



Finding A Cosmetic Dentist

By Ivan Valcarenghi,

You've dreamed about how it would feel to have that fabulous smile! If only you had that drop-dead gorgeous smile, how much more confident would you feel?

But, with other demands on your time and funds, you put yourself second to others. Now you are ready to **invest in yourself and give yourself a gift.** You deserve it!

Precious few things in life are as valuable as your smile. It is perhaps your greatest asset!

And not many things look better as we get older, or last longer! A "smile makeover" is a great value. Dr Ivan believes that *If "the eyes are the windows to the soul, then your smile is a reflection of it"*

Where do you go? Who do you go to? The popularity of Cosmetic Dentistry demonstrates that people value a great smile. Some patients have experienced disappointing results, or worse, problems resulting from their treatment. Cosmetic Dentistry can be irreversible, and making sure you have the right place and doctor is essential.

This is why **it is crucial to find a highly trained cosmetic dentist to protect your greatest asset, your smile.** Achieving a professional, esthetic, strong, healthy, and natural appearance to your veneers takes much training and commitment by a dentist. **There are very few dentists whom have made this commitment.** When it comes to entrusting your smile, the Yellow Pages is not where to look. With many dentists claiming to be "cosmetic," and patients not knowing the difference, patients might go to a nice doctor who charges a "fair" fee. This can be a cosmetic disaster and the disappointment that can result is an expensive and painful lesson. **When it comes to your front teeth, find the most competent dentist you can trust and feel comfortable with.**

In our office, we might even suggest you visit other offices before coming to ours. A cosmetic practice is different and you will know instantly when entering our office you will feel confident is competent and will protect your investment.

Look at the **AACD** (The American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry) web site, www.aacd.org for a starting point to look for.

These recommendations are a guideline but may not tell you how much training or if the pictures are of the doctor's own patients. Here are additional things to consider:

Membership in cosmetic organizations/Continuing Education

Membership in the AACD is a minimal requirement. With only 7600 members, however, this represents less than 5% of all dentists. **The 500 graduates from LVI (Las Vegas Institute, the world's premier training facility), represent dentists that have made the time, financial, and educational commitment to perform at a high level of competency.** While membership in the AACD or training at LVI is not a guarantee, it is an indicator of further training needed to ensure veneers are done properly. These dentists are at the top of their profession and would be very proud of this distinction and communicate this via diploma, certificates and plaques, on web sites and in marketing.

Veneers Take caution when only six veneers or "No-drill" veneers, sometimes called Lumineers are recommended. We greatly advise against these two techniques, as they create aesthetic and gum problems. While patients may not like the drill, only a minimum is needed for most veneers.

Photography

One of the best methods to distinguish a cosmetic dentist is demonstrating his/her own beautiful work with photographs. Most cosmetic dentists are proficient photographers with professional cameras. You will most likely see photographs of patients proudly displayed in the office. These photos will be of actual patients with photo releases for them.

The artist's talent must translate into fabulous smiles in pictures!

Advanced Technology

Does the office look esthetic, have a web site, and have the feeling of being advanced? **Cosmetic Dentists are technologically advanced.** To manage photo imaging, printing, storage, and to adequately beautify a smile, treatment lasers, and advanced computer functions are required.

The Consultation

Perhaps nothing is more important than to meet the doctor. **Choosing the right doctor for you is essential.** Patients are rightly concerned with fees, though obtaining the right skill level and personality match is of greatest importance. Dr. Ivan receives and restores at least one patient per month who was disappointed with their cosmetic dentistry. As a consultant, Dr. Ivan teaches other dentists and speaks to the public regarding aspects of cosmetic dentistry. Get educated about your doctor.

The consultation is a great way to see the office, the staff, to see if the office is clean, advanced, and friendly. You must **feel** this office and doctor is competent and the place you want to go for cosmetic treatment. You must feel you were listened to and that your concerns were addressed. This appointment may be complimentary with staff or doctor. Doctors whom are in demand and value their skills would likely charge a fee for the consultation.

Additional things to consider:

Laboratory Support

Probably the most important technical aspect of a smile makeover is obtaining the expertise of a very highly qualified laboratory. It is nearly impossible to know the quality of lab the dentist is using, but if you could asking to speak to the lab owner could result in a revealing conversation. I am very proud of the work I do, and my laboratory.

Fees

While it is attractive to get a "smile makeover" for a low fee, realize that fees are indicative of the value the dentist places in his own work. Cosmetic dentists fees will be in a similar range, but will likely be more than your local general or family dentist. You can find a range of fees for your services during the consultation, however, **no estimate of treatment can be given without a thorough examination.** "I find it amazing how many doctors quote fees on the phone!"

This is an important decision, one that when done well, will reward you for many years to come. The cost of a smile makeover can vary from a few hundred dollars to as much as a very nice automobile. Your smile is much more valuable, however, and will last longer than a car. Don't shop for the most "reasonable" fee. Remember, **the right doctor is the most crucial part of this decision** and you don't want your doctor cutting corners. You want the doctor and you to be proud of the fees you pay.

Most doctors also work with financing companies to help you afford your care.

Some other clues to be aware of:

The look and feel of a cosmetic office will be different and should reflect quality. From business cards (without dancing teeth), print material, décor, and from the initial phone call to your visit, team members are personable, professionally dressed, more customer service oriented, and very knowledgeable about procedures. They would be on time, awaiting your arrival, often with a refreshment.

Treatment is personally tailored for each patient, and not one of many patients "checked" as in a typical dental office, for example. With this level of quality and service, patient volume in a cosmetic practice is usually lower. Consider if the dentist practices solely cosmetic dentistry, or as a part of a general practice, such as "Restorative & Cosmetic Dentistry?" There are only a handful of highly trained "niche" cosmetic dentists so get a feel for how much Cosmetic Dentistry and training is done. A cosmetic dentist in a "niche" practice will have likely have more training and experience.

A cosmetic dentist might be on radio or TV, and in professionally designed ads in magazines. He will have a web site that looks professional and demonstrates his/her work.

Cosmetic treatment is an elective procedure not a benefit of insurance. So cosmetic practices will not handle insurance as your family dentist might customarily do.

Cosmetic dentists will most likely practice "non-metal" dentistry, meaning no mercury/silver fillings, not even the porcelain covered metal crowns that so often create those unsightly black lines along the gum line. Cosmetic dentistry is "adhesive" dentistry that is bonded rather than cemented. **Metal-based, cemented restorations have little place in a cosmetic practice.**

Cosmetic dentists are the most advanced dentists and will often lead study groups, author and be published in journals and speak publicly to educate and teach skills. They will not, however, teach in dental schools which teach students the basics of dentistry.

Hours of operation will be tailored to individual patients and normally without evening, weekend, or emergency hours.

When seeking a cosmetic dentist, consider if the dentist has an attractive smile. Does his/her smile reflect cosmetic dentistry? The doctor must believe in his own work and demonstrate an attractive smile.

Finally, you must feel the doctor has demonstrated proficiency. In addition, become familiar with normal protocol for the treatment desired. There are dentists that are qualified to entrust with your smile. With some diligence, the "culture" of a cosmetic practice can be distinguished. Finding a highly trained cosmetic dentist is essential to protect perhaps your greatest asset: your smile! Congratulations on your decision!

Dr. Ivan practices exclusively Cosmetic Dentistry in his "niche" Elmhurst, IL practice. He often writes and speaks to dentists and the public and can be heard weekly on the Kiki Vale radio show, WJJG 1530 AM, and seen in the Doings, Lake, Elite, and West Suburban Living magazines. For more info visit www.drivansmiles.com.