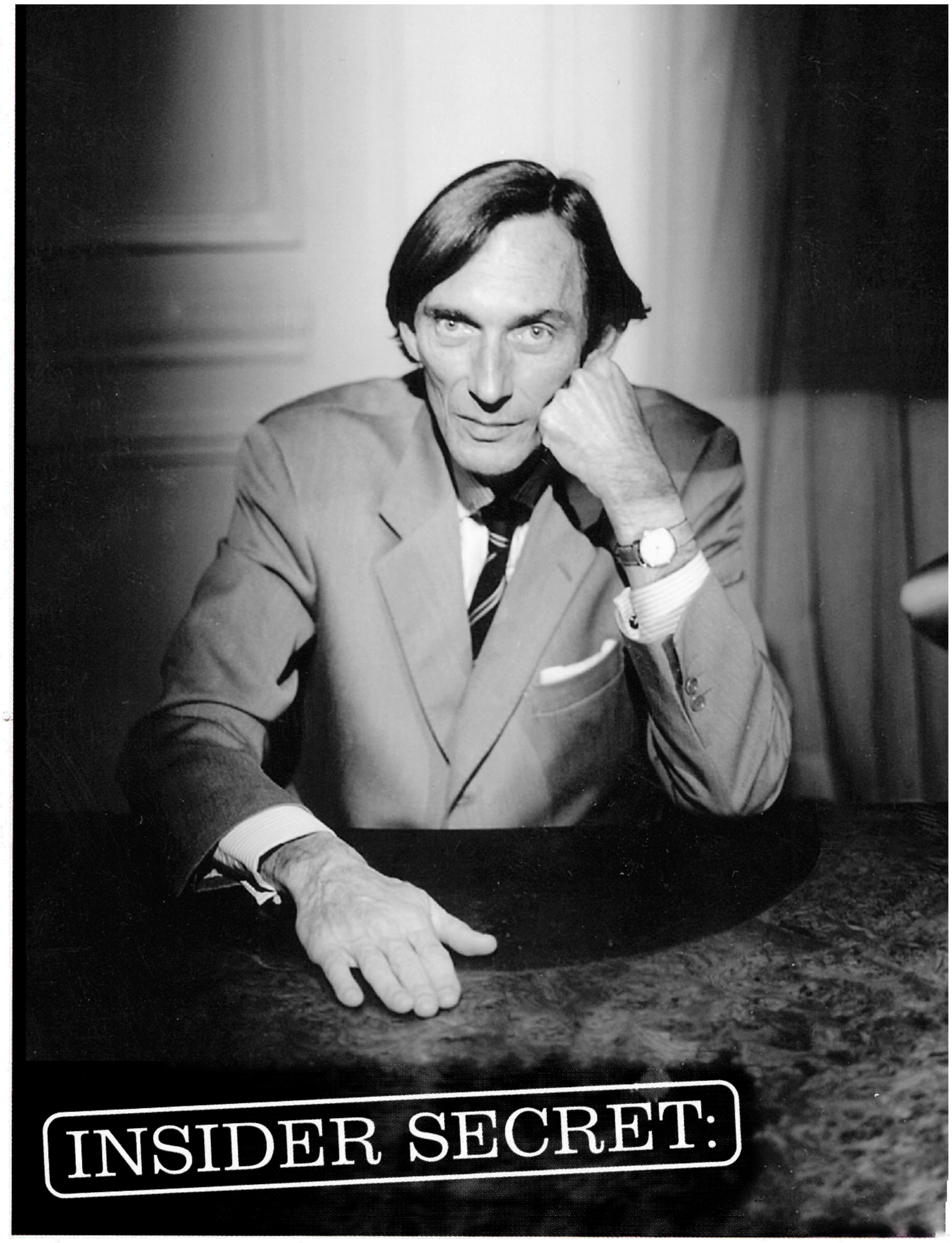

Doctor who?

Olivier de Frahan is a wanted man in London. **Henrietta Creighton** talks to the suave Parisian they call the Michelangelo of plastic surgery

What links Tony Blair, John Kerry and Silvio Berlusconi? The answer: there are rumours they've all resorted to youth enhancing treatments. Blair is said to dye his hair, Kerry apparently resorted to Botox to increase his election chances against Bush and Berlusconi's been under the surgeon's knife. Plastic surgery, once a predominantly female domain, has hit the mainstream. And our reasons for such drastic measures are changing. Once upon a time, women had facelifts to predominantly hold onto their sexual allure but now, more and more of us, male and female need to look young in order to succeed in politics and the boardroom.

Recent figures are staggering. Plastic surgery rose in Britain by 65% in 2004 and in America in 2003, a staggering nine million operations were classified as plastic surgery. The increase is, in part, due to its recent affordability but don't be too quick to opt for cheap 'plastic surgery safaris' to South Africa and Eastern Europe. One of the reasons why there has been such an increase in Britain is corrective surgery from botched operations abroad, says plastic surgeon Peter Butler. Another reason for the increase is what was once only available to the few is now the cost of a modest car. Breast enlargement costs £4,000 to £5,000; a facelift and eyelid surgery £7,000 to £8,000; and a new nose £3,500 to £4,000.

If you're looking for the finest surgeon in the business – just how do you start your search? In her recent book, Toyah Wilcox explains the nightmare she faced tracking down Doctor Olivier de Frahan, who did her facelift. Wilcox was only too aware of the look she didn't want. If you've ever seen that Palm Beach over-cooked, tight, wide Joker-smile face-lift you'll know how ridiculous it looks.

De Frahan, is one of the finest surgeons in the business – think of all the surgery you've seen that looks natural, subtle and refined and you can bet he's the master behind it. The Parisian's client list reads like Who's Who of the truly beautiful. He's in such hot demand for his perfect eye and notion of beauty that he spends alternate weeks between his consulting rooms in Wilbraham Place and Paris. His philosophy? Because we are living longer and therefore working longer, with less of us retiring at 60, keeping our sexual allure is becoming economically necessary. Ten years ago, 3% of his patients were male and in the last few years he's seen this increase to 20%. What's even more surprising is that these men are CEOs, politicians and television presenters. They need to look young and fresh to secure their career.

De Frahan is a big devotee of the natural look and likes to keep the expression around the eyes and prefers to help his clients look fresher and younger rather than opting for the more extreme American style. He's known for performing surgery on the most beautiful women in the world – since these women have the most to lose, it's into his capable hands that they trust their most valuable asset. He's tweaked many young models and actresses – who have just one imperfection holding back their career. He doesn't say yes to performing surgery on everyone. Sometimes, he says, 'it's a question of suggesting they do more sport rather than opting for surgery. I know in one minute what needs to be done and if I see five people, I'll only agree to do surgery on two of them. If what they request doesn't fit in with my taste, I won't do it – I'm very selfish but I want a good result for them. I've always been fascinated by beauty – I grew up in Zaire with some of the most beautiful people in the world and I became very interested by proportions and decided then to become a surgeon. I believe big lips and big breasts mean women only attract a certain type of man. The natural look can be far more seductive.'

But before opting for such drastic measures it's worth noting Sharon Osbourne's insider's view: 'If anybody says their facelift doesn't hurt, they're lying. It was like I'd spent the night with an axe murderer.'

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