

cosmetic dentistry *explained*

According to Sydney cosmetic dentist **Dr Michael Tam**, choosing the right cosmetic dentist may be easier than you think if you keep certain key factors in mind. Lise Petersen reports.

Cosmetic dentistry is more about the face as a whole than fixing individual teeth that may be discoloured or of a displeasing nature. It is vital to assess from the 'outside in' to ensure that an effective assessment is made of all areas that may impact on the desired outcome of achieving a beautiful smile. It must be remembered that the teeth fit into the face, not into the mouth.

According to Sydney cosmetic dentist Dr Michael Tam, essential ingredients to create a more aesthetic and pleasing smile include an assessment of hair colour and dress style, skin tone and facial complexion, plus facial

structure, symmetry, balance and contour. The soft tissues are assessed, especially in regard to lip shape, length, symmetry and bulk. Also the gum lines, smile lines and gingival display are critical ingredients in achieving more pleasing proportions. Shape, form and alignment may also be far more important than colour.

The cosmetic dentist needs to be aware of visual techniques that may be used to enhance your appearance. For example, a long, thin face can be made to look shorter by shortening the front teeth. Conversely, lengthening can slim a round face. A more masculine appearance is

achieved when teeth are made squarer, with a straighter smile. Deeper, more rounded curves and a more curved smile line will achieve a more feminine look.

Some patients want a Hollywood smile. They want to walk into a room and have people say, "Wow, look at your teeth!" Others want a more natural-looking smile which blends into the natural contours of the face. A more youthful look can be achieved by lengthening, lightening and reshaping the smile. This is the important area of smile design.

case study 1

Patient presented with discoloured teeth with excessive gum display. Her teeth had irregular form and displeasing proportions, and old and fatigued bonding. Dr Tam gave her porcelain veneers following tooth whitening and crown lengthening



BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



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Types of procedures available

There is a range of cosmetic procedures available to patients. These include cosmetic bonding, which can be used to close gaps and repair chipped or fractured teeth, and composite or porcelain restorations. These are an attractive, more natural-looking option to unsightly dark amalgam fillings.

Veneers are made from either porcelain or tooth-coloured filling material to cover teeth that are severely stained or discoloured. Veneers made from porcelain are thin, semi-translucent facings. Due to their natural appearance, versatility, durability and ability to bond well to tooth structure, porcelain veneers are the ultimate anterior restoration in most cases.

Crowns are placed when there is very little natural tooth left and may act to realign teeth and to protect teeth long term. Crowns

are made from all-ceramic materials which are strong and very durable, especially now with the latest porcelain technologies. They also allow light to reflect through them, giving a natural and aesthetic appearance. Unsightly 'black lines' around the edges of crowns are now a thing of the past.

Gum contouring, also called 'crown lengthening' or 'gum lifts', can be used to lengthen teeth, reduce a 'gummy' smile and ensure the gums form an harmonious shape around the teeth.

Key factors to be considered

There has been a great deal of hype and media attention surrounding the television show *Extreme Makeover* but it is important that your cosmetic dentist gives you realistic expectations. If they seem to 'wave a magic wand', then proceed cautiously.

Thorough prior assessment and treatment planning are key factors, while keeping in mind that the success and longevity of aesthetic treatment is directly related to good oral health is another. It is essential that your mouth is healthy and long-term stability and maintenance is addressed. For example, assessment of any grinding or para-functional habits, how teeth come together, whether there are teeth missing which may lead to a 'collapsed bite', and the requirement of a harmonious physiological balance with the facial and 'biting muscles' are of vital importance.

The final result

It is essential that the patient be given the opportunity to visualise the final result before going ahead with surgery. A good cosmetic dentist will provide a cosmetic diagnostic wax-up of the proposed final cosmetic result before any actual work is undertaken. They should also offer cosmetic digital imaging software to ensure the patient is able to visualise the final result prior to starting. These measures help to ensure total patient satisfaction. This is all part of the up-front smile assessment, smile design and treatment planning process. This is what differentiates a good cosmetic dentist.

Finding the right cosmetic dentist

It is important to check that the cosmetic dentist you are considering:

- Performs the procedure you are seeking on more than a regular basis
- Has their own before and after albums showing their clinical expertise. There are many pre-packaged

cosmetic albums available

- Offers value for money. It is important that you feel you are getting the right service for the right price
- Has a good chair-side manner – you need to feel comfortable in their presence
- Gives you a good gut feeling. Do you like the cosmetic look to the practice? Is the staff professional and caring? Is the team well trained? Do they have a great attitude?
- Is committed to and passionate about continuous education in their field
- Is the cosmetic dentist a member of affiliations and associations? Are they either on the lecture circuit or do they attend constant aesthetic updates locally and overseas?

Conclusion

It is essential to select a practitioner who has a special interest in and commitment to cosmetic and reconstructive dentistry, and who also has the artistic abilities as well as technical expertise. Choosing to go ahead with cosmetic dentistry is an important and personal decision. **acsm**

case study 2

Patient presented with worn, discoloured and aged crowns opposing 'fang like' lower canines and 'grey lines' showing on old crowns. Dr Tam created a more youthful appearance for her with a full mouth rehabilitation comprising all ceramic crowns and porcelain veneers.



BEFORE



AFTER



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AFTER



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AFTER