

A Not So Extreme Dental Makeover

by Dr. Warren C. Edwards.

The popularity of reality television has been nothing short of a phenomenon. When we thought we saw it all, ABC introduced *Extreme Makeover* (Wednesdays, 10 p.m. ET), the weekly documentary on which two homely people are cut, stitched and molded into two beautiful people—and thus granted deliverance from the toils of everyday existence. Putting commentary and judgments aside on the redeeming value of such a program, a curious fact remains that all participants had a dental makeover as part of their extreme makeover.

The state of our teeth is an integral part of our feelings about how we look. A study by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry revealed that 92% of respondents say an attractive smile is an important social asset, yet only 50% of adults are satisfied with their own smile. There are many choices to be made in a dental makeover, ranging the gamut from simple to complex, reasonable to exorbitant. It takes a dentist with a trained, cosmetic eye to realize the detractors and ‘see’ the possibilities of what can be done. Often an esthetic reshaping, simple bonding to close a gap, or whitening can have dramatic results.

Whitening is the cornerstone of cosmetic dentistry and most all the participants on the show had a ZOOM! whitening treatment with dramatic results. Bonding is an option for cracked, chipped, malpositioned or misshapen teeth. It is a process in which an enamel-like material is applied to a tooth’s surface, sculpted to an ideal shape, hardened, and then polished for an ideal smile.

Veneers, ultra-thin, custom-made porcelain or ceramic laminates that are affixed directly to the teeth, are an increasingly popular procedure. They are a great option for closing gaps or disguising discolored teeth that do not respond well to whitening procedures. Veneers are the most durable and are long lasting. Crowns are a covering for weak, broken down or cracked teeth. Today new materials such as all ceramic, zirconium, fortified resin or porcelain can make restorations very cosmetic. Implants are a strong, attractive option for replacing missing or lost teeth. An anchor is placed in the patient's jaw, and a life-like ceramic restoration is built around it and matched to the original tooth color. Orthodontics is a conservative approach to the treatment of misaligned or crooked teeth, and today can be ‘invisible’.

To get an outstanding dental makeover you need to find a dentist with a good eye and experience in the area of cosmetic dentistry, utilizing the advances in dental materials and modern techniques. Take an unattractive smile to five dentists and get five different

treatment plans. Give the same cosmetic challenge to those same five dentists and you will get five different results. Combine that with the fact that many people are concerned about the expense or pain of the work involved, worried about hearing an overwhelming treatment plan or having an otherwise healthy tooth drilled down and it is no wonder that people are stymied to make a decision.

Look in the mirror and give yourself a smile evaluation. Do you love the appearance of your smile? Do you cover your mouth when you laugh or smile? Is there something that has always bugged you about your smile that you would like to change? If so, you are a candidate for a dental makeover. Ask those you meet with a fabulous smile who their dentist is. Do some research. Visit these websites: American Dental Association, www.ada.org or the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, www.aacd.com. Ask your dentist. Go for a second opinion and keep looking until you find a dentist you are comfortable with. It doesn't have to be an extreme makeover to be one of the best things you ever did for yourself.

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