



# SMILE, PLEASE

Traditional British teeth are a thing of the past. Kathleen Baird-Murray on the latest dental wizardry that promises to galvanise your grin

atching a news report on Obama's proposed NHS-style health plan, I couldn't help but notice the super-size-me lady from some godforsaken part of America. She bared her snowy-white toothpaste-teeth at the camera, laughed heartily and said: 'Why would we want that? We've all seen Brits' teeth!'

She's not the first to poke fun at our characterful smiles, which when they were by the way, work well. Georgia May Jagger and Paul Simonon, for example, both carry off that cute gap between their two front teeth. But our choppers consistently get criticised, alongside, and even Kiefer Sutherland, the nation's supersmodel sweetheart, smiles with her mouth firmly clamped shut.

'Crown specialist Dr Kyrill Ferras, London's go-to guy for when all other dental work has failed, blames our reputation on 'piecemeal dentistry' – a history of patching up rather than planning perfection. 'Most work done is to replace old jobs that need redoing,' he says. 'But America can stop laughing, because British teeth are biting back. The USA has lost a helping hand, with most top British orthodontists and dentists having had training there. "We don't need to be defensive anymore," says Dr Mervyn Drizan, who is such an expert in cosmetic dentistry that a high proportion of the patients visiting his Swiss Cottage premises do so from across the Atlantic, and he even teaches American dentists. 'People now realise they need a good smile for the job market,' he says, and as smile-whitening clinics open on city high streets, we're getting used to the idea that looking after our pearly whites is an investment. Which, with the work for a good set of teeth costing anything up to £20,000, is certainly so. A top-notch crown costs from £1,600 to £2,000, lingual braces (the kind that stick to the backs of your so no one can see) can cost up to £6,500

'No one should put up with bad teeth,' says Dr Neil Coushan, whose clinic, Eleven Orthodontics, gave *Harry Potter* star Emma Watson her straight smile. 'Besides the difference it makes to your self-esteem and sense of wellbeing, if you do not straighten your teeth other problems can develop. The money you spend now is paid back 20 times over in your lifetime.'

So, what is bringing about this change? The new technology certainly helps. On the day I meet Dr Drizan, he's looking into bringing over the latest 3D photographic system from Israel (derived from weapons

**I view my gold skull from all angles on the screen before me**

technology), which will take a picture of your teeth as such an incredibly high resolution that you won't need to have an impression made when you are fitted for a crown.

Also from Israel is the 3D tomographic dental scan, which Dr Arief Chaitco, an orthodontist whose practice is the only one in London dedicated to lingual braces, sends me to try. 'In the US, it's used all the time,' he says. 'You can get a really good look at an individual tooth and plan how to move those surrounding it – it's possible to see if the bone is weak or the gum support is not healthy.' The scan only takes about 20 seconds, and although it generates more

implants. Not every dentist has cottoned on to it yet, but do insist if you can. As I view my gold skull (it's very Damien Hirst) from all angles on the screen before me, Kiri Atias, the tomographer and director of the scan company, CT Dent, points out a slight inflection at the base of a root canal, which wouldn't have shown up on a normal X-ray.

'Once they started using 3D tomography in the US, insurance claims dropped dramatically,' says Atias, who notes that it's been a godsend in particular for dentists performing implant surgery. 'It allows for a hole to be drilled that's exactly the right size and in exactly the right place. Before, the entire gum area had to be opened up and, however experienced the dentist, it was very hit and miss.' Ouch!

So how can we get a perfect smile? For a quick fix, try a bit of whitening. It has the same effect as getting your eyebrows shaped if it's done subtly; friends will comment on how well you look. Think Aletia Fried, who had hers done after moving to LA, where a good set of graders is a job requirement, but avoid a Steven Seagal-style makeover – it'll have people reaching for their shades.

Dr Drizan uses a new method called the Thermal Diffuser System, designed to be quick, yet ultra-safe for even sensitive teeth. He applies a hydrogen peroxide gel – which contains a chemical that reduces sensitivity – to my teeth while my mouth stays open thanks to my chomping on a plastic guard. My gums, meanwhile, are protected with rubber, plastic and soft strips of cotton. A warming plaster is stuck on top, raising the temperature of the various bleaching

hands me a tube of whitening toothpaste (from £6.64 from Amazon). The next step has

straightened – a smiling posture that some of us suffered through in our teens, when it required headgear, elastic bands and wires, as well as a thick skin to shield us from the jolts and insults that had to be endured. This time round, it's a bit different.

At the sleek-looking Q Clinic, Dr Tapesh Anand takes moulds and fits custom-made 'aligners' to our teeth, producing an even smile in just a few months. Invisalign looks a bit like a clear mouth guard and is tightened every two weeks. It wraps over your teeth and is worn at all times – you remove it only to eat, drink or brush. It's great for mild cases of crookedness. Our tester was thrilled when after three and a half months her smile had completely straightened out.

Of course, once you start straightening, you just can't stop. Literally. Even with Invisalign, you're looking at six months of post-straightening retainers wear. 'A lot of my US colleagues would say retainers are for life,' says Dr Chaitco. The discreet lingual braces he specialises in are popular with burlesque, news reporters, actresses and anyone who doesn't want to walk around looking like jaws for the next six months or so.

With a lingual brace, as with any type of self-ligating brace (braces that work without the little o-shaped rubber bands, or ligatures, traditionally used), brackets are fixed to the teeth – in this case at the back – and wires are used to move them into position. Depending on the individual, a self-ligating brace can work more quickly than an Invisalign brace, but the downside is that it can cost more.

## TATLERS TOP DENTAL SPECIALISTS

- Dr Mervyn Drizan** (Dentist & Splicer), The London Centre for Cosmetic Dentistry (tel: 020 7222 2220). Consultation, free. Thermal Diffuser mouth whitening, from £175.
- Dr Kyrill Ferras** (The London Centre for Implant and Aesthetic Dentistry) (tel: 020 7222 2280). Consultation, from £250 for one hour, maximum, from £1,200 per tooth.
- Dr Neil Coushan** (Eleven Orthodontics) (tel: 020 7487 2711). Consultation, from £220 for one hour, from £1,000 to £2,000.
- Dr Arief Chaitco** (The London Lingual Orthodontic Centre) (tel: 020 7486 2863). Consultation, from £300 for 30 minutes, and from the rest of any further treatment, lingual braces, from £5,000.
- Dr Tapesh Anand** (Q Clinic) (tel: 020 7307 1111).
- Dr Joe Oliver** (The Welbeck Clinic) (tel: 020 7486 8100).

you find even a smile, which is more than the tooth is meticulously shaped and then topped off with a cap of modern porcelain, pressed-glass ceramic, zirconia or gold.

There are plenty of quick fixes around, but for something that looks good, is comfortable and lasts well, Ferras suggests taking a long-term view and treating your mouth like a work of art. 'Often we will place and modify one, two or even three provisional crowns in sequence, to play with shape, bite and gum stability. These occasions need to stay in place for several weeks, or possibly months, before the final laboratory-made crown is completed and fitted.'

If you're considering veneers, these need to be approached just as carefully. The more recent years are the longer-lasting they're likely to be. Our tester's had been clinging on for 20 years, but never had prevented her from updating them, in spite of discoloration.

Dr Joe Oliver of The Welbeck Clinic – a fittingly sparkling-white townhouse north of Wigmore Street – is London's veneer king.

His porcelain veneers, which are custom-made for home whitening – Oliver believes the most successful bleaching involves a double whammy of four nights of home trays followed by a laser treatment. In the meantime, veneers are made out of porcelain to match the new tooth colour. The improved lasting power of this new breed of veneers (15 to 20 years without deterioration) is down to the bonding substance, derived from rocket science and impossibly strong. Old veneers must be filed off, temporary ones attached, and new ones bonded on, using a local anaesthetic. While not technically painful, it is eyewatering and the effect of the drugs is rather tiring. But the result? An impressively natural-looking but much improved set of teeth. No wonder Helena Bonham Carter and Sophie Ellis-Bextor are such happy customers.

Once you've discovered a sublime smile, there's no looking back. After all, you're making history. Your country needs you. ☺



**Dr Joe Oliver the Welbeck Clinic (tel: 020 7486 8100). Consultation, £75 for one hour; veneers, from £695; teeth whitening, from £545.**