

# A King's Nose

Once a thing of nobility and honour, strong, natural noses are undergoing mass renovation with all kinds of surgery. Some men have found immediate self-worth and satisfaction in their quest for a 21st-century nose. Others prefer the original. By MURRAY CLARK





**I** WAS ABOUT 15 when someone first disrespected my nose. It was during a mock German exam in our freezing cold, hellishly spare gym hall. A classmate glared at me, honking on a huge, imaginary clown nose. I loudly implied that I'd had sexual relations with his mother, which was both extremely childish and extremely effective. A nearby invigilator hissed like a mad goose.

From that moment on, I realised I had a nose that belonged on a coin: my dad said so. He said it was a Roman nose. A strong nose! Beak-like and bold, it is long like my father's and wide like my mother's. The worst of both worlds. And unfortunate, given they're both very handsome people. I spent some time feeling insecure about my nose. Then, over the next 20 years, I gradually learnt to worry about other consequential things, like mortgage rates and the prospect of nuclear war.

For many guys, the ghosts of secondary school still linger – and with your nose sitting in the centre stage of your entire face, perceived imperfections can cause a lot of teenage unease. “From a school age, I knew that I had a big nose, and I was very conscious of it. I'd always avoid photos from the side, and people would mention it,” says Ashford, a visual merchandiser in London. “It made me really kind of unhappy with the way I looked.” Ashford lightly toyed with the idea of surgery, and the feeling loitered well into his mid-20s. “At school, you just want to fit in. You just want the normal beauty standard. It's the only thing people are really interested in.”

Countless other men have felt that way. It's led some of them to seek out a rhinoplasty, the clinical term for a nose job, in a bid to look and feel better. Most procedures take around two and a half hours, and involve a surgeon reconfiguring the underlying bone and cartilage to shape a new nose. The NHS estimates that such operations can cost anywhere between £4,000 and £7,000. That price tag is determined by the intricacies of the procedure, and recovery time that can last up to a year. Multiple parts need to be manipulated. Cartilage is removed, or grafted from other areas of the body (ribs are good, a surgeon tells me; an ear, not so much). It's like

disassembling a model plane that took months of a steady hand, glue and a scalpel, only to painstakingly put it back together to form something new.

Guys like Jaffar are happy with the results. As an athlete and goalkeeper at school, he suffered many direct hits to the face. “I don't know what happened. Someone put the evil eye on my nose as a kid. I just always got hit in the nose, so over the years, it went crooked, with these two massive, almost like bony growths at the top of the bridge,” he says. “It wasn't my natural nose.” Pair that with chronic sinus issues, and, aged 22, he paid a visit to Dr Mohammed Elahi, in Toronto, with some specific criteria. He was nervous, too. Jaffar points to TikTok, and how there is never “anything chill” about a quick “male rhinoplasty” search. “I said I really just wanted it to look natural,” he tells me. “I didn't want it to look like a fake nose and I wanted it to suit my Pakistani and Indian heritage. And he did exactly that, *alhamdulillah*. God bless, 10 out of 10.”

Since the operation, Jaffar, who acts and models, has seen a huge boost in his self-esteem: “Islam teaches us to be humble and stuff, and after I got it, one of my friends said, ‘You're going to get it done, and your ego and your confidence will be going through the roof. Try to keep it down.’ He wasn't lying.” Jaffar kept his natural bump, and he laughs at the negative comments on social media about his old nose. He looks objectively great, and recommends people do their research when shortlisting surgeons.

Justin looks great, too. He is a design producer in Los Angeles, and his rhinoplasty came on the back of another medical surgery in 2014, a time when he'd never “met a man who'd had a rhinoplasty, or at least one who admitted it,” he says. “I never liked how my nose looked. The tip was a bit bulbous and the bridge had a bit of a bump. It wasn't super crooked, but it wasn't straight either.” Plus, it made some sort of financial sense to him; Justin's health insurance covered the anaesthesia, which was the majority of the cost.

“I distinctly remember looking in the mirror a few months before my surgery, and thinking, If I have to live with this nose for the rest of my life, that's OK. At that moment, I knew I was doing it for the right reasons,” he says. “I wasn't

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**A FEW THOUSAND** years ago, a big nose was the sign of a big dog. It was worthy of being on a coin. Mark Bradley, a professor of classics at the University of Nottingham, has spent almost a decade researching and writing about noses – from classic antiquity to the Middle Ages. “In the Roman period, there's a really stark identification of big noses being associated with power and authority,” he says. “If you look at portraits of Cicero, he has a cleft in his nose like a chickpea. I think there was pride about inheriting that kind of authority through your family – and all this plays out in Roman coin portraits, in Roman sculpture too, where people would be depicted proudly holding their noses up as a sign of their heritage.” And as for all those noseless statues you see in museums? A massive disrespect, it turns out. “We used to go, ‘Well, they topple over, the nose is the first thing that gets smashed off,’” says Bradley. “But often it was chiselled off, normally by somebody who wanted to deface the memory of, say, bad emperors. It's an expression of disempowerment for whoever's nose you were taking off.”

If the Romans saw the nose as a birth certificate stamped right in the middle of the face, it was the Germans who saw it as a record to be edited. Just before the First World War, entrepreneur Leo Maximilian Baginski patented a very medieval-looking device that used screws to mould the cartilage of the nose. “In a sense, this is a very early rhinoplasty, particularly when Germans are trying to establish themselves as an ideal race,” says Bradley. “It's really picking up on that fixation with noses as being an expression of character, behaviour, of race, of profession, of ancestry, heritage, all that stuff.” Noses have been at the centre of bigoted stereotypes for centuries, and it's not difficult to find Eurocentric ideals dominating beauty conversations today.

Though early procedures can be traced back to ancient Egypt and India, the modern idea of a nose job began in 1950s Hollywood. In his 1992 biography of Dean Martin, Nick Tosches recounts how the actor had a rhinoplasty paid for by his manager, Lou Costello. His career went on the up from there.

Cosmetic surgery has been through multiple phases since then. In 2025, there's a whole menu. Dr David Jack, a practitioner who has three clinics in London, has seen a noticeable uptick in guys electing for “non-surgical” nose jobs. “Botox relaxes muscles and that helps reduce the amount of flare in the nostrils, and the other thing that you can do with Botox is inject into the





muscle that connects the upper lip and the nose; you can relax that slightly, and lift the tip,” he says. Results typically last three to four months, whereas filler can retain the new shape for 18. With all these procedures, Jack says that around 30 per cent of his clients are men.

In San Diego, Dr John Hilinski has seen things take a bit of a U-turn: people wanting their lumps and bumps reinstated via a second nose job. He calls it “dorsal hump restoration”. “A good percentage of patients regret the operation because they simply don’t look like themselves any more,” he says. “The very first patient I ever did this type of surgery on travelled from Pennsylvania. She was Italian, and she kept going to these family reunions and looking around at her family and she didn’t look like them.” What happened next was a fairly novel procedure to bring back some semblance of her old nose. She was ecstatic with the results. “It kind of hit me: there are patients who just want to have their bump back,” says Hilinski. “Now, granted, it takes quite a bit of effort, but the point is I’m able to do that, and I have patients fly from all over the country, and sometimes the world, to do this restorative revision rhinoplasty.” He adds that he would never add a dorsal hump to someone who’d not had one in the first place. “That would be crazy.”

Full nose jobs can be performed through the nostrils, without breaking the structure. Others make incisions in the tissue between the nostrils, allowing for more precise work. But even at its most basic, a rhinoplasty is deeply complex – and filled with so many variables – that some surgeons have discontinued the procedure altogether. “It’s one of the most difficult cosmetic operations in regards to patient satisfaction,” says Dr Anthony Youn, a Detroit-based surgeon and medical podcaster. He hasn’t performed a rhinoplasty in 10 years. “This is because of many factors: rhinoplasty patients tend to have a high rate of body dysmorphia, the difficulty of the surgery, and the fact that the results change pretty dramatically over six to 12 months.” He doesn’t regret the loss of custom, either. “I just never enjoyed doing it. I believe my results were great and my patients were almost universally happy, but I just never loved doing the operation,” says Youn. “It’s tedious, and there is an element of the results over which the doctor doesn’t have control, like scar tissue.” While it’s hard to ascertain a concrete figure for revisions, one study presented at the 2017 ENT World Congress, the international gathering for ear, nose and throat specialists, estimated the figure to be about 15 per cent.

Will, in London, knows all too well about these unknowns – even when



a nose job is for medical purposes as opposed to cosmetic. “An ENT consultation found that the left passage of my nose was very flat, and the other side also deviated, but not as badly. For as long as I can remember, I’ve always had a blocked nose and attributed it to something like hay fever,” he says. “They said I was a prime candidate for surgery, but the waiting list was six to 12 months.” Will saw a Harley Street doctor to get a second opinion, but was told that a £7,000 procedure might not even guarantee success. Two years later, he took the NHS route. The surgery was quick. The recovery, not so much (“It was really uncomfortable and quite bloody, snotty and itchy”). When the bandages came off, Will still experienced the

same breathing problems. “The surgeon explained that this is not uncommon, but not before saying, ‘Hmmm, I thought we took that bit out,’” he says. “He also said cartilage has a ‘memory’, and it’s possible to grow back bent.” Ultimately, it didn’t work. Will is awaiting another consultation, but says, “Instinctively, I think this is just the way my nose is.”

Professionals point to the increased risk of procedures performed abroad. Even with flights and hotels, such trips can work out much cheaper. One website offers prices in Turkey that start at £1,500; another, an alarming £780. Last year, the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS) – a body that describes itself as “the UK’s only

organisation solely dedicated to advancing safety, innovation, and excellence in cosmetic surgery” – recorded a decrease in men seeking surgery here. While they accounted for 20 per cent of all procedures in 2022, the figure shrank to just 7 per cent in 2024. But that’s not because fewer men are signing up: they’re simply taking flight. Marc Pacifico, then president of BAAPS, wrote: “This trend appears consistent with the increasing number of individuals opting to travel abroad, particularly to destinations such as Turkey, in search of cheaper options for popular surgical procedures.” Pacifico highlighted the significant consequences of countries with fewer regulations, and how the NHS often bears the burden of corrective surgery when patients return home.

Daniel was 21 and on a plane to Mexico. The former flight attendant had been put in touch with a cosmetic doctor there. After years of mean comments that “stuck to [his] brain”, Daniel was in pursuit of a new nose. There were no consultations. Instead, everything was organised over email, and the process was quick. “I was not financially stable, so I took whatever I could afford. I think my first nose job was, like, £3,000? It was very affordable.” When he came round, Daniel was not happy with the results. “I just didn’t like the way it looked. It didn’t make me feel great,” he says. He’s not the only patient to have received a less than perfect rhinoplasty in Mexico. A 2018 study by the Regional Hospital of High Specialty of Oaxaca reported that loopholes in the system allow postgraduates to obtain aesthetic surgery degrees that skirt around official regulations.

Still, Daniel thought something could be done. So, charmed by a social media surgeon and encouraged by the amount of people sharing posts ooohing and ahhhhing over their new designer faces, he booked flights to Turkey. “It was my first time having money, so I was like, ‘Oh my God, I can do these things! I was influenced, and you think you’re in good hands,” says Daniel. “And it was a nightmare when I was there. They put me under [anaesthetic] in the lift, it was the worst experience of my life. I don’t know who did my surgery. It was scary.”

Daniel doesn’t express extreme dissatisfaction with these procedures. Instead, he likens it to a “journey”, each one a chapter that mirrors the undulations of life. To finally get the nose he’d always wanted, Daniel says he spent £25,000 on a final procedure with a surgeon he describes as “remarkable”. “His clients include patients with birth defects, people in accidents, and he makes you look normal,” says Daniel. He now has his ideal nose; symmetrical, in proportion and something that’s recharged his confidence. “I feel like

what I’m trying to reflect inside. I feel it now, you know?” he says. “I always wanted to feel part of society. People would point it out, or on social media they would just call me ugly. And I felt like that for many, many years. I always felt like the ugly kid.”

**IN MAY 2022**, the Health and Social Care Committee met in parliament. One of dozens of cross-party groups that regularly meet to discuss and scrutinise government policy, experts and witnesses are invited to speak. Charlie King, a reality-TV star who debuted in 2012 during *The Only Way Is Essex*’s golden age, was a keynote speaker. The committee was discussing the impact of body image on physical and mental health.

“I was at an all-boys school and there was a lot of competition and a fight for popularity. Unfortunately, I was not one of the popular kids. I was terribly bullied,” he told the meeting. He recounted how, after a longstanding struggle with his sexuality, and a quick segue into a huge TV show, he was subject to Twitter, which, in 2012, was starting to get comfortable with nastiness. “You end up becoming consumed by this world.”

The insecurities stuck, and they came to a head during lockdown. King decided to get a nose job – something the committee interrogated at length. The surgery led to his confidence levels and career being decimated.

“Obviously we spent a lot of time on our own and on the Zooms looking at ourselves, and picking ourselves apart,” King tells me. “I just got it into my head that, once we’re out of this mess, I wanted to get this nose fixed because my career hit a bit of a low.” He booked an appointment with someone he believed to be “very reputable”. “Within minutes, he got his rulers out, went, ‘Your nose is too big for your face, and we can make it more masculine.’ So I thought he was seeing what I was seeing. That was just music to my ears.”

When he saw the post-surgery pictures, King was shocked. His nose was still very rounded. More mass had been removed than he expected. A month later, it got worse. “The nose was just collapsing around me. I couldn’t breathe properly. I thought, I’ve been hacked,” says King. “It was only when I started learning about the anatomy of it that I realised the surgery wasn’t correct for my nose. So I had to wait for a full year to have another surgery with the same surgeon. Another surgeon assisted him. And again, the same thing happened because he didn’t use the right cartilage.” King would advise anyone against surgery unless it was totally necessary. “It just lends itself to so many risks and complications,” he says.



The problems persisted and he asked a new surgeon for a third opinion, who said that if he’d worked on the primary case, he wouldn’t have recommended King for surgery at all. The reconstruction went ahead. He was starting to look more like himself, with a nose that had more definition. But about six weeks later, an infection caused inflammation in his face that has left King needing yet more surgery. It will be his fourth rhinoplasty. “I turned 40 in August and they say life starts,” he says. “I feel like it’s ended.”

I wish King the best, and I think about my own nose. There’s risk in change. My parents are pro-cosmetic surgery. On the few occasions where I expressed some insecurity, they said we could consider our options. Then, they also said I had an “aristocratic nose”, a “great nose”, and, more reassuringly, that I’d grow into it.

Even in 2025, there are still so many unknowns with rhinoplasty. Perhaps it’s like any other big life commitment, then: marriage, mortgages, children. You do your research. You front up huge costs. You try to do things right, and you hope for the best. Sometimes, it works out, like it did for Jaffar and Justin, who made the jump with good doctors and never looked back (or felt better). Daniel unintentionally went the long way round to his perfect nose. Sadly, for some guys, like Charlie, things don’t work out how they’d planned.

Ashford, the guy who hated his nose at school, is now 33. He never did get surgery. Instead, he turned the anxieties of youth into his trump card. “As I got older, I was prouder to have my nose,” he says. “I’m Indian, Caribbean and English, so I’m a mix. It really just made me feel a bit more connected to that,” he says.

A few days before we spoke, he posted to Instagram. The picture was a side profile of his nose in all its glory, strong, lived-in, on a face that was glowing. “I never imagined sharing a photo like that. In my bio it says ‘big nose, big heart’, and someone messaged me who was anxious about their own nose,” says Ashford. “They said it made them think differently about it.” ❖

MURRAY CLARK is BRITISH GQ’s senior style editor.