

smile design

Sydney cosmetic dentist **Dr Michael Tam** explains how a visit to the dentist can do more than just improve your teeth – it can give you a new smile and alter your face's overall appearance. Elise Eggleton reports.

According to Sydney cosmetic dentist Dr Michael Tam, 'Designing a sensational smile is about more than just fixing individual teeth; it takes the whole face into consideration. It's therefore essential for patients to select a practitioner who is not only skilled as a cosmetic dentist but also has an understanding of facial features in order to make their new smile as beautiful as possible.'

A comprehensive, up-front smile assessment, design and treatment plan should first be completed. 'The smile evaluation is very important,' says Dr Tam. 'This entails detailed discussions about the type of smile the patient wants – whether it be a smile with a "wow" factor or a more natural-looking, youthful smile that blends into the natural contours of the face. It also considers the diagnostic tools that can be utilised to create the desired outcome.'

According to Dr Tam, there are a number of visual techniques that a cosmetic dentist needs to be aware of.

The shape of a person's face, for example, will affect the chosen shape of the teeth. If a patient has a round face, creating long, square-shaped teeth will help to elongate the face.

There is a range of procedures available to patients. Dental veneers can be used to correct irregular or uneven teeth, discolouration and to close the space between teeth.

Porcelain veneers are made from a very thin porcelain material that is custom made to fit the teeth. They usually require two visits and require considerable tooth preparation. However, they may be necessary if minimal enamel and tooth structure are present. 'The application of porcelain veneers is a two-step procedure. First, the tooth needs to be reshaped and a temporary cover put over it. In the next visit, the cover is replaced with a customised, natural-looking porcelain one,' says Dr Tam.

Composite veneers on the other hand are usually performed in a single visit and involve an application of a

Case study 1

Rebecca visited Dr Tam after having several different procedures performed by a variety of dentists that had left her with what she described as a 'mottled group of teeth'.

'I had braces when I was younger, so my teeth were straight but they had gaps in them. A dentist put crowns on them but they looked artificial and were different colours,' she says. 'I wouldn't smile with my mouth open.'



BEFORE



AFTER cosmetic dentistry by Dr Tam

'When I visited Dr Tam, he used a combination of porcelain veneers and crowns to achieve a more attractive, natural-looking result. He took me through the process step by step because by this stage I had a phobia of the dentist's chair.'

Rebecca says she is very happy with the results and now feels happier and more confident.

bond and enamel directly to the tooth's surface. They are less expensive than porcelain veneers but may not be as durable as porcelain veneers. 'Composite veneers are directly placed on the tooth and can be applied in a single visit,' says Dr Tam. 'They are usually less expensive than porcelain veneers but tend not to be as long lasting.'

When a tooth has had root canal therapy or when a substantial portion of the tooth structure has been lost a full crown may be needed. A fractured tooth or old restorations with open leaky margins and decay may also require a crown. Dental crowns encase the entire visible aspect of a tooth, becoming the tooth's new outer surface.

Crowns protect heavily restored teeth and prevent further fracturing. They are made from all-ceramic materials, which are strong and durable, and give a natural-looking appearance. As with porcelain veneers two visits are normally required.

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

'Ultimately patients need to remember that their smile is unique. It can make a positive and memorable statement to everyone they meet,' concludes Dr Tam. **acsm**

Case study 2

After an in-depth smile analysis and the use of close-up digital photography, Dr Tam noted external and intrinsic staining and discolouration around a number of this patient's front teeth. The patient also had a prominent gap in the midline of his front teeth (known as a midline diastema). This had occurred after the removal of his braces eight to 10 years prior. He was unhappy with the colour, shape, proportion and alignment of his teeth.

After carrying out a thorough smile design process involving a diagnostic wax-up followed by chair-side colour adjustments with the ceramist, Dr Tam was able to achieve a natural, harmonious smile with pleasing proportions and colour improvements. This involved the placement of eight customised porcelain veneers after diagnostic 'temporaries' were used to rejuvenate and recreate his smile.



BEFORE



AFTER cosmetic dentistry by Dr Tam



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