

# THE HOLLYWOOD SMILE: IS IT TIME TO GET REAL?

**I can't watch the *Austin Powers* films.** I've got nothing against the script; it's Mike Myers' teeth. He spent years in the UK gigging at the Comedy Store, and couldn't understand why British teeth were so crooked and dirty when everyone in LA had gleaming clean mouths, every tooth neatly in its place. Powers' wonky brown gnashers were a sly dig at our dentition.

'You guys have free healthcare,' my American friend Adam likes to taunt me. 'So how come you have mouths like medieval peasants?' He's particularly down on me. The effects of some unsightly braces in my teen years seem to be reversing; one front incisor has been replaced by a hefty implant, and years of wine, booze and coffee have left their mark. 'Get your teeth fixed about once a month,' Adam says. 'Seriously, it'll change your life.'

Right now, it seems as though the rest of the nation agrees. It could be celebrity culture, or it could be that teeth are a logical next step for perfectly toned gym bunnies, but perfect smiles are suddenly quite the thing. 'Teeth whitening is the number-one treatment cosmetic dentists are asked for these days,' says Dr Kailesh Solanki, who runs the Kissdental practice, and online resource the Cosmetic Dentistry Guide.

Dr Marc Lowenberg, New York's cosmetic dentist to the stars, has been treating Brits for years. When sterling reigned supreme, they'd fly over, have Marc attach a set of veneers – pearly semi-permanent covers for unsightly teeth – and be home by the end of the week. A life-changing smile with some shopping in the Village thrown in.

'The great American smile began with Marilyn Monroe,' says Lowenberg. 'Monroe was the first Hollywood film star to have those perfect teeth. Then it wasn't until the Eighties that similar procedures hit the mass market. Today you'll find most Americans view healthy-looking teeth as a status symbol, and that influence is spreading.' Lowenberg points out that both Simon Cowell and Jodie Marsh have had the full 'great American'

treatment – teeth coloured eight on the whitening scale – to look as Hollywood as they can.

Lowenberg's practice offers porcelain veneers from \$20,000. Given that having only a few teeth covered can look odd, the price for a full set can reach \$40,000, and the procedure isn't covered by health insurance, which begins to explain the status-symbol thing.

Dr Solanki, however, says British admiration for Hollywood choppers is starting to fade. 'Prior to the credit crunch, patients aimed towards the whiter end of the scale, but now they are holding back. That is undoubtedly a reflection of the times. Cowell asked for eight on the whitening scale, but six, an off-white shade, is now much more fashionable. It seems that people in the UK are looking for a subtler, even classier, approach.'

Intrigued, I visit Aqua, a London dental spa, for the experts' view on how to improve my grin. While I'm slumped in his chair, Dr Anoop Maini asks me to pick my ideal tooth colour from a chart. I choose number six – number eight looks like it could glow in the dark. 'If you want the difference between British and American attitudes to teeth, ours is about normalisation and theirs is about perfection,' says Maini. 'There are plenty of treatments that allow a much more natural-looking set of improvements than drilling into a healthy tooth and sticking a veneer on top.'

Maini prefers to correct wonky teeth with a new kind of brace – clear plastic rather than the unsightly metal of my youth – then to use deep bleaching or laser whitener to brighten them up. 'With veneers you have to drill into a healthy tooth, but with orthodontics you get permanent change,' he says. 'There are also new techniques for crowns and white fillings that have a powerful cosmetic effect.' He sees veneers as excessive, and spends a good deal of my visit trying to persuade me to avoid them.

Admittedly, a full set of braces plus whitening would take around seven months to achieve what veneers could in just two days, but I guess Brits are all about knuckling down and soldiering on. You could say I'll have to grin and bear it.

