

# smile design

Sydney cosmetic dentist **Dr Michael Tam** outlines the importance of comprehensive smile assessment and treatment planning in creating a sensational smile. Lise Petersen reports.

Designing a sensational smile is more about the face as a whole than fixing individual teeth,' says Sydney cosmetic dentist Dr Michael Tam. 'It is therefore essential for patients to select a practitioner who has a special interest in and commitment to cosmetic and reconstructive dentistry. The practitioner must not only have the technical expertise to be able to create a new smile but also have an artistic understanding of the features of the face to be able to make your new smile beautiful.'

First up, a comprehensive up-front smile assessment, smile design and treatment planning process must be completed for total patient satisfaction. 'The smile

## case study 1



BEFORE



AFTER porcelain veneers and tooth lightening by Dr Tam



BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER

evaluation process is what differentiates a good cosmetic dentist,' says Dr Tam. 'It comprises assessing all the areas that may impact on the desired outcome in achieving a beautiful smile – from attaining correct diagnostic records to utilising cosmetic digital imaging software to ensure patients are able to visualise the final result prior to starting treatment. It entails detailed discussions about the type of smile the patient wants (whether it be a Hollywood smile with a 'wow' factor or a more natural-looking, youthful smile that blends into the natural contours of the face), treatment planning and explaining realistic outcomes. It also comprises informing patients about what is actually involved in each procedure, scheduling requirements, costings, and the possible risks and complications.'

While thorough prior assessment and treatment planning are key factors, the success and longevity of aesthetic treatment is directly related to good oral health. Dr Tam says it is essential that the patient's 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 all of vital importance.

The soft tissues are also assessed, especially in regard to lip shape, length, symmetry and bulk. 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.

Teeth fit into the face, not just into the mouth; therefore Dr Tam says the following cosmetic criteria are crucial: midlines, vertical and horizontal reference planes, facial symmetry and harmony, lips (shape, bulk and symmetry), smile line, gum lines and gum display, 'the bite' and cant (the general horizontal slant of the plane of

## How to find a good cosmetic dentist

Take your time. Cosmetic dentistry is normally an elective procedure and not an emergency. For something as important as this, research time up front will pay great dividends towards your understanding and emotional comfort later. It is important to check that the cosmetic dentist you are considering:

- Performs your chosen procedure on more than a regular basis
- Has before and after albums showing their clinical expertise
- Offers value for money
- Is honest in their assessment of your needs and their ability to meet your expectations
- Has an artistic eye. Excellent cosmetic dentistry requires a highly sophisticated artistic sense. Your dentist must have a clear vision of what is possible, as well as being able to communicate well with the cosmetic ceramist
- Takes a multi-discipline approach. The cosmetic

dentist must utilise a network of specialists and, if necessary, refer to them in consultation with you

- Has a good chair-side manner so you feel comfortable and relaxed
- Gives you a good impression. Do you like the appearance and feel of the practice? Are the staff members professional and caring? Is the team well trained?
- Explains all options, including any possible risks and complications
- Is committed to and passionate about continuous education in their field
- Belongs to affiliations and associations, is on the lecture circuit or regularly attends aesthetic updates locally and overseas.

*Dr Michael Tam has performed cosmetic dental procedures on national TV, in Channel Seven's The Body Specialists on Thursday nights. During his appearances he has discussed in-chair tooth whitening systems and performed smile design and porcelain veneers treatment for two patients.*

the teeth). Other elements to be considered are the amount of teeth displayed with lips at rest and when smiling, the condition of existing fillings or crowns, spacing, female-looking and male-looking teeth, the vertical alignment of the teeth, the height and width of the teeth, their proportion, and overall and individual tooth colour.

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

Veneers are made either from natural-looking, durable porcelain or tooth-coloured filling material and are designed to cover teeth that are severely stained or discoloured. 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 that are strong, very durable and give 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 a harmonious shape around the teeth.

'Ultimately patients need to remember that their smile is unique,' Dr Tam adds. 'It tells the world about you, fosters communication and goodwill, and indicates vitality, happiness,

confidence, success and friendship. It has an impact on your personal and professional relationships, and makes a positive, powerful and memorable statement to everyone you meet.' **acsm**

### case study 2



BEFORE



AFTER porcelain veneers and tooth lightening by Dr Tam



BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER