in fad dieting. "The only principle I follow is that 'food is medicine' so eat only to fuel your body and you'll see the results." Not that easy I had to say. "Come on Michael, don't you indulge sometimes?" His mischievous grin gave it away. "Yeah, Bree, I sure do, but the next day I remember to pay it back in the gym, there's just no other way." Darn, I knew it.

To test his theory of finding the 'deep underlying tissue' and using specifically applied resistance (his branding terms) I asked for one exercise for tightening the tiny (but annoyingly noticeable in tight slacks) area that rests directly beneath the buttocks, before the stretch of thigh muscle runs lengthwise. Another impish smile and he had me bent over a gluteus maximus bench press, with my back muscles rounded and my feet splayed outward, contracting my abdominals



and pulling with the butt muscles. "Now hold that position and squeeze." Holding it, is the trick for that difficult muscle group, Michael says. Just fifteen reps and the next day, I felt it. Either I am out of shape (though I still box and bike a bit) or he really is a guru of specific muscle knowledge. Vanity makes me suspect the latter. After all, ABC can afford to hire the best.

Another point Michael repeats over and over again is that we need to eat, rather than starve, in order to reshape the body. "The only way to speed up the metabolism is eat specific foods at specific times of the day in order to build muscle and burn fat. Since no two people are alike, finding the right balance of specific foods and specific times of day is the challenge." That's where his diagnostic tools of health evaluation and trained sculptor's eye take over. Viewers have watched Extreme Makeover patients drop six sizes in as little as four weeks through Michael's approach. Patients have their meals catered during their transformations, so producers can maximize success on the show. Michael oversees the catering too, just as he does for clients of 'Michael Thurmond's Spa Body Makeover' at the Luxe Hotel in Santa Monica.

For the rest of us who don't have a catering service, Michael recommends eating six to eight times a day. Mini meals including all those foods we know we should be eating like fresh veggies, protein and high fiber carbs. He believes in bio identical hormone replacement for baby boomers and older clients. "Hormones are the microchips for weight gain and loss, and muscle tissue replacement during the aging process. Even though it's a controversial area of medical science, I see results day after day that could never happen without hormone replacement therapy."

Another piece of advice he offers, "I see a lot of hypoglycemic people cutting carbs willy nilly and that's just plain dangerous. Find out if you are hypoglycemic and respect that reality."



Look for more wise advice about health and body building Michael Thurmond style in his Six Day Body Makeover book coming out this month. His empire grows.

When Dr. Garth Fisher was first approached by producer Howard Schultz to lead the Extreme Dream Team, he was a bit apprehensive. "The idea of building an entire TV show around one of the fastest growing and most controversial aspects of our culture was an obvious two-edged sword," he says, casually draping his athletic frame into the big easy chair opposite mine. "I never dreamed it would really fly, because, as you know only too well Bree, the odds of selling a TV network a new show idea, much less having it hit a home run, are astronomical. But then I thought, as long as we can focus as much on making people grow more confident and happy with themselves as we do on simply making them more attractive, we'd have something special."

As one of Hollywood's 'golden' surgeons, Garth certainly didn't need the celebrity. "I really enjoy being home with my kids while they're still young and the complication of TV celebrity was not something I wanted or needed. Howard assured me the network would allow us to do some procedures that I knew could change people's lives in enormously positive ways and that was an exciting thought."

"Howard assured me the network would allow us to do some procedures that I knew could change people's lives in enormously positive ways and that was an exciting thought."

Garth Fisher, M.D., F.A.C.S.



His reconstructive work sets the tone for the entire show when a big makeover is at stake. To that end, his easy going nature is a huge plus. "It's essential there be a loving, embracing environment when a patient has to expose their emotional vulnerabilities when we 'assess' what is to be done, and have to do it in such a public arena." I laughed out loud in agreement, recalling how many times I felt so 'naked' while anchoring the news for twenty years, simply because I was having a bad hair day. "These brave souls open up their lives, hearts and their very flesh to a cynical and sophisticated viewing public, which often assumes someone chooses plastic surgery out of sheer vanity," he says.

Dr. Fisher specializes in breast and face reconstruction – and his waiting list is more than two years long. Sound like a lot of pressure? Garth is circumspect about that. "By the time a patient's surgery date finally arrives they've had ample time to do the research that makes the best possible patient for me. Others will find another surgeon to perform the procedure. There are lots of great surgeons out there in every part of the country, every part of the world."

He has several overriding philosophies which guide his choices about who the best candidates are for the show. "They're the same people who make the best candidates in real life. They have to be making the choice to do this for the right reasons at the right time and with the right doctor." I asked him to give me an extreme case of the opposite. "You'll find this hard to believe but it's true. I had a twenty-something Saudi princess fly to California for a consultation. As she pulled at her cheeks, insisting she needed her first facelift immediately, I told her to go home and come back in twenty years. I thought I'd never see her again. Less than three years later, she's back in my office, yanking at the face lift someone else had done for her. I sent her home again, but I bet she found someone to do it anyway."

Extreme cases like that can easily be dismissed as the worst example of choosing to go under the knife. So how does Dr. Fisher decide to turn down a patient with more realistic expectations than the Saudi princess was seeking? "I ask myself several questions. Is there another physician better qualified for this specific surgical procedure? Is the patient seeking "perfection" which is subjective? And finally, do I want my name on this? I appreciate there are doctors out there who are making much more important decisions than whether to change someone's looks. I have enormous respect for doctors who are treating serious diseases, like cancer, so I try to keep what I do in perspective. I have the luxury of making sure I am exactly the right match for a patient."

This humble attitude is one major reason the show is a huge success. Just watch Garth's bedside manner on *Extreme Makeover* and you'll see a guy who's comfortable in his own skin (no pun intended). A reluctant TV star is always more fun to watch than one with a big ego, particularly when the patient is supposed to be the star.

Finally, my behind-the-camera experience begged me to ask Dr. Garth a final question. What really makes this show a true reality television production, especially now that it has a big budget? "There are no second takes in the operating room. I don't get to see the patient's results until minutes before the audience does on live TV."



Photos courtesy ABC photo department



Just as in real life, when the bandages come off so does all the pretending. This is where Extreme Makeover could just as easily be titled Extreme Surprise or Extreme Emotion. And that, as any producer will tell you is an extremely successful "TV moment."

ABC's Extreme
Makeover airs
on Thursdays
9-10pm PST.

