

# the perfect smile

**T**he chances are that if you're British, your teeth will be gappy, crooked, yellowing or a post-nuclear meltdown of blackened fillings. Who didn't laugh at the episode of *The Simpsons* in which Homer has a nightmare that, while on holiday in Britain, his wife and children need dental care? To Americans, the sight of a mouthful of teeth that looks like a line of washing on a windy day is not a sign of character, it's something approaching a personal tragedy. 'When Americans smile, they all look alike,' Germaine Greer once observed. Well, yes - but they also look gorgeous.

To the British, wanting to improve your teeth is thought to be curiously naff and undignified. Even those who suffer from agonising toothache, like Martin Amis, get unprecedented levels of flak for wanting to buy the best that dentistry can provide. Naturally, this wasn't to be found in Britain: he had to go to the States to obtain it. In this country, both rich and poor alike display hideous fangs; someone with good teeth is thought to be either famous, or suspect, or both. People here point to the notorious Bride of Wildenstein, the New York socialite who became grotesque as a result of plastic surgery and say, 'She started out having her teeth whitened, you know.' Yet the human eye travels between the eyes and the mouth when looking at somebody's face. Having your teeth improved is no more vain or unnecessary than wearing contact lenses instead of glasses.

Until recently I had the sort of teeth that made NHS dentists jump for joy - and photographers bite the carpet. From a strictly medical point of view my teeth are without flaw or

After years of hating her long, gappy teeth, cosmetic dentistry has put a smile on Amanda Craig's face. And it could work for you, too

blemish. No fillings, healthy gums, nightly flossing, few sweets - I was the girl who bounced out of six-monthly checkups wondering what all the fuss was about. But as I grew older I realised that there were, in fact, all sorts of things wrong with these healthy gnashers. For a start, just like Hermione in the Harry Potter books, my front teeth were too long and had frilly bits on the ends. Most children gradually wear these away: my super-strong ivory wouldn't budge.

Maddeningly, it took my very nice NHS dentist 20 years to tell me that she could file these down to an even shape in 30 seconds - too late to prevent all the photographs of me grinning like an insane rabbit, but still enough to make a significant change.

Then, there was an enormous gap between them, like that of Chaucer's Wife of Bath. 'It's sexy,' said my mother, unreservedly baring hers. 'Venus has gap-teeth. So does Madonna.

Besides, it's hereditary.'

Where the myth that gap-toothed women are particularly sexy or lustful arose, I can't fathom, but those with gap-teeth should be under no illusion that what may make you look appealingly vulnerable at 15, looks absolutely hideous by 20.

Having the gap between your teeth filled is ridiculously easy, as long as you can spare up to £200 to do it. You can even have it done on the NHS. All a dentist has to do is match the colour of the bonding material to your teeth, stick it on, smooth it down and suddenly you have lovely, regular teeth. One friend of mine, who worked as a downtrodden publisher's secretary, suddenly found she had the confidence to apply for a better job after she had it done. She is

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