



THE smile MAKEOVER

Dental reconstruction
could be the latest weapon
in your anti-aging arsenal

Words: ALEXANDRA VENTURA

awards season. Whether the Dubai or Marrakech International Film Festivals, it is the time of year celebrities spend months preparing for. Sauntering down red carpets, light bulbs flashing, no expense has been spared. From head to toe, stars of the Arab world dazzle. There is something of a phenomenon at work here. The art of anti-aging. Hair might change and contouring might improve, but there is a certain symmetry to their looks that only those in the know can point out. So subtle are procedures that they can only be performed by the best in the business. The secret to maintaining these youthful appearances? Dentistry.

The daily grind leads to teeth shifting and wearing away. Coupled with the skin's diminishing elasticity, aging and discolored teeth can make you look older, even if the rest of your face does not. However, a natural and youthful-looking smile can be achieved through the masterful work of dentistry professionals and, if required, non-invasive cosmetic surgery.

"Over time and with age, our faces become increasingly asymmetrical," says restorative and cosmetic dentist Dr Michael Apa. "Our muscles change and pull on our face, we lose collagen, elastin, and fat, and our teeth break down." Highly regarded by royals and celebrities for his "smile makeover," Apa creates teeth that look natural, helping the face appear more youthful. "When working on someone's teeth, we have to look at where the patient is presently, where the facial asymmetries exist, and what needs to be balanced out," he explains.

With aging in particular, asymmetries often occur in the lower third of the face. Dubai-based dentist Dr Sofia Arzavopoulou says, "Think of how a grandmother looks with and without her dentures; the whole lower part of the face shrinks in." A smile makeover that corrects irregularities can make this part of the face look fuller again, giving a 50-year-old the smile they had in their 20s.

To begin, Apa examines the macro factors: "How much tooth is exposed during talking and smiling? How do teeth support the lips; is there collapse? How is the smile filled out? And what effect does the teeth's color have on the face? Are they dull, gray, yellow?" After this initial examination, the micro factors, such as proportions, slight rotations, texture, detail, and light reflection are considered. Generally, the best course of action is veneers. The custom-made, thin pieces of porcelain are bonded to the teeth, with little to no tooth structure being shaved. The process is an investment, though, with each veneer costing up to US\$3 500. It takes between three and 14 days to complete,

and needs to be replaced every 15 to 20 years. Make sure you go to a reputable dentist, though – improperly applied veneers can lead to gum swelling, rejection, and bad breath caused by trapped bacteria. You also might not need a full set – beauty entrepreneur Huda Kattan only required her four front teeth to be fixed.

Some dentists can also tell you if you need cosmetic surgery to complement their work. Apa explains, "It's important to go to a cosmetic dentist who understands facial beauty. Lip lifts help tremendously with long philtra (upper lips), especially in older patients. Cosmetic dentistry goes hand in hand with aesthetic facial surgery." Apa works with New York-based facial plastic surgeon Dr Sam Rizk, who says, "If a patient has receding or weak teeth, I will often refer her for dentistry before performing my signature lip lift with platelet-rich plasma stem cell injections and hyaluronic acid fillers. The aesthetics of the lower face can be greatly improved with innovative combination procedures."

Finding the right balance between the two procedures can give you the natural look you desire.

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The use of fillers and Botox is also on the rise, with the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reporting more than seven million injectable treatments in the US in 2016 – a 10% increase from 2015. However, these procedures aren't always compatible with cosmetic dental work. One of Apa's patients returned to his practice six months after her smile makeover, saying her teeth had become shorter and less visible. Upon closer inspection, she admitted to getting lip fillers. "The weight of the fillers had pushed her lip down over her teeth, rendering them almost invisible," Apa says. "Fillers, face-lifts, nose jobs, and cosmetic dentistry can work in

harmony if there is a game plan." Entrepreneur Rosemin Manji agrees. After breaking her front teeth at 17, she received veneers from a dentist in Canada but they were too thick and the wrong shade. She eventually turned to Apa, who also fixed an inverted tooth. "When you choose a doctor, you have to pick one you really understand," she says. "People can tell you that they are great, but you have to trust your instinct in that chair. Nobody can put a price on feeling good and feeling confident." □