

Braces? At My Age?

There's more to cosmetic dentistry than meets the eye—especially today, when a beautiful smile comes in many shapes and shades. *By Janet Carlson*

Time to do something about the teeth. So I said to myself just over a year ago, for reasons of normal wear and tear. I thought I'd see a cosmetic dentist and get laminates. Little did I know it's more complicated than that. Like Goldilocks tasting porridge, I ended up visiting three dental offices in Manhattan to learn what might make my well-used teeth look spiffier.

In the very posh office of **Marc Lowenberg** and **Gregg Lituchy**, cosmetic dentists to television anchors and models, I was reminded that our teeth age along with the rest of us (I'm fifty-three) and that it's senseless to take great care of your face and your body but let your teeth go. "With aging, teeth become darker, yellower and chipped," Lowenberg said, "and there's also loss of muscle tone around the mouth." I learned, when he peered into my mouth, that my little pigeon-toed front teeth and their neighbors—in fact, the whole neighborhood—would do well to sport veneers, because the side teeth were tilting inward (a clear sign of aging, which I'd already detected) and the front ones were kind of chipped. I was reassured to hear what's new in veneers, since I've always abhorred the Chiclet-white choppers you often see on anchorpersons and narcissists from Los Angeles. "What's changed in our field is not technology but artistry," Lowenberg explained. "There's a greater awareness of what's aesthetically pleasing today. It's not only the artistry of the dentist but also how he directs the ceramist to create the veneers in a way that replicates natural teeth. For example, we like translucency at the edge of the tooth so that light passes through it."

Lowenberg and Lituchy don't rely on computer imaging to show you your improved smile; instead, they build the sample right in your mouth. "We sculpt a composite putty on top of the teeth, and we 'change' the length, shape and color in a fifteen-minute appointment," said Lowenberg.

A few weeks later, **Frank Andolino**, a top New York City orthodontist, told me I didn't necessarily need veneers; braces were the answer. He said that it's better not to tamper with perfectly healthy teeth by doing the invasive filing that veneers require. "Making the teeth you have straighter and doing a little bleaching will be a significant improvement," Andolino assured me. He told me I have a Class I bite, which I took as a compli-

ment, and then he reviewed the choices in braces. There are traditional metal, ceramic, lingual (metal hidden behind the teeth), Invisalign (clear "trays") and iBraces, which are his favorite, "hands down," because of their precision. They incorporate a relatively new technology—in use in Europe for almost a decade—in which the brackets are created via digital models and fitted to the backs of the teeth. With iBraces "patients have fewer speech problems and less discomfort than with traditional lingual braces," said Andolino.

When I reported back to Lowenberg, he tactfully reminded me: "You are not a teenager. We want to turn back time, so why would you invest a year of your adult life in braces when I can improve your smile in one *week*?" I saw his point but countered: "I tend to take the route of least intervention. I'm not in a big rush." Apparently, I'm unusual; most people want more immediate gratification. It was tempting. Because my bite's basically fine, I could go straight to veneers. I was on the fence. The only solution, of course, was for me to talk to a third dentist.

"Many people come in with crowded teeth that, because of color or shape problems, will not look satisfactory no matter how straight," said **Jennifer Salzer**, an orthodontist to whom Lowenberg referred me. "And if their bite is off and they get veneers, they run the risk of chipping them. We'll treat their teeth with orthodontic work to the point that their alignment is good. Then the healthy teeth are made beautiful by veneers. I think a team approach is great."

And that's what I chose. Under the care of Salzer, I'm nearly six months into Invisalign braces (to perfect my alignment), with three or so more to go. I adjusted well to the routine: I take the clear plastic trays out to eat, drink, floss and brush but otherwise wear them day and night. When I'm done, Lowenberg will do veneers—my guess is, fewer than he originally thought. And I'll wear a retainer at night from then on to keep my newly beautified teeth in place. Meanwhile, I swear I can already see a difference in those tilting uppers. *Invisalign costs from \$6,000 to \$8,000 for a year of treatment; iBraces cost from \$8,000 to \$12,000 for a full treatment; veneers start at \$1,700 a tooth. Marc Lowenberg and Gregg Lituchy: 212-586-2890; Frank Andolino: 212-753-5575; Jennifer Salzer: 212-755-2333.*

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