

THE SPIRIT OF HIGH SOCIETY

# SINGAPORE TATLER

*FASHION  
FORWARD*  
CURRENT  
Couture Concepts

*ONE  
Good Turn*  
Formula One in Asia

*INDIAN  
SUMMER*

DANA CHEONG SPARKLES FOR THE LAUNCH  
OF THE INDE MYSTÉRIEUSE COLLECTION

SEPTEMBER 2008 \$8.00 (incl. GST)



WWW.SINGAPORETATLER.COM



Ernest Rex and  
Grace Tan





# *Sizzling* SMILES

DAZZLING, GLEAMING TEETH DO WONDERS FOR  
ANY GRIN AND ARE THE INSPIRATION BEHIND  
DENTAL PRACTICE **SMILE INC.**, SAYS SUSAN LEONG





HAT'S AN OSCAR NIGHT WITHOUT THE red carpet haute couture, coiffed hair, flawless make-up, stunning jewellery and accessories, topped off by a de rigueur megawatt smile? Eye-catching smiles publicly profess to the world the high premium placed on evenly aligned, gleaming white teeth, and are the best endorsement of a multi-billion dollar industry for cosmetic dentistry. The American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry (AACD) even surveys its members to determine which Hollywood stars have the best smiles – this year Eva Mendes and Brad Pitt topped the charts.

In the US alone, the restorative and reconstructive (cosmetic) dentistry market absolutely sizzles with an estimated yearly value of US\$2.75 billion. Figures from the AACD support the surge in demand – 99.7 per cent of Americans believe a smile is an important social asset, 96 per cent believe an attractive smile makes a person more appealing to members of the opposite sex, and 75 per cent of adults believe an unattractive smile can hurt their chances for career success.

Similar industry figures are not available for Singapore or the region, though renowned local cosmetic dentist Ernest Rex Tan reports a "significant growth in patient demand and awareness over the last five years. Patients are increasingly requesting procedures that are more complex than just basic teeth whitening." He would know – in 2005 he had already crossed the 10,000 mark for the number of cosmetic dental procedures undertaken. "I don't really keep count of the number of cases I do, though my client base has been steadily growing."

Publicity is literally through word of mouth, as "every patient is my brand ambassador," he says. The advent of reality television shows featuring drastically different "before" and "after" images has also raised awareness of and demand for cosmetic dental services. Tan spotted the trend early – "way before William Dorfman (celebrity dentist responsible for some of Hollywood's brightest stars and their smiles) called attention to cosmetic dentistry with his participation in makeover programmes" – and knew the market was ripe for such procedures as early as 11 years ago.

That Tan sports a business mind beneath the mask and gown and is not afraid to break the mould is obvious. When he wanted to start his own dental practice, he did not ask a fellow dentist to join him. Instead, he broached the subject with his

**FROM TOP**  
Eva Mendes;  
Brad Pitt

IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES/WWW.SYGMA.COM





*“By keeping the practice small, we better control the quality, service and value we deliver”*

then-girlfriend, Grace Chong, inviting her to partner him in life and in business. “With her, I know I will succeed,” he says simply – and the first Smile Inc Dental Surgeons clinic was born in 1997 at Suntec City Mall.

The duo went on to launch the country’s first kids-themed dental clinic at Forum Mall in 1998. “Our new concept dental practice includes having a child-friendly environment,” explains co-founder and managing director Grace Chong-Tan. “We encourage parents to bring their kids in from two years of age, and we’ll start teaching them about oral health, such as how to brush their teeth properly.” The clinic also offers general dentistry services for the whole family. The third clinic opened at One Raffles Quay last year.

Defying convention, the Tans did not name the practice after the dental surgeon in charge, as is the norm. Instead, they chose to express their vision in the moniker Smile Inc, clearly communicating theirs is a lifestyle business that centres on the patient’s smile.

When the US FDA approved revolutionary laser teeth whitening technology, Smile Inc took immediate action and became the first dental practice in Singapore and Asia (ex-Japan) to offer it. “Laser Whitening remains the gold standard today; its higher power intensity can whiten teeth by up to 15 shades,” says Tan. With proper care, and without the inconvenience of a home maintenance kit, your teeth are expected to continue gleaming for five to seven years after the hour-long, chair-side laser treatment.

Six years before ABC’s hit reality series *Extreme Makeover* cast the spotlight on how cosmetic dentistry can drastically alter a person’s appearance, Tan was already “changing lives” with his cutting-

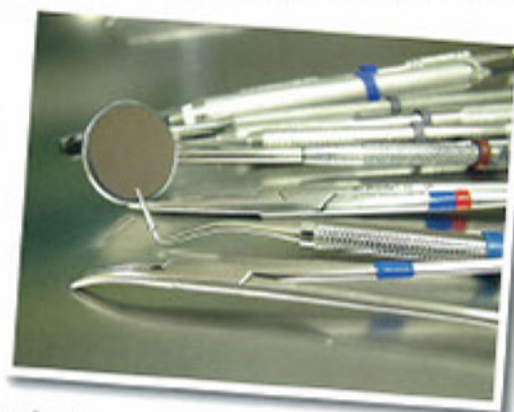
edge procedures and finely honed skills. “I had a lady client who saw me in 1999. She had already consulted a dental surgeon and two orthodontists about her unevenly aligned and stained teeth. They’d recommend braces which usually means lifelong night retainers after the braces come off. She craved a nice smile and was upset with the options as they were uncomfortable, ungainly and troublesome.”

“I recommended Instant Braces which offer the same results as braces but without the downsides, and Laser Teeth Whitening.

The procedures took two sessions, a total of fewer than two-and-a-half hours,” says Tan. “By the second visit, I was already seeing a different person – her head was held high, she took pride in her appearance, and she wore a happy smile – and did not cover her mouth with her hand as she used to.”

The lifestyle focus is apparent in the sleek office décor and treatments such as Instant Braces, Laser Teeth Whitening, Smile Lift and The Smile Inc Makeover. The innova-

tive business model “has succeeded beyond our expectations,” says Chong-Tan. “People have asked us to franchise the practice or have wanted to buy us out,” informs Tan. “By keeping the practice small, we better control the quality, service and value we deliver, and that’s what the Smile Inc brand is all about.” ■



**TOP FROM LEFT** Ernest Rex and Grace Tan; Smile Inc at Forum Mall has a kids theme

## MILESTONES

### 1997

Smile Inc Dental Surgeons at Suntec City Mall is established; the first in Asia, ex-Japan, and Singapore to introduce the revolutionary Bitesmile Laser Teeth Whitening treatment; offers Instant Braces, The Smile Lift, The Smile Inc Makeover

### 1998

Opens second clinic at Forum Mall; it is a family clinic and Singapore’s first kids-themed dental clinic

### 2005

Tan completes the 10,000th cosmetic procedure

### 2007

Opens third clinic at One Raffles Quay

### 2008

Opening two more clinics by year’s end