

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 tombstone-teeth at the camera, laughed heartily and said, 'Why would we want that? We've all seen British teeth!'

She's not the first to poke fun at our characterful smiles, which when they work, 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 constantly get criticised stateside, and even Kate Moss, the nation's supermodel sweetheart, smiles with her mouth firmly clamped shut.

Crown specialist Dr Koray Feran, 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 lent 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 Druian, 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, it certainly is. A top-notch crown costs from £1,600 to £3,000; lingual braces (the kind that stick to the backs of your teeth so no one can see) can cost up to £6,500.

'No one should put up with bad teeth,' says Dr Neil Counihan, whose clinic, Elleven 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 Druian, he's looking into bringing over the latest 3D photographic system from Israel (derived from weapons technology), which will take a picture of your tooth at 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 tomography dental scan, which [Dr Asif Chatoo](#), 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 radiation than a normal 2D X-ray, that's still about 20 times less than a CAT scan, and the information acquired is invaluable for anyone needing braces, crowns or 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, Kfir Atias, the tomographer and director of the scan company, CT Dent, points out a slight infection 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

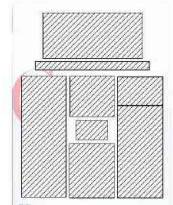
dramatically,' says Atias, who notes that it's been a godsend in particular for dentists performing implant surgery. 'It allows for a hole to be drilled that's exactly the right size and in exactly the right place. Before, the entire gum area had to be opened up and, however experienced the dentist, 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 Anna Friel, who had hers done after moving to LA, where a good set of gnashers is a job requirement, but avoid a Simon Cowell-style makeover – it'll have people reaching for their shades.

Dr Druian 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 solutions by three degrees or so.

Half an hour later and my teeth look... not startlingly bright or sparkling, just really clean. Which is exactly what I wanted. Dr Druian hands me a tube of what he says is the best whitening toothpaste on the market, Retardex (from £6.64 from Amazon), and off I go.

The next step has to be getting your teeth straightened – a sadistic process that some of us suffered through in our teens, when it



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required headgear, elastic bands and wires, as well as a thick skin to shield us from the jokes and insults that had to be endured. This time round, it's a bit different.

At the slick-looking Q Clinic, Dr Tapesh Anand takes moulds and fits Invisalign 'aligners' to our tester, promising an even smile in just a few months. Invisalign looks a bit like a clear mouth guard and is tightened every two weeks. It snaps 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 retainer wear. 'A lot of my US colleagues would say retainers are for life,' says **Dr Chatoo**. The discreet lingual braces he specialises in are popular with barristers, 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.

Of course whitening and straightening will only glam up your grin if your teeth are in good shape in the first place. If they're crumbling from having too many fillings, you may need a crown, which is when 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, Feran 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 sometimes 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 yours are, the longer-lasting they're likely to be. Our tester's had been clinging on for 20 years, but terror 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. First, he suggests a whitening treatment, so that he can match the veneers to the new colour. He photographs your teeth, and adjusts the image to show you on a computer what your ideal new smile will look like. Then trays 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. The attachment procedure is slightly scary. Old veneers must be filed off, temporary ones attached, and new ones bonded on, using

a local anaesthetic. While not technically painful, it is eye-watering 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. □

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

TATLER'S TOP DENTAL SPECIALISTS

Dr Mervyn Druian Druian & Spektor, the London Centre for Cosmetic Dentistry (tel: 020 7722 1235). Consultation, free; Thermal Diffuser teeth whitening, from £475

Dr Koray Feran the London Centre for Implant and Aesthetic Dentistry (tel: 020 7224 1488). Consultation, from £250 for one hour; crowns, from £1,200 per tooth.

Dr Neil Counihan Eleven Orthodontics (tel: 020 7487 2711). Consultation, from £125 for one hour; braces, from £2,950 to £6,500.

Dr Asif Chatoo the London Lingual Orthodontic Clinic (tel: 020 7486 2883). Consultation, from £100 for 30 minutes, deducted from the cost of any further treatment; lingual braces, from £5,000.

Dr Tapesh Anand Q Clinic (tel: 020 7317 1111). Consultation, free; Invisalign braces, £1,850.

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

CT Dent 3D tomography scanning (tel: 020 7487 5717). Full orthodontic scan, £99.

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