



ART • FASHION • PEOPLE



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fashionista*





A smile is

an inexpensive way to  
change your looks

This is an old quote by a famous writer and it would be true if you naturally had beautiful teeth, but a beautiful smile has a price tag attached to it these days and if there is one person who can make your investment in your smile a worthwhile one, it is definitely **Dr. Ernest Rex Tan**. By **Menaga Vincent**



**D**r. Ernest Rex Tan, Co-Founder and Director of Smile, Inc. Dental Surgeons, embarked on his dental career after graduating from the National University of Singapore, and the renowned postgraduate Masters program in Restorative Dentistry from the Eastman Dental Institute in London, UK. PMR got a chance to catch up with the friendly and outgoing man himself amidst his hectic schedule for a very informal and fun, yet informative chat.

**Hi Dr. Tan. You are a key person in the dental scene. Tell us more about how you started off.**

Where did you hear that (laughs)? Well, we started SMILING in 1996. My wife and I joined our complimentary strength and started this. We did not stand on two boats and hold separate jobs just in case the venture didn't take off because we were very sure it would take off and we were a hundred percent sure it would work. SMILING started because we wanted to have a very new and modern approach to dentistry. We wanted to bring something modern into medical tourism and this was twelve years ago. SMILING would sound very much like an American franchise but it was started in Singapore. We wanted something very cutting edge so we did a lot of R&D (research and development). We got the very first laser teeth whitening machine in Asia and brought it into Singapore and that was in 1997.

**What made you actually want to go into dentistry? Why did you choose this path?**

Dentistry is healthcare but it's also art and science and the interesting thing about this is that you are dealing with well and healthy patients. They are not sick. I do a lot of Cosmetic Dentistry and improve their walks of life, either through reconstruction or cosmetics dentistry. Dentistry is about interaction and I like that interaction. It is rewarding.

Dr. Ernest Tan is the first and only dental surgeon in Singapore to perform (and popularise) the revolutionary Bitesmile Laser Teeth Whitening procedure in Singapore since 1997. The Smile, Inc. Makeover is a cutting-edge system of dental cosmetic techniques to straighten, whiten and reshape teeth in as little as one visit. The Smile, Inc. Makeover employs several key features in our approach. They are Instant Braces, Smile Lift (anti aging cosmetic dentistry) and Laser Teeth Whitening.

**Have you encountered any interesting or peculiar cases?**

Oh there are so many anecdotes. One of them was this patient I saw many years ago. He was at his company's dinner and dance party with his family and they had this game where they used flash slides showing different angles of the people who worked there for everyone to guess. One of the slides was of him and the angle they chose was his smile with all the gaps in his teeth and the whole room broke out in laughter and he laughed along because he was used to it. But when he went home his daughter was very affected by it because she felt that everyone was teasing the father. She was embarrassed for him and over the next few days she brought it up and he felt that he should do something about it. Although, he was used to it he felt that it was affecting his family. His wife was a patient of mine so she brought him to see me. After two visits, there was a huge improvement and even his colleagues said he looked different but they didn't know what was so different because the thing about the procedure is that the results look very natural.

**After coming into this profession, do you subconsciously find yourself judging people based on their smiles or teeth?**

Well, I don't judge their characters based on their smiles but I do judge their smiles and that's part of my job so there is this natural tendency to observe. When you look at a person, you tend to judge their expressions first including their smile. As for me, I will observe and start thinking what can be done about their teeth or smile (laughs).

**There was this novelist Charles Reade who once said Beauty is power; a smile is its sword. What is your take on that?**

Swords are double edged right? (Laughs) Well, I guess he meant it in a positive way. In that context, I guess a beautiful smile always makes a good first impression. If your first impression shows confidence because you can smile well without being self-conscious, then that is a plus point. I think nowadays, in this day and age people want to look nice and beauty is a currency and when you smile your personality shines through. A smile is a key part of the appearance.

**How would you define your success to date with everything you have achieved?**

Well, I think that professionally there is always room to improve. You are always refining your skills and seeing new cases and pushing yourself. The reason I work so much is because I don't consider it work; I enjoy what I do, which is why I spend so many hours in the office and we go for

courses to constantly challenge ourselves and we meet with other professionals in this field and we get to see and compare cases and share information.

**What is the utmost satisfaction you get upon completion of each surgery or procedure?**

It is the emotional satisfaction. The patients are very happy and they are so grateful and they remember you and call you up or come visit you just to thank you and share their happiness.

**Behind every successful man is a woman. How far does that apply to you?**

That's completely true for me. That woman is my wife Grace. Grace started this with me and she works really hard, harder than I do from the very start. She has been very instrumental in bringing up the name of Smile, Inc and the systems inside Smile, Inc. Everything that you see here, the recruitment, the HR and the culture, it's all her production.

**You are very lucky then. As you said, you are all about your work but when you do get some time to unwind, what do you do?**

Sleep is a luxury. I work most of the time so the rest of my time is spent on family or resting. I love to travel so we travel around the region and I love to eat also, so we try out new places, other than in Singapore, we also travel overseas to try different food. I have a son who is 7 years old and he is a delightful child and we spend a lot of time with him and it's really nice watching him grow up. We are constantly challenged and motivated by him.

**Which is the most common procedure requested?**

It is mostly cosmetic dentistry. Those who have not worn braces when young come here for the Instant Braces especially the adults. Some want laser whitening, some want implants, smile makeovers, etc.

**Do you see yourself possibly implementing a new procedure in the near future? What can be improved?**

Yes (laughs)! There is always something that can be improved. We can always come up with new things like new procedures, new applications of technology and materials. The quality and strength of materials can be improved such that you can actually mimic the actual physical properties of the tooth structure. That is the goal.

**Lastly, who are the people who usually come to see you for help?**

We have the high society people and the middle upper management like CEOs, who need to look good when they give speeches. We see some members of royal families from the neighbouring countries. There are also the 'men in the street' the normal people who want to invest and save money to do these cosmetic procedures. Apart from fashion or skin care they place a lot of importance in their smiles. No matter who you are or what status you have in life, a smile is still very important these days.

**Thanks for your time. It was a wonderful interview.**

No problem, it was my pleasure.