



Picture: LEZLI ROSE. Hair and make-up: DESMOND GRUNDY. Stylist: CAMILLA POLETTI-DAV

DEEP crow's feet, frown lines criss-crossing my forehead, a horribly creased top lip line, crinkled neck and lifeless pallid skin. Sixty-six? My reflection in the mirror, as I contemplated what to pack for my big summer holiday, looked more like 166.

But perhaps that's no surprise when, after 27 years of indulging in 'tweakments' to keep my face looking its best, I'd neglected them entirely for almost 18 months. I'd had

by Amanda Platell

such high hopes for 2024, promising myself more 'me' time, joining a painting class, walking the Camino de Santiago trail in north-west Spain and, of course, catching up on facial maintenance.

Sadly, though, it quickly turned into an

TURN TO NEXT PAGE



‘Just last week my hot window cleaner asked me out on a date (at 66). I have £840 of Botox to thank for that ego boost...’

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

annus horribilis when my dear friend Gary fell seriously ill and all my plans were dashed. Four months of hospital visits, followed by the funeral, and I was exhausted. No wonder my skin, then the least of my worries, had become lifeless and drawn.

Sadness, grief, tiredness, stress, they all show up first in your heart and then on your face.

I had kept promising myself I'd do something about it, but there was always something more pressing to do: sorting out Gary's affairs, getting his home ready so I could fulfil his wish to die at home.

It was at his funeral that the first kindly, well-intentioned comments came from friends. One said I looked 'exhausted', which as any woman knows means you look like hell. Another said surely I needed a break, as I looked worn out (sisterly code for haggard).

But, in the end, it was the looming thought of a planned trip to see my friends and family in Australia that made me realise I had to get a grip.

While I used to fly back to see my parents three or four times a year, since their deaths, 'home' no longer felt like home. I hadn't been back for five years. The last time I saw my oldest friends I was still in my late 50s. And a lot can change in half a decade.

What would everyone make of this once carefree woman, now sagging with sadness, every single second of her six decades of life seemingly etched on her face? Yes, I knew, deep down, they would love me however careworn I looked, but I wanted to be at my best for the reunion — if not for them, for me.

This is the point where many would console themselves with a super-sized shopping spree, stocking up on gorgeous summer clothes, splashing out a fortune on an uber-glamorous homecoming.



Once, I would have done the same. As my six bursting wardrobes full of expensive clothes attest, I've always loved beautiful outfits, shoes and handbags. I have enough designer clothes to sink the Titanic and ordinarily that wouldn't deter a pick-me-up summer splurge.

But this time I looked at my rails and shelves of exquisite garments and only felt dejected. What's the point of fabulous new dresses if your face and neck look saggy, crinkly, dull and old?

And so at the very last minute — barely more than a week before my holiday — I decided I simply couldn't face the folks back home in my current state. My holiday must-have wasn't a suitcase full of new clothes, but a complete facial overhaul.

I booked in with Lee Garrett, a fully qualified aesthetic nurse practitioner with 24 years' experience and a Harley Street clinic.

I soon realised, from the bemused look on Lee's face, just how drastically my own had changed since I had seen him last.

'There's only so much we can do before you fly,' he said tactfully, before assuring me he could still make a big difference.

He set about some serious injecting... Botox in my upper face, including my forehead, my crow's feet, frown lines, and more in the lines in my neck; dermafiller in my very wrinkled upper lip — not to give me a Love Island pout but to banish the so-called barcode lines — and Profhilo, a hyaluronic acid treatment, to improve skin tone and texture and hydrate.

Normally it would be done across two sessions, but time was of the essence so I went for the lot in one go.

The cost? In total, around £2,000. While some may gasp at such extravagance, I reasoned I'd forgone the cost of my holiday wardrobe to pay for it.

And it was really just an enhanced version of something many of my mid-life friends, all successful career women, are doing this year: tweaking their faces, lips and necks in time for summer, with its parties, reunions

and ever-present cameras. The difference is they just don't tell anyone.

We all agree that we've plenty of fab outfits — but who sees the frock when your face is a rocky horror show? Better, I think, to be realistic and spend your money on something that can actually make a difference.

These days, it's fashionable to agonise over whether we 'should' have tweakments or stay 'natural'.

While I have the utmost respect for ladies who age gracefully without any tweakments, I am not, nor do I ever intend to be, one of them.

But unlike the millions of women, including almost every celebrity on TV and in movies, who claim they've 'never had anything done', I've always been honest about it — with myself, with friends and with readers.

After all, my face is one thing I can change. So why not? My friends and

I, when we lament the passing years, make sure never to say, 'Now we're getting older...'. Instead we use the phrase, 'Well, we're not 40 any more...'

But however much we hate to admit it, once we reach our mid-60s, our bodies just aren't what they were, and no amount of time spent at the gym or starving ourselves on silly diets will change that.

Packing for a summer holiday when I was younger meant buying a few new bikinis, a couple of sarongs, a slinky strapless dress for the evenings and some designer sandals.

I used to love a pair of my favourite Levi's denim shorts in a 28in waist, too, but my midriff has sadly caught up with the years — I'm now more 30in. That's despite being relatively fit due to regular boxing and weight training.

Of course, there are two camps in the army of sixtysomething women fighting an active campaign against ageing. Those of us, like myself, who focus on our faces — and those who are trying new ways to lose weight from their bodies.

I'm simply not one for body procedures like fat freezing — yes, it's a quick fix, but it's far better to eat less fat. And although I have a number of friends who've been on weight-loss drug Wegovy for months — and the results *are* remarkable — it's not for me either.

That made rummaging through my hitherto go-to holiday wardrobe



a depressing experience, particularly when I found that some of the zips no longer did up.

The elasticised 'control' panel of my eye-wateringly expensive Rigby & Peller designer swimsuit — bought a few years ago promising to flatten my tummy and give me Marilyn Monroe bosoms — has perished, leaving me looking saggy and six months pregnant.

Trying on a beautiful pale green Ghost dress that was once a holiday essential is suddenly a disaster in the full-length mirror. The drapes sit awkwardly over a more fulsome body, the skinny straps revealing many women's biggest nightmare: batwing arms.

As for my favourite designer sandals, all I can see is 60-year-old bunions — the price for wearing high-heels all my life.

Oh, the irony; all the things we did in our youth to be beautiful — wearing stilettos, sunbathing — have come back to haunt our faces and bodies. To the extent that, today, I would never entertain the idea of having that hell of all hells, a beach holiday.

While I am in awe of women my age with perfect 'bikini bodies', I am not one of them. Looking sensationally sexy on the beach is a dream beyond most of us past 60.

And dare I even mention the midlife décolletage dilemma? It's the part of a woman's body we most forget because in England we're covered up for 11 months of the year. Then summer arrives and you suddenly discover your cleavage is as dried-up as a Saharan riverbed.

Better to ignore the body altogether — and thank God there are other things that can be done.

Enter Lee and his tweakments, the most extensive I've ever had done, especially all in one go: Botox to the upper face, forehead, frown lines and crow's feet (£470); Botox in the neck (£370); dermal filler to the upper lip (£580) and Profhilo

to rehydrate and improve skin tone (£450).

Was it painful? A little but not horribly. The needles do sting but

only as they go in, a bit like a mosquito bite.

The results? Excellent.

Within days I could see my face lifting, de-creasing, the crow's feet melting away — and the improvements continued over the coming days. I was left with not a frown in sight and a more natural glow to my formerly grey skin.

As for clothes, I packed light, allowing my new youthful appearance to do the talking. I opted for a few white T-shirts, a two-year-old Stella Nova orange print dress, an ancient Seafolly monochrome one-piece swimsuit, some sarongs and a light Max Mara cashmere coat for the chillier evenings, among others.

Then it was time for the acid test, when I arrived back in Australia at the end of last month. Even after a 20-hour flight, the first thing one of my girlfriends of 50-plus years said was: 'Mandy, you haven't aged a bit!'

Later came the ultimate compliment: in a hushed tone, she asked delicately if I'd 'had any work done' and if so what, in detail, so she could have it, too.

And the praise continued. So many old pals commented on how young and happy I looked. Friends' wives, more discreetly, asked if I'd had any tweakments.

Suffice to say the holiday was one of the happiest I've had in my entire life. Family reunions full of joy after so long; endless barbecues and home-made pizza nights in the back garden.

I'm not ashamed to admit that looking 166 after such a torrid year had affected my mood — and I'm not sad I resorted to cosmetic enhancements, just glad that they exist.

I had felt so worried that my old friends would greet a shadow of my former self, but the tweakments saved the day. They gave me such a boost, a sense of confidence that made me ready to greet the world again.

So I have no regrets. I know I look younger than I should.

When I first became a journalist, my mum said: 'Oh, Mandy, it's such a tough life: you'll end up smoking, drinking and divorced.' And I've been guilty of

all three.

Yet just last week the hot 44-year-old window cleaner said he couldn't believe I was 66 — and asked whether I would go on a date with him. Was he just looking

for a bigger tip? Either way, I have Botox to thank for the ego boost.

And I've decided to go even further, now that I'm back from my holiday, with longer-term tweakments later in the year.

Here's what I'm saving up for next: BBL (broad band light), which feels like mini whip lashes and removes red broken veins and skin pigmentation.

This would be combined with Moxi, an ablative laser that rejuvenates the skin and removes old sun damage, polishes and tightens. Three sessions of these six weeks apart will set me back £2,450.

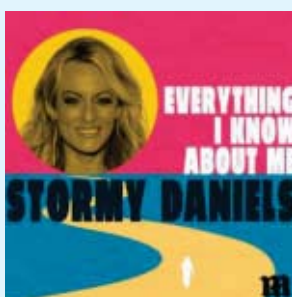
Next the new must-have regenerative treatment, polynucleotide injections. Used medically since 1978 mainly for wound healing, they are now used in aesthetics to correct damaged, ageing skin around the eyes, face, neck and body. They improve collagen and hyaluronic acid in your skin and the cost for four sessions would be £1,800.

And not forgetting ultratherapy, a procedure that emits ultrasound waves to penetrate the skin's surface to the deeper dermal structures, stimulating collagen. Costing £3,650 for one session, this would be used on the jaw to get my jawline back and on the neck to tighten and remove lines.

That's another £7,900. Yes, it's a lot of money, but it's a decision any woman of a certain age has to make for herself. Of course I don't have to have it all, just what I really, really need.

After all, who can put a price on a beaming holiday smile — or the self-confidence and ease that lie behind it?





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*Within days
I could see
my face lifting
and de-creasing*

*So many
friends said
how young and
happy I looked*





Fresh-faced: Amanda all set for summer and (above) before her tweakments



Picture: LEZLI-ROSE/Hair and make-up: DESMOND GRUND/STYLIST: CAMILLA RIDLEY-DAY

