

# Word of Mouth

*The rumors are true: your teeth tell your age. Fortunately, the new cosmetic "smile lift" can subtract years from your look.*

BY JANET CARLSON FREED

I'll bet it could be said for most of us that since childhood we've associated going to the dentist with pain. Tension. Headaches. Toothaches. Being told we don't floss enough. Therefore, we could logically wonder, who in his right mind would go to the dentist if he didn't absolutely have to?

Well, the view from the dentist's chair has changed considerably in recent years. Cosmetic dentistry has seen great technological advances, and more and more regular dentists today are skilled in cosmetic procedures. Smile design, as Dr. Larry Rosenthal puts it. This New York-based cosmetic dentist has revitalized the smiles of the well-heeled, the high-profile, and countless models and film stars. He likes to talk about the artistry he and other dentists can accomplish with a little ceramics, laser and NASA technology (from which dentistry has indeed borrowed bonding materials). Dr. Rosenthal sees aesthetic dentistry as an antiaging strategy. "Think of it as a cosmetic smile lift. As someone ages, the entire lower third of the face begins to droop, and teeth yellow." He promises he can make a 50-year-old look 38 by using laminates to not only improve tooth shape and color but also build teeth up and thus

fill out the shadowy corners of the mouth.

The work of a good aesthetic dentist no longer looks fake; the veneer colors are more translucent. And the patient has more input. In Dr. Rosenthal's office, there's a computer simulator to show before and



offers, as well as electronic patient-controlled anesthesia. He even has his own in-house ceramist so he can create customized porcelain laminates at lightning speed.

Says Dr. Rosenthal, "Today we can do a mouthful of porcelain laminates, some laser gum reshaping and old-filling replacements in a day or two, noninvasively and painlessly. There's rarely any cutting down of teeth." Surprisingly, these acts of dental vanity can be good for your teeth. Porcelain laminates, especially pressed ceramics, strengthen aging teeth that have begun to fracture. Sometimes, veneering can be done in lieu of orthodontics. "By reshaping the teeth," says Dr. Rosenthal, "we give the illusion that each tooth is in the right position."

Just as there's no perfect nose, there's no

perfect set of teeth. One man's imperfection is another man's character. "Take gaps," says New York dentist Dr. Jonathan Diamond. "Some might consider that a problem. But look at David Letterman. He has a very distinctive gap. That's who he is."

You need to be the high-commitment type to go to Dr. Rosenthal, to be sure, since his style is to improve the whole smile. If you ask him why he doesn't do just the two top front teeth, he'll explain that it's kind of like fixing up just two houses—it makes the rest of the neighborhood look even worse. But for someone who identifies with David Letterman, there's always

the path of low commitment. Dr. Diamond says, "I told one patient we could do eight porcelain laminates for more than \$5,000, or we could bleach and contour his teeth and get 85 percent of the result for one hour's work and

\$1,000. A patient just has to decide what 'perfect' means to him." For dentist referrals, call the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry at (800) 543-9220. ❖

## Tooth Terms

**Bleaching:** Brightens and whitens tooth color. Laser bleaching is done in the office. Many dentists prescribe Nite-White, the at-home system (\$500 for top or bottom).

**Contouring:** Painlessly eliminates small irregularities in tooth shape with a superficial "sanding" drill (from \$150 per tooth).

**Bonding:** Repairs a chipped tooth or fills a gap. A claylike material is sculpted onto the teeth. Lasts up to eight years (\$150 and up per tooth).

**Veneering:** Creates straighter, more evenly spaced teeth with thin porcelain facades that never stain and last up to fifteen years. (\$700 and up per tooth).