THE 10 BIGGEST MISTAKES YOU CAN MAKE IN CHOOSING A COSMETIC DENTIST

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A Note to Readers

Whether you are searching for a cosmetic dentist for the first time or because you have had less than desirable results from cosmetic dentistry in the past, you are not alone. Dissatisfaction with teeth is becoming more and more common as patients become more knowledgeable and sophisticated.

Many times, people may not even know why they don’t like their smile until after they see an experienced cosmetic dentist. Sometimes, defects can be easy to spot as the teeth may appear to be too opaque, square, or bulky. Or perhaps the teeth are too long and the patient can’t bite or talk properly. Usually, no matter what the problem is, the skill of the dentist is the determining factor. That’s where this e-Book comes in.

Much of the information in this e-Book came from feedback from patients who initially made the wrong selection in what they thought was a “cosmetic dentist,” and learned the hard way. As you search for the right cosmetic dentist for you, I hope you will find the information compiled here to be invaluable.

Warm regards,
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An Introduction To An Important Decision

We all make mistakes, but the ones that hurt the most are the ones that are long-lasting and that could have been easily prevented. Very frequently, I hear from people who have come to the realization – after-the-fact – that they have made a mistake in their selection of a “cosmetic dentist.” I am not alone. Experts have estimated more than one quarter of the total annual spending on cosmetic dentistry goes toward redoing unsatisfactory work from a prior dentist. While properly executed cosmetic dentistry can produce wonderful results, if poorly executed, it can cause a lifetime of pain and problems. And these mistakes can be easily avoided – if you know what to look for.

The search for a real, qualified cosmetic dentist has become so confusing today because now almost every dentist seems to hold themselves out as a "cosmetic dentist." How can they do that? You may be surprised to learn that because the title, “cosmetic dentist,” is an unregulated term, any dentist can claim to be a cosmetic dentist. And now, the trend for dentists is to not just stop with the claim they are a “cosmetic dentist,” but rather declare they are the “best,” “top,” “world-renowned” or the city’s “premiere” cosmetic dentist.” As a result of the lack of regulation on the use of these terms, most dentists find it virtually irresistible – to their ego and to their pocketbook – to label themselves that way. Many of these dentists may have the belief that because they offer services such as white fillings and teeth whitening, then they are providing cosmetic dentistry. And to a certain extent, that is true. On the other hand, many general and family dentists stretch their rationalization on the theory that because they have never intended any of their dentistry to look ugly, all of their dentistry must have been – you guessed it – “cosmetic.”

All dentistry is not “cosmetic dentistry.”

Smile Analysis: In this photo of Hillary Clinton, her teeth are discolored, different colors, misshapen, and recessed at the buccal corridor.

Recommendation: She needs her smile re-done with porcelain restorations.

Being famous or affluent certainly does not insulate you from making mistakes in the choices for your smile.

Unfortunately, that happens all the time. This e-book will help you make the most important decision in this process -- your selection of an appropriate cosmetic dentist for you.
What do the “perfect” eyes, nose, or other body parts look like?
There is no universal definition of perfection or beauty because beauty is in the eye of the beholder. It is the same with teeth. It is safe to say that the objective of cosmetic dentistry is not to look like you’re wearing big, white-out dentures. Rather, beautiful cosmetic dentistry should be seen as naturally beautiful teeth that you were born with.

The best cosmetic dentistry is undetectable.
Truly beautiful porcelain veneers are not cookie-cutter, perfect Chiclet teeth. But, we have to respect that some people’s definition of beauty may be different. As such, some want teeth that range from white-white to differing colors, from very uniform to different shapes. In all cases, the cosmetic dentist should seek to understand and listen, then educate and then work together to achieve the desired results (so long as it doesn’t go too far from the dentist’s standards of beauty).

If you want to get an attractive, naturally-looking smile, here is what you need to know before choosing a cosmetic dentist.
Making the right choice of a cosmetic dentist will have significant ramifications on your appearance and self-confidence that could last a lifetime. Yes, there are a lot of dentists out there, so it is imperative that you select a cosmetic dentist wisely. The best cosmetic dentists are highly trained, experienced, and Accredited in the art form of beautiful cosmetic dentistry through the use of porcelain veneers, crowns, bonding materials, gum positioning, and the like. Without knowing the appropriate criteria, however, selecting the right cosmetic dentist can be a difficult and confusing process. It is my hope that after reading this e-book, you will be able to select a cosmetic dentist confidently.
**Mistake #1 (The Biggest One): Thinking That A General & Family Dentist Is The Same As An Expert Cosmetic Dentist**

A “soup to nuts” general, family and cosmetic dentist is very different from an exclusive, expert, qualified cosmetic dentist. As you now know, any dentist – whether they are fresh out of dental school or they graduated 50 years ago but haven’t taken any courses in cosmetic dentistry since -- can call themselves a “cosmetic dentist.” To an extent, most dentists try to practice cosmetic dentistry as part of their larger general practice. Some merely dabble in this field and some do it more extensively. **Caveat: As the saying goes, a “jack of all trades is a master of none.”** Say you needed a brain surgeon. Would you go to a general and family doctor who on any day may be treating colds, advising a patient on a sprained ankle, or performing an annual physical? The answer is obviously, no. That’s because, when the stakes are high enough, you get a true expert in the field – one who has had extensive formal training, years of experience, and who works in the field every day. By the same token, your smile is so important, do you really want a general and family dentist to try and perform your smile makeover?

"It’s best to do one thing really, really well.”

--Google

**Dentists may tout their experience in all sorts of endeavors and interests, which – don’t get me wrong – can be really neat stuff. But that does not mean they have expertise in cosmetic dentistry.**

Being an officer in a dental organization, practicing in the area of forensic dentistry, wellness, spa dentistry, laser dentistry, sedation dentistry, doing charitable work and community service, etc. are all laudable, but **don’t get those accomplishments confused with the discipline of cosmetic dentistry.** Usually, the way it works is that “wanna be” cosmetic dentists tout their expertise in non-related endeavors and then tag on that they are a “member” of the Aacd and claim to be a cosmetic dentist. Don’t fall into this trap.

When Do You Not Need A Real Cosmetic Dentist?

If you are not really concerned with your appearance, but just want your teeth to function properly, you may be just fine with a general dentist. Also, if you just want professional teeth whitening, that is available at most dentists’ offices and you probably do not need a cosmetic dentist for that. But if you are interested in proper function and the possibilities for a smile transformation, you want a real cosmetic dentist.
One way to explain the difference between a general dentist and a cosmetic dentist is with photographs.

The smaller photograph below to the left shows dentistry performed by a general dentist. The teeth look like they would be able to function and bite an apple, chew a steak, etc. In many such cases, the general dentist loves his dentistry and thinks it is gorgeous. What do you think?

“Before” Smile Analysis - General Dentistry: In the “before” photograph to the left, the patient has porcelain fused to metal crowns, which are noticeable from the tell-tale dark metal edges at the gum line. The color of the crowns is an opaque, grayish shade of white. They certainly don’t dazzle. They appear to be bulky, unnatural and look more like Chiclets than natural teeth. Of course, the patient paid thousands of dollars for these restorations.

“After” Smile Analysis: Cosmetic Dentistry: To the right is an “after” photo of the re-do using all porcelain, hand-crafted, hand-fired restorations. Her smile is now warm, inviting and sparkles. The teeth are translucent at the edges and natural-looking. They are whiter. They truly sparkle. They have subtleties embedded in their shapes and the coloration to make them look real.

Having my smile designed by the Atlanta Center for Cosmetic Dentistry was a wonderful experience.

- Peg Pisciotta
Most family and general dentists will try to do the occasional cosmetic case if and when the opportunity arises. But think about it. Great cosmetic dentistry is an art. The fact is, many dentists are generalists who simply have not performed cosmetic smile designs very many times or with a regularity that leads to mastery of this art. So, if you are considering veneers, for example, you should ask exactly how many veneers the dentist has placed. Placing thousands of veneers a year allows a dentist to see a wide variety of many different types of smiles and bring this experience and expertise to enhance your case.

“The primary differences between a real cosmetic dentist and a dentist who practices general dentistry is that the cosmetic dentist has a strongly developed artistic eye, has honed his or her skills through lots of cosmetic dentistry education and experience, and has a reputation to uphold specifically in cosmetic dentistry.

Conversely, general dentists are usually more focused on ensuring overall maintenance and that everything works appropriately as opposed to ensuring that it looks 100% real and amazing as well!

Red Flag Warning: Most general dentists offer “soup to nuts” dentistry of all types. So it’s a red flag when you see a dental practice offering all the general, family, wellness, selling vitamins, and then in an almost “oh, by the way” fashion, cosmetic dentistry too. Typically, such practices will “spin” their lack of specialization and demand for cosmetic dentistry along the lines of claiming to want to be a generalist so they can provide “a lifetime of care for all patients.” The reality is, they don’t have the demand.
Mistake #2:
Selecting A Cosmetic Dentist With Insufficient Credentials In Cosmetic Dentistry

Many well-known dentists are not Accredited Cosmetic Dentists, although patients may believe they are. There have been numerous disappointed patients and botched cases from other dentists where the patients have found out only afterwards that their original dentist actually had no formal cosmetic dentistry training and was not Accredited by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. It’s very disturbing.

There is no shortage of dentists without relevant training or significant experience masquerading as cosmetic dentists. How many of the dentists who claim to be cosmetic dentists actually are? Experts have estimated the number is fewer than 2%. And, less than one-quarter of 1% are Accredited in cosmetic dentistry. Why is this?

Red Flag Warning: It should be a “red flag” to you if a dentist claims to have done 50,000+ cosmetic dental procedures or a younger dentist who claims to have done “thousands” of smile designs, because there is a high degree of likelihood that they are counting any filling, whitening, or other basic or general procedures that they have done as “cosmetic.” If they are doing that in my opinion, it is misleading to consumers. A good question to ask is, how many smile designs with porcelain veneers and crowns have they done in the past few years?

1 See, e.g., “What is A Cosmetic Dentist?,” (“From what I have seen, and from what I know of the dentists who have pursued extensive additional training in cosmetic dentistry and have shown a level of skill that I would consider acceptable, I would guess that it’s some number under 2%.”) http://www.mynewsmile.com/cosmeticdentist.htm
Again, virtually any individual who graduated from dentistry school can call himself or herself a cosmetic dentist. There is no specialization in cosmetic dentistry while in dental school. Moreover, many dental schools don't even teach any courses specifically dedicated to cosmetic dentistry. For those that do, they are usually limited to only a few introductory courses. For this reason, any “cosmetic dentist” touting the “credential” that he finished first in his dental school class thirty-some years ago holds little to no relevance as to their cosmetic dentistry skills today.

Why are real credentials necessary for a cosmetic dentist? To become an expert in cosmetic dentistry, it takes more than just a declaration from a dentist that he or she is one. It takes a rigorous program of post-graduate training in cosmetic dentistry, technical skill, an artistic eye, and years of experience doing this work virtually full-time. Yet, very few dentists meet these standards. Your mouth is not the place for on-the-job training. It is crucial that the cosmetic dentist that you select continually completes series of hands-on courses in cosmetic dentistry. The field changes rapidly and what was state-of-the-art five or ten years ago is not anymore. In depth training is essential to learn the latest techniques and materials to get optimal results. The significance lies not only in developing the dentist's clinical judgment and technical skill, but also in demonstrating a commitment to practicing cosmetic dentistry at the highest level of excellence.

The most important credential is Aacd Accreditation. Here is why you need to know the initials - Aacd. In dentistry as in medicine, specialties exist that indicate a higher level of education, knowledge, and expertise in particular areas of focus. Presently, however, there is not an American Dental Association recognized specialty in cosmetic dentistry. In 1984, the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (Aacd) was formed and has filled the dire need for credentialing in this area. Presently, with more than 5,000 members in the U.S and in 40 countries around the world, the Aacd is the largest international dental organization dedicated specifically to the art and science of cosmetic dentistry. The Aacd also administers the leading accreditation program for cosmetic dentistry. The accreditation process is a rigorous program, which requires dentists to attend a number of continuing education courses in cosmetic dentistry, be tested, and submit a number of cosmetic cases to be judged by a panel of cosmetic dentistry experts.
Here is what is important to know about dentists who belong to AACD:

1. **General membership in the AACD (the lowest rung on the ladder chart to the right) can be obtained for a nominal fee.** Mere general members, participating, and sustaining members have *not* presented and passed any or the requisite number of cosmetic dental cases to be judged by the panel of cosmetic dentistry experts as being Accredited. Even non-dentists can become members of the AACD, so being an AACD member alone is certainly not enough to be considered a cosmetic dentist.

2. **An Accredited Member, as opposed to a General Member, is crucial,** because these cosmetic dentists had to present and pass *five different types of cosmetic cases* before an expert panel of cosmetic dentists as well as pass oral and written examinations. From the approximately 150,000 dentists in the United States, only a few hundred dentists are Accredited by the AACD, and less than 100 are Accredited Fellows.

3. **An Accredited Fellow of the AACD (which is the highest rung on the ladder chart in the side bar to the right) had to already be Accredited for a number of years, but then present an additional *50 different types of cosmetic cases* before the panel of cosmetic dentistry experts. These are the 'real deal' dentists who you want as cosmetic dentists! These dentists actually are legitimate cosmetic dentists who employ a winning blend of qualifications in general dentistry, experience, as well as the aesthetic education to provide you with the types of outcomes you desire.

The AACD vets cosmetic dentists through a rigorous Accreditation process, requiring from them a number of continuing education courses in cosmetic dentistry, tests, and a number of cosmetic cases to be judged by a panel of cosmetic dentistry experts. Therefore, the “real deal” in cosmetic dentistry will usually be the two highest tiers on the chart above -- an Accredited Member of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD), or better yet, an Accredited Fellow of the AACD, which is recognized as the highest level of competence in cosmetic dentistry. You can easily check whether a dentist is Accredited on the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry’s website at www.aacd.com.
Is Aacd Accreditation the absolute “end all and be all” when it comes to cosmetic dentists?
No, but it is an excellent starting point. That is because there are more than 150,000 dentists in the United States, and for a dentist to successfully go through the Aacd Accreditation process probably puts them at least in the 95th percentile of dentists according to cosmetic dentistry skills. An Aacd Accredited Fellow is probably in the 99th percentile. Once a dentist becomes Accredited, that is not the end of it, as it is important that they continue to hone their skills through formalized training, continuing education, and extensive experience.

Are there excellent cosmetic dentists who are not Aacd Accredited?
Yes, but frankly they are few and far between and they have become very difficult or almost impossible for consumers to identify because of all the “noise” out there of dentists claiming to be the “best cosmetic dentist.” That is why it is important to select a cosmetic dentist who has met rigorous, standardized criteria for excellence, which is the Aacd Accreditation standards.

What about a prosthodontist -- is that a specialist in cosmetic dentistry?
No, prosthodontics is not a specialty in cosmetic dentistry even though some prosthodontists incorrectly advertise that they “specialize” in cosmetic dentistry. A prosthodontist is a crown and bridge specialist who has additional education in replacing missing teeth through treatment such as dentures. Prosthodontists can be great at what they do, but they are not cosmetic dentist specialists.

Nonetheless, of late, a number of prosthodontists have held themselves out as cosmetic dental specialists although many (most) had very limited training, if any, on cosmetic procedures such as porcelain veneers in their prosthodontic program. Thus, just like other dentists, even prosthodontists need to have taken specific cosmetic dental courses and had the proper training and experience to become cosmetic dental masters.
Hold On! My dentist told me himself that he is an experienced cosmetic dentist and doesn’t need some sort of "stinkin’ Board" to validate those skills.

Psychologists have found that people are not very good at estimating their own competence. Moreover, they found that the less skilled a person is, the less practice they have actually put in and the fewer relevant experiences they have -- the worse they are at comparing themselves to others on certain tasks. To add to this effect, many of their peers don’t call them out on this because they know about the same or because they don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings.

Frankly, quite a number of “wanna be” cosmetic dentists fall into this category. It is human nature that the less you know about a subject, the less you believe there is to know in total. Only once you have some experience do you start to recognize the breadth and depth you have yet to learn. The more experienced you are, the more practice you’ve put in -- the more skill you have. As you seek to improve, you begin to better understand where you need work. You start to see the complexity and nuance, you discover masters of your craft and compare yourself to them and see where you are lacking. Education is as much about learning what you don’t know as it is about adding to what you do know. Like other human beings, dentists also don’t know what they don’t know. This is why it is crucial that dentists who want to be cosmetic dentists are evaluated by objective criteria such as the AACD Accreditation protocols.

This all-too-human self deception effect is what makes “American Idol” so entertaining. Stadiums full of singers show up who are totally convinced they are great because they sing for their friends and family and in those reference groups, they are the best. But when they perform for experienced critics and are compared to great singers, many do not measure up.

Similarly, this is how some dentists can rationalize to themselves that they are great cosmetic dentists and do not need to be assessed by a qualified Board that their skills are at an exceptional level. Whether it’s singing or performing cosmetic dentistry -- those with less expertise are far more likely to think they are experts (thus creating an illusion of superiority) compared to actual experts. Many times, this phenomenon arises when one has a reference group of a small circle of similarly skilled people and their narrow advantage over other novices leads them to think they are very skilled.

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Mistake #3 (which is related to Mistake #2): Getting Fooled By Dentists’ “Credentials” Consisting Of Quickie “Certifications” Or Awards

Unfortunately, there are organizations cropping up offering short-cut “credentials,” “medals,” or awards” in cosmetic dentistry. To the uneducated consumer, some of these initials and the word “Fellow” may certainly sound impressive. After all, that’s probably precisely what they are intended to do. Unfortunately, these awards may be primarily marketing driven or in some cases even “won” by the dentists who are themselves administering the competition! So buyer beware when a dentist is touting cosmetic dentistry medals and awards.

This is still true even if a dentist touts receiving gold, silver, or bronze medals for cosmetic dentistry from the AACD. In fact, the Aacd medals process became so abused that the Aacd abandoned the medal awards practice as dentists were beginning to embellish and overstate the impact of the medals, which was many times based on an unregulated vote with imprecise criteria. Thus, as some dentists sought to exploit the medals in ways not intended and confuse those with Accreditation, the medals approach has been reined in by the Aacd.

Red Flag Warning: Any dentist (or even non-dentists) can become a member of the ACCD, but dentists Accredited by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry must undergo a substantial amount of cosmetic dentistry education and training, present five different types of cosmetic dentistry cases to panel of experts to be judged, pass comprehensive written and oral examinations, and adhere to a strict code of cosmetic dentistry ethics. No other certifying board requires their dentists to meet standards as stringent as these.

Bottom Line: If you want to get a cosmetic dentist with the “real deal” credentials, ignore the medals and look for a cosmetic dentist with Aacd Accreditation or Fellowship.
Beware of a dentist that places an alphabet soup of all sorts of initials after his or her name. This is not one of those areas where more (initials) are better. It is more important that the initials be the right initials. But some dentists want to impress you with the number of initials, and hope you don’t notice that they are not from the right organizations. In many cases, the initials may come from an organization that provides them in an area other than cosmetic dentistry, or for very little effort other than the payment of a fee. Did they come from a weekend course, with criteria that is bona fide? For example, if a dentist says he or she is a “Fellow” or “Accredited,” the question should always be “by whom?”

What do these letters after a dentist’s name mean?

- **FACE:** Means a Fellow in the Academy of Comprehensive Esthetics. This is a small privately held group that was previously known as “GenR8Next.” They have a program whereby dentist applicants can submit two cases to a panel and receive the FACE. The standards and number of cases are not as strenuous as the Aacd Accreditation standards. This organization does not contend that FACE represents the highest level of competence in cosmetic dentistry (even though some individual dentists have claimed otherwise to exaggerate their credentials) and reportedly is considering dropping their credentialing program.

- **FIADFE:** Means a Fellow in the International Academy of Dental Facial Esthetics. The Academy for Dental Facial Esthetics is an honorary service organization and to become a Fellow, no cosmetic cases need to be submitted. A nominee simply fills out an application, pays a fee, and upon acceptance, the Fellowship is awarded at an awards dinner.

- **FAGD:** Means a Fellow in the Academy of General Dentistry. A FAGD means the dentist has completed 500 hours of continuing education in approved courses and passes an exam. These courses may or may not have been in cosmetic dentistry. Also importantly, no dental cases need to be submitted. The level beyond FAGD is MAGD, which is a Masters in the Academy of General Dentistry requiring an additional 600 hours of continuing education.

Unlike a number of other professional organizations, Aacd Fellows and Accredited Cosmetic Dentists must attend regular continuing education courses and meetings to maintain their credentials. Therefore, even if the Aacd credential was obtained some time ago, you can be assured the Aacd Fellows and Accredited Cosmetic Dentists are up to date on the latest techniques.
Mistake #4:
Selecting A “Cosmetic Dentist” Based On Cheaper Price

Bargain shopping is great . . . but not when it comes to cosmetic dentistry.
You probably started considering cosmetic dentistry because you wanted a stunning smile. With that goal in mind, does it really make sense to perhaps save a few dollars, but by doing so, sacrifice a significant amount of beauty and quality? With a number of things that we buy, cost may be a determining factor.

You will regret ugly dentistry you had done, but shouldn’t have had done.
Porcelain veneers, crowns or bridges that are high quality can provide a dramatic enhancement for your smile for many years to come, making them one of the best investments you can make. On the other hand, cheap porcelain veneers, crowns or bridges may not only look fake, but may need to be repaired or replaced in a short time. Seriously consider, would the short term savings really be a savings to you at all--

- If you are not happy with the shape and color of your veneers and you really aren’t that excited about smiling?
- If your porcelain veneers began to stain or crack after just a few months?
- If one of your porcelain restorations unexplainably broke or popped off just before a big social event such as a wedding or perhaps a business presentation?

"The bitterness of poor quality is remembered long after the sweetness of low price has faded from memory."
--Benjamin Franklin

Red Flag Warning: We love to discover coupons and Groupons for certain things. But cosmetic dentistry is not like a lot of other things that you use for a while and then throw away. Instead, it is something that you will use extensively throughout your day, every day, for years and years to come. Another reason to stay away from these approaches is that a number of states are cracking down and have barred these types of online coupons as practice of fee-splitting.
Your smile is one of your first impressions and if you want to get a beautiful smile, you should not select a dentist who will cut corners. Intuitively, you probably realize that a dentist who has substantially discounted prices reflects that he or she is hurting for business or is in a volume-based business. Thus, cheap dental prices should definitely be a red flag to you that likely reflects the quality of the dentistry. Dentists who offer cheap dentistry simply must find ways to reduce their costs to do so, either through lower-quality materials, cutting corners on technique, or like Wal-Mart, make it up in volume – such as a mill practice. In cosmetic dentistry, as in life, you usually get what you pay for. A cheaper dentist may be motivated to offer you a “deal” because: (a) the dentist wants to obtain further experience and “training” using you as the guinea pig; (b) the dentist is using a cheaper lab (where in China did your veneer come from?), materials and equipment; or (c) the dentist hasn’t invested in extensive postgraduate training necessary to become a master cosmetic dentist.

The smarter investment is for you to choose quality. An excellent cosmetic dentist’s fees and prices should be based on his or her experience, skills and the value that is provided to the patient. The quality of cosmetic dentistry can vary widely, but depends on:

1. **The skill and experience of the cosmetic dentist**, who will evaluate and recommend appropriate options, designs the smile, and then restore and enhance the smile. The cosmetic dentist will also design the color map of the teeth and specify the ingot color and shape of the restorations. As we discuss throughout this e-book, this is best performed by an experienced, AACD Accredited Cosmetic Dentist.

2. **The skill and experience of the master ceramist**, who will hand-make the wax-up of the teeth, as well as hand-make the porcelain restorations, many time hand-painting and hand-firing each porcelain restoration multiple times to match the shape, size and color specified by the cosmetic dentist.

3. **The quality of the technology and materials used in the process**, including high quality bonding agents, cavity detection, the latest equipment and techniques in curing lights, and handling of the restorations, digital x-rays to confirm proper placement, high tech photography to co-diagnose, are all important to the outcome.
Should you use participation on a dental insurance list as the selection criteria for choosing a competent cosmetic dentist?
In my estimation, there are very few, if any, expert cosmetic dentists who are members of any restricted preferred provider insurance networks. Here's why.

To insurance companies, the term "preferred provider" really means "cheap provider."
Many dentists are solicited and fall into a trap set by insurance companies who want them to become part of a preferred provider network or similar list. The approach of the insurance companies is to tell the dentist that they can help fill the dentist's empty dental chair in return for the dentist cutting costs and reducing fees to meet the insurance company's discounted fee schedule. Real cosmetic dentists who stay busy creating beautiful smiles, however, cannot still maintain their high quality standards and at the same time cut corners on materials, use cheap laboratories, employ rock-bottom staff salaries, or go with quickie techniques, etc. In addition, real cosmetic dentists need to spend a great deal of time away from the office at continuing education courses where they can learn the latest techniques in cosmetic dentistry. Therefore, they must charge an appropriate fee to make that investment worthwhile. Furthermore, expert cosmetic dentists are usually not interested in the insurance company's deal because they're not suffering from a lack of business.

A word about selecting a cosmetic dentist based on your insurance plan
Although there are some exceptions, usually dental insurance plans do not cover pure, cosmetic dental procedures. If your procedures are not covered by your dental insurance, then why would you try to find a cosmetic dentist among the members of restricted preferred provider insurance networks? Instead, you would be far better off to select the cosmetic dentist based on the criteria set out throughout this e-book.

You have a choice -- do you want to have a dentist who is in your insurance network and who is just going to fix your tooth in the most economical way available, or do you want an expert cosmetic dentist who can create something beautiful in your mouth? If you want the beautiful smile, you're going to need to go outside your insurance network. You cannot really have it both ways.
Mistake #5: Selecting The “Student” Instead Of The “Professor” In Cosmetic Dentistry

Key: Select a dentist who teaches post-graduate cosmetic dental clinical training.

Today, most people no longer want just to improve their smile, they want an incredible smile. And patients that already have a good smile want a better one. Cosmetic dentistry as an art form has increased dramatically over the past few years. As most dentists did not take any cosmetic dentistry courses in dental school, post-graduate training in cosmetic dentistry is absolutely crucial to perform cosmetic dental procedures at the highest level. At a minimum, the cosmetic dentist that you select should have completed a series of hands-on courses in cosmetic dentistry. The more recognized of these type of programs are The Hornbrook Group, Aesthetic Masters, Las Vegas Institute, and Aesthetic Advantage. While at a bare minimum the dentist should have completed this hands-on, post graduate cosmetic dental education, it is just the beginning.

It’s great if a dentist has taken a lot of continuing education in cosmetic dentistry. But far better yet, select a cosmetic dentist who teaches clinical cosmetic dentistry to other dentists.

In other words, you are far better off to get the “professor” instead of the “student.” The clinical instructor teaches other dentists the latest techniques and is predictably much more experienced and skilled in the art and science of cosmetic dentistry.

Red Flag Warning: Some dentists advertise that they “lecture” to and “teach” other dentists, but the “dirty little secret” many don’t tell you is that their lectures are not on how to perform cosmetic dentistry, but rather on dental marketing or practice management. You want a dentist who actually teaches other dentists in the clinical aspects of cosmetic dentistry.
What about a cosmetic dentist to the stars?
Obviously, hit television shows such as “Extreme Makeover” and “The Doctors” seek out the top doctors in their field to feature for their expertise to a national audience. Usually, the doctors appearing on the shows are vetted a number of different ways and are bona fide international experts.

What if celebrities go to a certain cosmetic dentist – should that be a factor or is that superficial?
Celebrities are people who happen to be very prominent in the public eye and they usually work hard on their appearance as it is a key part of their image and career. Because so much is at stake with their looks and function of their smile, they usually research more, and ask around more, and they have more contacts and put more into the selection process than the typical person. They most always have the ability and resources to go anywhere to any cosmetic dentist that they choose. So when they place such an important part of their image into the hands of a cosmetic dentist, that is a factor you should consider. In short, the more celebrities who have their cosmetic dental work done by a cosmetic dentist – the more significant.

Red Flag Warning: Unfortunately, to give themselves a “credential” that they don’t really have, some dentists mislead consumers by implying or even asserting that they have -- or their work has been -- featured on TV shows like “Extreme Makeover” when actually that is not the case at all. Again, this is very disturbing and raises serious questions about any dentist that would make such a claim.

Tip: If a dentist you are considering for cosmetic dentistry claims he has been featured on Extreme Makeover, ask (insist) to see the video of their appearance on the show. If there is no video featuring them, you have to wonder about their integrity.
Mistake #6: Not Realizing How Important Cosmetic Dental Experience Is And How To Recognize It

A full-time cosmetic dentist performs more cosmetic dentistry cases and thus is simply more experienced in the art. Deep experience in doing all sorts of complex cosmetic cases is crucial in selecting a cosmetic dentist for you. So if at all possible, select a cosmetic dentist who performs smile designs every day. Again, the most in-demand cosmetic dentists are busy. And there is a reason for that. The better the cosmetic dentist, the more in-demand and busier they are. A truly full-time cosmetic dentist will be highly likely to have the extensive skill and techniques perfected to create your dream smile.

Choosing the right cosmetic dentist is a sort of balancing act. You don’t want a dentist with years and years of experience, but who is using out-of-date techniques. You also don’t want to select a dentist that has some credentials in cosmetic dentistry, but lacks the years of experience to truly know how to put the techniques into practice. When a cosmetic dentist has the combination of the right credentials and years of full-time experience -- you can’t beat it. Therefore, the trick is to research a cosmetic dentist with years of experience and the proper form of credentials.

All dentistry is not “cosmetic dentistry.”

Smile Analysis: Aside from the obvious gap and gold teeth, Mike Tyson has worn down teeth and a gummy smile. This makes his teeth look short and fat. Some of the teeth are almost as wide as they are tall.

Recommendation: Gingival contouring, replacing the gold and closing the spaces with longer porcelain restorations would enhance his appearance.
Mistake #7: Not Realizing That The Best Cosmetic Dentists Can -- And Usually Do -- Limit Their Practice To Cosmetic Dentistry

If a dentist is truly focused on cosmetic dentistry, it is highly likely that such a dentist will experience a high demand for cosmetic dentistry services. As noted throughout this e-book, most dentists today hold themselves out as cosmetic dentists. But, it is another thing altogether to be so in demand that the dentist can limit his or her practice to cosmetic dentistry. That would be the sign of one of the best cosmetic dentists. In short, if the demand is high enough, the best cosmetic dentists will usually limit their practice to cosmetic dentistry. By the same token, if a general dentist doesn’t have a significant demand for cosmetic dentistry services, then such a dentist has not achieved a high level in this field and is not in a position to limit his or her practice to cosmetic dentistry.

Even most “cosmetic dentists” mostly perform general and family dentistry. Dentists who are fairly accomplished in cosmetic dentistry (meaning they have taken a number of continuing education courses, and have a number of years of experience) and market heavily for cosmetic dentistry still mostly perform general and family dentistry. In fact, many of them feel very lucky if 20-30% of their practice is actually composed of porcelain cosmetic dentistry cases. This is probably far different that their website reflects or that you thought.

Red Flag Warning: If a dentist isn’t performing cosmetic dentistry exclusively, then it is highly likely that the dentist does not have enough demand or experience as the best full-time, real cosmetic dentists. That non-exclusivity is a red flag for you.
On the other hand, imagine you went to a credentialed, experienced cosmetic dentist whose practice is 90-100% cosmetic dentistry?

There are very, very few elite cosmetic dentists in the world in this category. If you find a dentist that limits their practice to cosmetic dentistry, chances are, you have found a “real,” experienced cosmetic dentist with the recurring demand to be able to have that type of practice.

In addition, remember that a successful cosmetic dentist is a busy cosmetic dentist.

Initially, you may think that a dentist who is able to spend hours of time with you is nice, but as discussed above, the best cosmetic dentists are in demand and busy. Yes, they should spend adequate time with you to get to know you and your case. But, a dentist who is available to spend an afternoon doing an exam with you is also a sign that the dentist is not very busy and thus not in demand. Therefore, his or her skills should be a question mark for you.

Even though busy, look for a caring approach and great communication skills.

Find a doctor with a good chairside manner who conveys to you that they care about you as a person as well as a client. Find a cosmetic dentist who is honest in his or her assessment of your needs and of their ability to meet your expectations. Cosmetic dentistry is a process not a single operation. So find someone with whom you can talk easily. It is just as important that he/she understands what you desire as that you understand what they are describing. To accomplish these goals, the first thing the cosmetic dentist should do is listen and make sure he or she understands all your concerns, needs and desires as they relate to your dental health and the look of your smile. Only then should they spend time diagnosing and consulting on the recommended treatment plan, which should be individualized for each client.
Mistake #8: Ready, Fire, Aim: Jumping Ahead With Not Enough Information

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 different Accredited cosmetic dentists for a consultation. This will clarify in your own mind those personal characteristics that you would like your cosmetic dentists to have. Our office, for one, is happy to provide second opinions.

The right cosmetic dentist should provide a well thought out treatment plan with different options. When you sit with the dentist during the consultation, it is imperative that you take note of his or her response regarding the changes you would like to see in your smile. It is very important that when consulting with a cosmetic dentist, you ask as many questions as possible and that all your questions are thoroughly answered. Make sure that the dentist’s vision for your smile meshes with yours. Look at your computerized imaging and discuss. Also, do not move forward until you have seen and approved a wax-up of your teeth showing what they would look like after the work is done.

If all you wish is a brighter and whiter smile, then there should be a few options laid out for you, and well explained at that. It is important that you gather all the facts from the cosmetic dentist before you make a decision. Ask as many questions as you would like. Did they explain everything in detail and why this is the best procedure for you? It always is a case by case basis, and in some circumstances, the investment for your perfect smile will be quite a sum of money. Although dentists are supposed to be the experts, that does not mean that you should just accept the first and possibly only recommendation they give you. Ask informed questions and expect informed answers.
Mistake #9:
Decision Fatigue: Too Many Choices Can Lead To Bad Decisions

On a daily basis, we are confronted with a dizzying array of choices. Starbucks offers almost 90,000 drink combinations. Comcast, the biggest cable company, offers 1,000 channels and a multitude of different packages. The notion – the more choices, the better – is not always accurate. Many times more choices do not always equate to better decisions. It can also lead people to make poorer choices – sometimes at a time when the choice really matters. This is called, “decision fatigue.”

Decision fatigue refers to the deteriorating quality of decisions made by an individual, when confronted with many choices. Decision fatigue can result not only in fast and careless decisions but even in decision paralysis, where you just cannot make any decision. No matter how rational you try to be, the more choices you have to make, the harder each one becomes for your brain, and eventually it looks for shortcuts, usually in either of two very different ways. One shortcut is to become reckless: to act impulsively instead of expending the energy to first think through the consequences. The other shortcut is the ultimate energy saver: do nothing. Instead of agonizing over decisions, avoid any choice.
Similarly, in cosmetic dentistry, some people believe that extensive "doctor shopping" and getting opinion after opinion is the best way to find a suitable cosmetic dentist.

While some research may be helpful to find a good cosmetic dentist, too much research can be counterproductive and taken too far it also leads to decision fatigue. Getting a multitude of opinions can add to the confusion instead of being helpful.

Let us say you were interested in buying a house, would you buy the first one you see?

Most likely no, unless you knew it is the perfect house! Just like your house, your teeth are something you use and live with on a daily basis, so searching for the right cosmetic dentist is definitely a good idea. On the other hand, if you already know of one with the right credentials, experience, and you feel you can trust, do not lose precious time and take action! Too much research can be counterproductive, for in the end, too much information can just make you dizzier than when you first started! Remember, time is money, so book a consultation promptly in order to begin to determine whether this is the right cosmetic dentist for you or not.
Mistake # 10: Not Doing Other Due Diligence

Make sure you review the before and after photos of work actually performed by the cosmetic dentist.

You’ll want to look at before and after photos of cosmetic dentistry that has actually been performed by the dentist that you are considering. Beware that there are commercially available photos and albums that show the possibilities for cosmetic dentistry. But you want to 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.

Look for a sense of perfectionism.

Find a cosmetic dentist who is accurate in his or her evaluation of your needs, precise in the execution of their operative plan, and meticulous in their craftsmanship. Although perfection is in the eye of the beholder, this doctor will do whatever it takes without cutting corners, not only to satisfy you, but also to meet their own personal standards of excellence. Make sure the cosmetic dentist addresses not just the teeth but also gums, lips, facial structure and your specific requests.

“[Patient’s quote]: "The staff was terrific and I use my new smile everyday."

- Tom Higgins
**Insist on a Cosmetic Dentist with 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. In this regard, it helps greatly if the cosmetic dentist works closely with the master ceramist, talking with them about the desired aesthetic results.

**Make Sure You Review Before and After Photos of Work Actually Performed by the Cosmetic Dentist**
As I noted earlier, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. So, you will want to look at before and after photos of cosmetic dentistry cases similar to yours that have actually been performed by the dentist that you are considering. Beware that there are commercially available photos and albums that show the possibilities for cosmetic dentistry. But you want to 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.

**When you look at before and after photos, remember too that the patient can also have a lot of input into the smile design.**
Some people may want whiter shades than others for instance. So you may agree and like it or for yourself want something different. That is okay. Just discuss with the cosmetic dentist and don’t be shy about expressing your vision for your smile.

**Other things you may want to consider.**
On-line patient reviews, references from other patients, a tour of the office including sterilization areas, and asking about technology and materials used in the practice are all things you may want to look into. You may also want to check with the state licensing board to verify that the dentist does not have a history of complaints or adverse State Dental Board action. In Georgia, you can do this by logging onto the Georgia Secretary of State’ website at [www.sos.state.ga.us](http://www.sos.state.ga.us).
Conclusion

The right cosmetic dentist can make all the difference in the world to your smile and self-confidence.
The sad truth is, however, that most people do not know the things they should be looking for in a cosmetic dentist before selecting one. Consequently, their results may be less than desirable. If this is the case, the patient usually must pay for the cosmetic procedures all over again, but this time with the right cosmetic dentist.

Particularly, since the procedures are not inexpensive, you should make sure you are going to the right dentist to begin with.
If you were to perhaps choose a slightly more “affordable” quote, and the cosmetic dentist is not as experienced or trained as he or she claims to be, you could end up with irritated gums, a crooked smile, or chipped teeth.

All this can be avoided if you are informed of some important details when it comes to choosing the right cosmetic dentist and you do your homework before-hand.
This e-book will help you avoid some of those mistakes. By keeping in mind the common mistakes discussed, you can definitely avoid a regrettable situation.

“Having a dental makeover has been the experience of a lifetime. It’s remarkable how a pretty smile can boost your self-confidence and how others look at you.”
- Kim Fortson

After

Before
Bonus Tip: Take An Action Step For the Smile of Your Dreams

An amazing smile can have a huge impact on a person. Although I may not have met you, I know you want to face the world with the best smile you could possibly have! So if you are ready to take the next steps to transform your image, I invite you to come in for a consultation where we can discuss your specific dental concerns.

Simply give us a call at 404.847.9711 to set up your appointment. We look forward to hearing from you!

Warm regards,
Debra Gray King, DDS, FAACD

About Debra Gray King, DDS, FAACD: Dr. King is one of the few dentists in the world to limit her practice to cosmetic dentistry smile designs. She is an Accredited Fellow in the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, which is considered the highest level of competence in cosmetic dentistry. Featured as an expert cosmetic dentist on ABC’s “Extreme Makeover,” Dr. King is a graduate of the University of Tennessee at Memphis Dental School and post-graduate programs at the Pankey Institute, the Pacific Aesthetic Continuum (PAC-Live) at the University of the Pacific in San Francisco, The Hornbrook Group and the Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies. She has lectured extensively at educational seminars around the world and is a clinical instructor of full-mouth reconstruction with the Aesthetic Masters program.

She has been featured by Entertainment Tonight, The Doctors, CNN, The Wall Street Journal, Time Magazine, Fox News, CBS, InStyle, Vogue, Glamour, USA Today and UK’s The Guardian. A leading trade publication, Dental Products Report, named Dr. King one of the Top 25 Women in Dentistry. Johnson & Johnson selected Dr. King as a national spokesperson for Listerine. She is also the official cosmetic dentist for the Atlanta Falcons Cheerleaders.

Dr. King established the Atlanta Center for Cosmetic Dentistry in 1987 and has since changed the lives of thousands of people by improving their smiles and boosting their confidence. To do so, she uses porcelain veneers, cosmetic bonding, whitening and full-mouth reconstruction, creating positive results no matter how challenging the issue. A pioneer in the art of Instant Orthodontics and Scalpel-less Facelifts, Dr. King also strives to create a comfortable environment for her clients, making them feel more like they’re at the spa than at a typical dentist’s office.