

Rise of the 'ear job'

Listen up! Ears sagging from heavy earrings can age you, say surgeons now offering cosmetic fixes

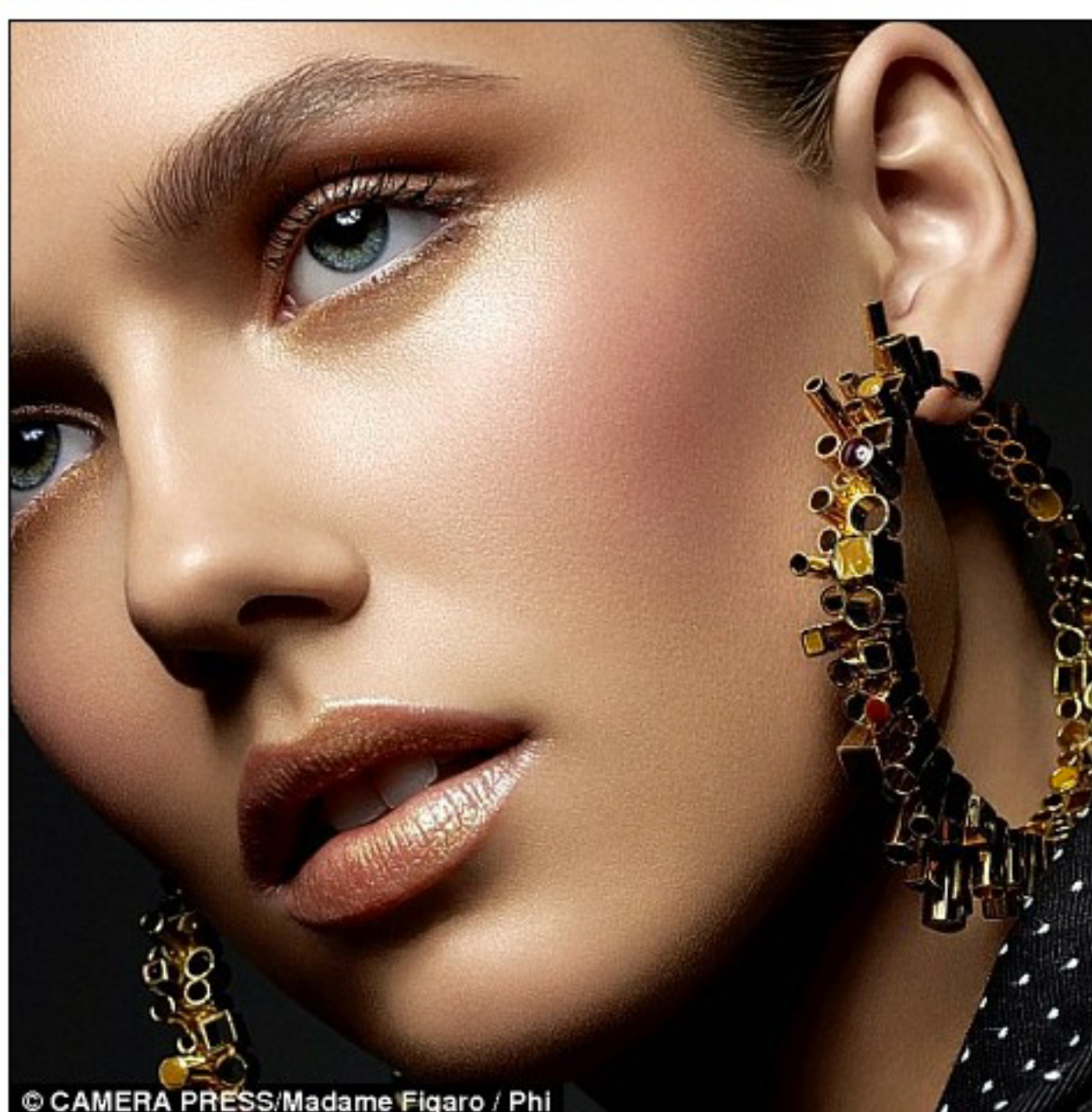
By ALICE HART-DAVIS

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When you examine yourself in the mirror for signs of ageing, I bet it's not your ears you're looking at.

Yet the earlobe is finding itself in the anti-ageing spotlight as it emerges that more and more cosmetic surgeons are doing a quick bit of work on the ears — often in conjunction with a facelift, but sometimes just on their own.

The British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (BAAPS) even featured a presentation on earlobe correction at their recent conference.



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Beware big earrings: Heavy jewellery could stretch your ear lobes (posed by model)

The first question that springs to mind is: 'Why bother?' But, apparently, saggy earlobes are as much of a giveaway of ageing as a turkey neck.

'It is no secret that more women are having what could be called a "lobe job",' says Wendy Lewis, cosmetic surgery adviser and editor of beautyinthebag.com. 'Gravity takes its toll on earlobes — they droop like chins and breasts do, and can make you look older.'

'Years of wearing heavy earrings also cause the lobe to get stretched out of shape. An earlobe reduction is a simple op that reshapes the earlobe to a better proportion. Another issue for women is a torn earlobe, where the hole from a pierced ear gets so stretched that the lobe tears open and has to be stitched together.'

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One plastic surgeon who works with ears is Dr David Gault. Most of his surgical work involves serious reconstruction of entire ears, but he also repairs holes, tears and shortens lobes — not by trimming off the ends, but by taking a section out of the middle.

'About one-third of my ear work is purely cosmetic,' he says. 'Surgery on the ear is more common, partly due to heavy earrings but also because of injudicious facelifts,' he says.

If too much skin is taken away during a facelift, you can end up with your earlobe on your cheek, which is clearly not a good look and needs expert correction.

Other top plastic surgeons are also spending more time de-ageing ears.

'Approximately 75 per cent of all patients inquiring about facial rejuvenation also have elongated earlobes,' says Christopher Inglefield, of London Bridge Plastic Surgery.

He has developed a method of cutting, trimming and re-attaching the earlobe that leaves almost no scar. This takes 45 minutes, can be done under local anaesthetic as an out-patient procedure and is proving very popular.

Rosalie Williams, 58, from London, is a recent patient and she is delighted with the results.

'I had massive earlobes, which stretched from wearing earrings over the years,' she says. 'It got to the point where I didn't want to draw attention to them. I went to see Mr Inglefield to discuss some work on my face and he told me he had a special procedure for making earlobes smaller. It didn't hurt. My stitches aren't out yet, but I already have a much smaller, neater lobe and can't wait to wear earrings again.'

But before we all start thinking ear-work is the new facelift, Fazel Fatah, president of the BAAPS, tells me that having ageing ears is an issue that only bothers a minority of his patients.

'Ears are not a major area of anti-ageing concern,' he says. 'There are few individuals who ask for this specifically — but when I am doing a facelift, I usually graft a bit of fat into the earlobe to give it a more youthful look.'

'As people get older, there is a loss of fat from within the earlobe. Add to this the effects of gravity and the fact that, for some unknown reason, the actual dimensions of the earlobe enlarge and expand with age, and the result is that the earlobe becomes floppier and looks older.'

And surgeons are fast developing techniques to treat the problem.

'We use radio-frequency energy to tighten up the skin of the ears,' says Lesley Reynolds Khan, of the Harley Street Skin Clinic.

'We can re-shape ears, too, using a special machine that evaporates the tissue.'

If that sounds too extreme, you could opt for a filler.

'Most clients want to have their ears plumped up with a bit of filler, to make them look younger and fuller. It's quick, easy and relatively pain-free,' says Lesley.

So the next time you look in the mirror, just ask yourself: are my ears hanging low?

David Gault, earlobe repair, single from £1,200, both from £1,600, davidgault.co.uk; London Bridge Plastic Surgery earlobe reduction, £2,400, lbsps.co.uk; Harley Street Skin Clinic, harleystreetskin.co.uk

Hang free

Twice as many people have earlobes that are free-hanging rather than attached



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Wearing heavy earrings - like Jane Fonda - can cause the lobes to droop