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# SMILE LIKE YOU MEAN IT

COSMETIC DENTIST TO THE STARS, DR MICHAEL APA SAYS LEADING PRACTITIONERS ARE LOOKING BEYOND THE GLARE OF THE HOLLYWOOD SMILE BY ADOPTING A NEW APPROACH TO THEIR PROCEDURES: FACIAL AESTHETIC DESIGN



The average smile may be worth a thousands words, but if you're Chloe Sevigny, Matt Dillon or Vera Wang, your smile is well above average and of considerably more value. In fact, those perfectly formed, seemingly life-like set of pearly whites – the haute couture of cosmetic dentistry – gleaming back at you from film screens and magazine pages, have been exclusively custom-made for their famous wearers with a price tag to match out of up to US\$80,000. ¶ And it seems more and more people are willing to splash out for that “perfect” smile. It’s estimated that less than 20 per cent of the population is born with perfect teeth, and the rest of us can reach deep into our pockets to acquire the next best thing. ¶ In a culture that is increasingly hungry for ways



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to improve our image, time-efficient, high-quality, pain-free procedures are of the essence. ¶ Cosmetic dentist to the stars, thirty-two-year-old Dr Michael Apa is based in New York City and lists the Trump family among a handful of famous clients, including film stars, models and designers. He explains that cosmetic dentistry has changed drastically over the past five years. “We had a trend where everybody wanted big white, fake teeth and it got kind of ugly in terms of what is normal, the more detrimental it actually is to your dental health.” ¶ Today’s aesthetic is much more individually tailored. “Cosmetic dentistry has come back to being natural and conservative, and a straightforward, simple process. Dentists used to do these formulas just based on the mouth, where everyone got the same set of teeth – they’d look like the perfect teeth, but out of place. The idea is to make them blend within the facial features. We can make teeth look as real as you want them to be, but some people choose them to look fake,” says Dr Apa. ¶ Today’s porcelain veneers are aimed towards slightly enhancing the face, rather than competing with it. Big white, glow-in-the-dark, straight-edged Hollywood-style chompers no longer make the cut. In New York City, anything goes, including the odd imperfection. “I’ve made veneers that have little gaps or twists and turns to them. There are definitely facial characteristics that warrant them and will enhance the way one looks. Usually if you have something like that to begin with, a lesser version of it, in the right position with a healthy veneer, will make it look better.” ¶ Dr Apa, who works on 10 very exclusive clients (including royalty) out of Dr Michael’s Dental Clinic in Dubai every three months, says there’s much skill and a degree of artistry involved with shaping veneers. He refers to this new approach as facial aesthetic design, a concept that has now placed him at the forefront of his industry. “When we see something in beauty that we like, it’s because it represents symmetry. The idea is to figure out where in the face the teeth are supposed to be and then figure out the colour and texture. Then we put them in,” explains Dr Apa. “Teeth are one of the most noticeable features on your face because they’re one of the brightest. One of the first things you’ll spot is if they’re not in the right position.” ¶ So, who has got it right? “Jessica Alba. She’s got beautiful colour, a lot of translucency in her teeth, full arch, full smile, they’re voluptuous teeth and they complement the rest of her,” explains Dr Apa. But he strongly advises against name dropping at your dentist.

“It’s impossible to give somebody else’s smile. It was really a conversation of the more uneducated consumer 10 years ago who would say, ‘I want Julia Roberts’ smile’. I try to stay away from it, because it gets a little unrepresentative of what the patient’s expectations are really going to be.” ¶ At up to US\$3,000 dollars per tooth, a full set of porcelain veneers can cost anywhere between US\$25,000 and US\$80,000 depending on the condition of the teeth. The almost-instant result, however, is well worth it. Unlike braces, which can be worn for years before any outcome, the entire process from initial consultation to fitting the veneers is performed over a week. The procedure is virtually pain-free and done under local anaesthesia. Two visits lasting approximately two-hours are followed by two 15-minute check ups. ¶ Patients need not bother booking their own accommodation if they’re travelling to the Big Apple for a new bite. Clients of Rosenthal Apa Group, the New York City practice Dr Apa shares in the Upper East Side, can expect five-star treatment, with a personal concierge to book hotel rooms, make restaurant reservations and organise tickets to sporting events and theatrical productions. ¶ Once you’re satisfied with the result, the dentist will send you away with a brand new smile as well as a sturdy investment – porcelain veneers may come with a healthy bill, but they typically last 15 to 20 years before they need to be checked or replaced. Similarly, they can provide functional needs to people who grind their teeth away or have bite issues, explains Dr Apa. “A veneer by definition is a lamination over something, so what the veneer is really doing is mimicking enamel, which is your outer surface of tooth. It’s the strongest and longest-lasting restoration you can put on the tooth and it’s the most life-like. There can be functional needs for it, as much as aesthetic.” ¶ Dentists are hopeful that with more awareness about the procedure, consumers will begin to catch on to the idea of enhancing their smile as a pain-free way to improving the overall appearance without the risk of invasive procedures, such as plastic surgery. Dr Apa explains that while cosmetic dentistry isn’t a replacement for operational procedures, such as face lifts, it has similar benefits. “You can take 10 years off by replacing your smile, without having to go under the knife and through all that healing. It’s a much less invasive measure to get a great result and still look yourself. I can definitely rejuvenate your face with teeth.” ■

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