



Best Bet

Farzana Merchant gambled on a better nose — and won a brand new outlook on life. BY MARISSA STAPLEY-PONIKOWSKI

At first glance, you'd never guess Farzana Merchant—a soft-spoken, 24-year-old pension fund specialist—is a poker whiz who plays weekly games with her colleagues and competes in tournaments. And you'd certainly never guess she had rhinoplasty last year. "I was never happy with my nose," says Merchant, who lives in Mississauga, Ont., and grew up in India. "It was [too] big for my face and had a hump in the middle that made it look twisted. It also had a hook. It really took away from my other features. When people talked to me, I felt like they were [always] looking at my nose."

Before moving to Canada in 2006, Merchant dreamed of having rhinoplasty—and not just because she didn't like the way her nose looked. She was born with a deviated septum, which often made it difficult for her to breathe. "I wanted [rhinoplasty] in order to be able to breathe better, and to look nice. [But] I wasn't sure it would ever happen for me. Then I moved here, started working and got a more positive outlook on life. That gave me the confidence and the push I needed to start doing research about rhinoplasty."

Merchant discovered Dr. Richard Rival, a Toronto-based plastic surgeon on the Internet. "The moment I met Dr. Rival, I had a good feeling about him," she says. "I just knew I wanted him to be the doctor to perform my surgery. My parents came with me to the first consultation, and they had a zillion questions. He was so patient and answered all of them."

Rival says Merchant knew what she wanted. "I suggested a few things she hadn't thought of, and we did some imaging on the computer to help illustrate what [her new nose] would

look like. The goal was to shorten and reduce the prominence of her nose, which would allow her other features to stand out." Merchant booked her surgery right away. "I took a cancellation [because] I knew the longer I waited, the more nervous I'd get."

She was still apprehensive when she arrived at South Lake Hospital in Newmarket, Ont., on the day of her surgery. But Rival reassured her by explaining exactly what he planned to do. The procedure took approximately two hours and was performed under general anesthetic. Merchant was home that evening.

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"Post-operatively, we ask patients to use ice, stay elevated for the first few nights and to use some ointment [such as Polysporin] inside the nose, which is in a little cast and fibreglass splint," says Rival. "About a week later, we see the patient and remove the cast and stitches." Most patients experience bruising and swelling around the eyes and nose, which peaks two or three days after surgery. (The bruises fade and swelling goes down about a week later, says Rival.)


Merchant says she felt better than she expected after the procedure. "Breathing was a little hard at night, so I used nasal spray so I wouldn't be so congested. I also applied Polysporin regularly and was very careful about not doing too much." About three days later, she was ready to get up and walk around. And she was excited to visit

Rival's office so he could remove the cast—and she could see her new nose.

"I was so happy," she says. "I didn't want my nose to look like someone else's, or like a famous person's nose. I just wanted it to be more in sync with my face." Rival was pleased with the results too. "This procedure changed Farzana's facial appearance in a very positive way. It brought out her other features, like her eyes, and really opened up her face. I think it shows that you don't really notice when a person has rhinoplasty—you just see that they look better. There's more focus on other features, rather than just the nose."

Merchant returned to work two weeks after the procedure and didn't tell any of her colleagues she'd had cosmetic surgery. "Everyone noticed, but they couldn't point out what was different," she says. "[Before I had rhinoplasty,] I wore glasses, but after my procedure, I switched to contacts. I told everyone that's what it was."

Merchant visited Rival's office a month later; she'd healed perfectly. Follow-up visits are required every two to three months for one year, to ensure that the scar tissue hasn't shifted or caused asymmetry.

Now Merchant is more confident than ever. She's still playing poker, recently took up ice skating and plans to play badminton this summer. "The way I look on the outside is making me feel like a different person inside—I feel more positive and I want to try different things," she says. "I used to feel like people were looking at me and thinking something was wrong with my face. Now I don't feel that way. Now I know they're just looking at me." 

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