

MY LIFE

John Masters
Plastic surgeon

John Masters is a Wellington plastic surgeon. The self-described former Auckland westie attended Te Atatu's Rutherford High School before beginning his medical training. He was a research fellow at Middlemore Hospital, and has post-graduate qualifications from the United States, where he worked under world authorities in burns treatment, breast reconstruction, hand reconstruction, and the implanting of electronic devices to give tetraplegics use of their hands. Dr Masters, 43, has lived in Wellington since 2003. His wife Leanne, a nurse, works with him. The couple have two young children.

The first time I realised I wanted to be a plastic surgeon was when I was told that plastics was the hardest surgical specialty training scheme to get onto. I did the groundwork and was lucky enough to get in on my first application.

When I tell people what I do they see it as an opportunity for an on-the-spot consultation. It's never appropriate and certainly not good use of my family time, so I usually say I work in a body shop – a slight perversion of the truth that rapidly leads to a change of topic.

I could cry when patients come in for a facial surgery consultation and tell me they want to look 10 (or more) years younger, have no scars, need to be recovered by the weekend (they have functions to attend most weekends) and want to be back at work in a week, but they don't want anyone to know they have had "something done".

When people mention *Nip/Tuck* I laugh. *Nip/Tuck* is to plastic surgery what *Ally McBeal* was to law. I've never watched an episode.

Celebrity plastic surgery sucks. Celebrities should be banned from having plastic surgery; they seem to have an almost universal inability to choose good plastic surgeons. I just don't understand it. There are so many shockingly bad celebrity results out there, they give plastic surgery a bad name.

If I could change one thing about my body it would be to slow down the aches and pains I'm getting from renovating our house. **I would never work on a patient who asked me** to do anything unrealistic. My role is to enhance nature, not to create freaks of nature. I am proud to run a conservative practice.

The difference between plastic surgery and cosmetic surgery is the surgeon. After qualifying as a doctor plastic surgeons train for at least another five years in plastic surgery, whereas any doctor in New Zealand can call themselves a cosmetic surgeon, even if they have absolutely no postgraduate training in surgery.

Why did I become a doctor? It was teenage ego really. I didn't even know what university was until half way through the seventh form. A teacher's pet a year ahead of me, whom I was always compared negatively to, applied unsuccessfully to get into medical school – what better incentive to apply than to have the last laugh on your teachers?

JULIE JACOBSON

Plastic fantastic: John Masters, plastic surgeon in the foyer of his clinic. Photo: MAARTEN HOLL

