

Sadati Center For Aesthetic Dentistry

Credentials, Experience & Artistry Matter

By Dr. Sam Sadati

So, you have been thinking about making some changes in your smile. Congratulations! Giving yourself the joy of a gorgeous healthy smile is definitely one of the nicest things you will ever do for yourself. A recent American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD) study yielded some rather revealing insights into the way we perceive the appearance of a smile. To the question “what is the first thing you notice in a person’s smile?” the most common responses were: straightness, whiteness and color of teeth, cleanliness of teeth, sincerity of smile, missing teeth and sparkle of smile.

If any of these smile problems are troubling you or someone you know (other than the sincerity of your smile – sorry, only you can fix that one!) the good news is that appropriately credentialed dentists can usually provide very natural-looking solutions. You may notice that I qualified that statement with the phrase “appropriately credentialed.” What I am saying is that the skills, artistic vision and clinical training among dentists varies from absolutely none to very advanced levels of excellence.

This situation has grown out of the American Dental Association’s choice not to consider cosmetic dentistry an approved ADA specialty like oral surgery, orthodontics, periodontics and so on. There is no professionally required course of study and testing that dentists must complete before being allowed to advertise themselves as cosmetic dentists! As a dental consumer, you need to know that it is perfectly legal for any dentist to “hang out a shingle” and proclaim him/herself a “cosmetic dentist” regardless of whether or not they have invested in the postdoctoral training and, more importantly, testing that can verify their expertise in aesthetic smile design. The net result of this dilemma is that you must be very savvy and careful when shopping in the “buyer beware” market that currently exists in cosmetic dentistry.

Selecting a cosmetic dentist can be a difficult and confusing process. In the end, it is a personal decision that each person must make for himself or herself. Here are some tips I believe will simplify the selection process:

TAKE YOUR TIME – Most cosmetic dental procedures are elective procedures, not emergencies. Time spent learning about the dental procedures, different techniques and materials, and cosmetic dentists you are considering will pay great dividends in terms of your understanding and emotional comfort later. If in doubt, see a couple of different “accredited” or “fellow” status cosmetic dentists for a consultation.

PROFESSIONAL COSMETIC DENTISTRY CREDENTIALS – The American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD), with over 7,000 members from over 50 countries, is the world’s largest, most prestigious cosmetic dentistry organization and its premier authority. The AACD accreditation process is the most rigorous credentialing program by which a dentist can be tested and measured. It requires dentists to attend a number of continuing education courses in cosmetic dentistry, be tested, and submit a number of cases to be judged by a panel of experts. Out of 7,000 AACD members, only 231 have so far achieved “accredited” status and 30 “fellow” status with the academy. The AACD (www.aacd.com, 800-543-9220) is an excellent information source which I highly recommend for reliable answers to your



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cosmetic dental questions, or to locate a member who has achieved the “accredited” or “fellow” status with the academy.

INTEGRITY – Find a cosmetic dentist who is honest in his/her assessment of your needs and of their ability to meet your expectations. Be wary of the doctor who focuses on what you like to hear rather than giving you a total treatment plan to provide you with a long-lasting, healthy smile after a complete and comprehensive examination and accurate diagnosis of your condition. After all, a great smile without paying attention to the health and function of the whole mouth is nothing but a gorgeous castle built on shaky ground.

AN ARTISTIC EYE – While technical virtuosity is necessary to produce a great clinical result, it is not sufficient. Excellent cosmetic dentistry demands a highly sophisticated artistic sense. In order to achieve an optimal aesthetic result, one must have a clear vision of what is artistically possible and appropriate.

REVIEW BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTOS – You’ll want to look at before and after photos of cosmetic dentistry actually performed by the dentist you are considering. Beware that there are commercially available photos and albums that show the possibilities for cosmetic dentistry. Confirm that you are seeing actual work of the dentist you are considering and make sure that the “before” photos you look at are also cases similar to yours. You may even ask to speak to one or more of his or her patients.

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