

DR. GEORGE KIRTLEY

To his patients, he's a porcelain god in the business of building better smiles.



BEAUTY AND THE TEETH

BY MIKE KNIGHT

MOVIE-STAR TEETH ARE MADE, NOT BORN.

BARELY PAST SEVEN ON A TUESDAY morning, and, courtesy of the Halcyon she's just swallowed, Connie is drifting into a fuzzy world somewhere between sleep and consciousness. Reclining in a green dentist's chair under a soft plaid blanket, she's listening

to a muted jazz CD over headphones. The tips of her black shoes and the hem of her gold corduroy pants peek out from under the blanket.

Wearing a smart black twinset, the fiftyish Connie (not her real name) is thin and pretty in a mildly weathered way, her tanned and freckled face framed with wispy ginger-colored hair. She's not here to get a cavity filled or to hear a lecture about flossing. Technically, there's nothing wrong with her teeth at all. Yet by the time all is said and done, she'll have spent more than \$15,000 for 20 to 30 hours of work by Dr. George Kirtley. Connie is about to get her smile fixed.

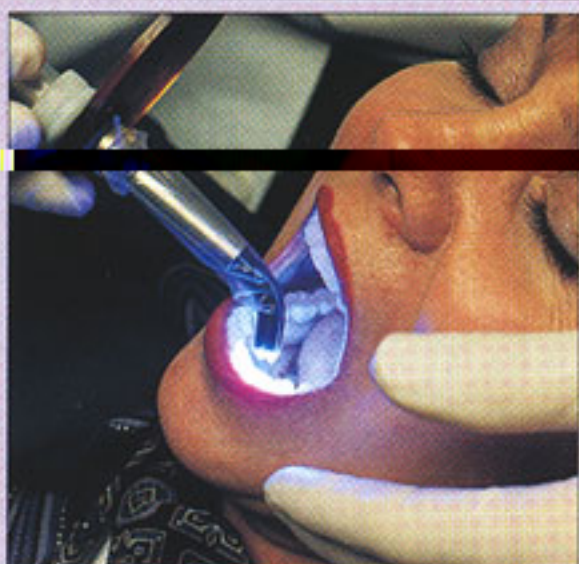
Kirtley, the state's only dentist accredited by the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, estimates that 70 percent of his patients—mostly middle-aged women—come for what he calls "smile design." Like other dentists, Kirtley offers teeth-whitening, but bleaching stains can do only so much. If you really want to see dramatic results, the biggest gains come from adding material to existing teeth, as in bonding or porcelain crowns, or from deconstructing the teeth and giving them a prettier facade. These were once known as caps, but in today's parlance, they're "veneers."

THE TERRIBLE TEN

Smile Saboteurs

In many cases, discolored or damaged teeth are the result of our own bad habits, says Indianapolis dentist George Kirtley; other problems are caused by chemicals that entered teeth during childhood. The biggest offenders he sees in Indy:

- » Drinking tea. Hot or cold, tea stains teeth more than any other kind of drink.
- » Smoking, because tobacco yellows teeth.
- » Drinking coffee; it stains teeth.
- » Drinking red wine; it stains teeth.
- » Consuming too many soft drinks, which leave sugars on teeth.
- » Eating highly acidic foods, including starchy snacks such as potato chips and tortilla chips. They can drive enamel-busting acids deep into teeth.
- » Ingesting too much fluoride during childhood, which can actually damage teeth.
- » Treating childhood diseases with antibiotics, such as Tetracycline, that can discolor teeth.
- » Chewing ice; it cracks teeth.
- » Grinding teeth; habitual grinding damages teeth.



NEWS FLASH Cover-Up

The equivalent of putting new siding over a weather-worn house, porcelain laminate veneering is the hottest treatment in cosmetic dentistry today, in part because it allows a "total transformation" in as little as two visits. The process, which in Indy can cost upwards of \$1,100 per tooth, involves deconstructing your teeth by grinding them down, then placing new, more uniform covers over them. This allows dentists like Indy's Dr. George Kirtley to design teeth that are "proportionately correct" to your mouth and face. The veneers are also shaded to complement skin tone and hair color (Kirtley cautions against getting teeth that are too white, lest they glow). "The biggest compliment I can get is when someone tells a patient that she has a beautiful smile," he says, "instead of asking her where she got her caps done."

And at roughly \$1,100 per veneer—little of which is covered by insurance—you want all the design savvy you can get.

Kirtley acknowledges that vanity drives his business. "I consider what I do no different," he says, "than what plastics guys do to peoples' faces." But unlike plastic surgery, cosmetic dentistry doesn't conjure up images of Prada-clad clientele in secret-location spas. To be sure, Kirtley has his share of celebrity patients, including members of the Indiana Pacers and a former towering center for the New York Knicks. (He won't name names but will admit that size doesn't matter when it comes to fear of the chair—more on this later.) But Kirtley's

GENTLE DENTAL

Kirtley's work combines art, science and patience with patients who want but fear dental procedures.



parking lot is as full of minivans as it is of Mercedes-Benzes.

On this day, his cosmetic patients include a Lilly marketing executive, a housewife and mother in her late 30s, a 70-year-old retiree, a carwash owner, and a fifth-year pharmacy student who found Kirtley's Web site and has come in for a smile consultation. Traditional dentistry patients come and go, too.

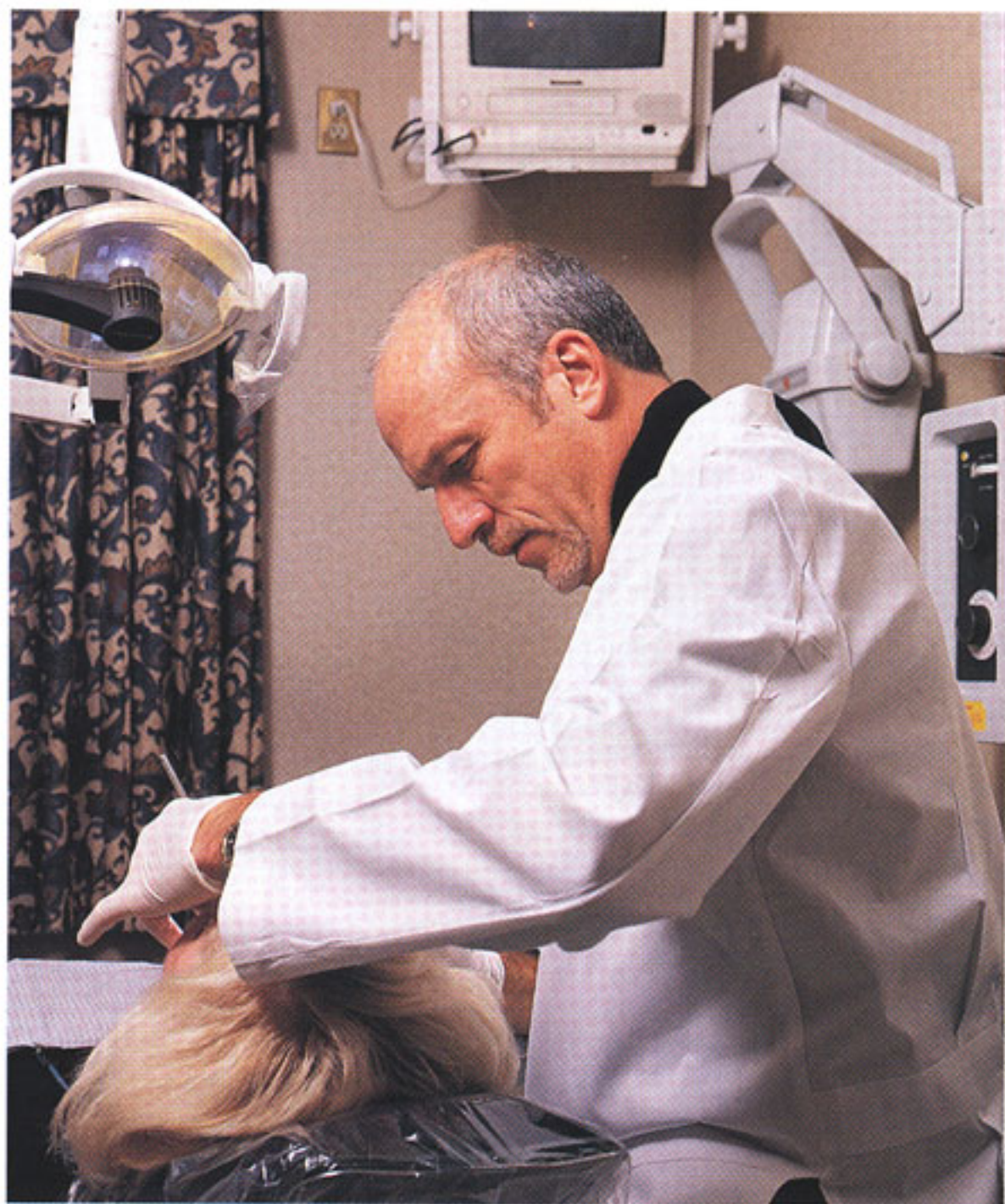
Tall and thin, today Kirtley is wearing expensive black slacks, modish black shoes and a red-patterned silk tie against a crisp white shirt. He bears a resemblance to Corbin Bernson in his *L.A. Law* prime, though the dentist's veneered teeth look more than a little like Donald Sutherland's in *Animal House*.

The dental staff—four hygienists and assistants—wear maroon slacks and bluish smocks sporting a Spanish-tile-meets-impressionism motif. Consciously or not, a lot of smiling goes on here. Most of the staff has had

some work done, and others plan to. Words like "awesome" and "neat" aren't uncommon. The staff meeting held before the first patient's arrival this morning wrapped up with a prayer. The overall approach gives the office a kind of understated new-agey vibe that seems at once warmly embracing and slightly goofy.

Kirtley likes to focus on the "Golden Proportion" for his smile patients, a mathematical ratio based on the aesthetic/philosophical idea that objects—including a person's front teeth—are most pleasing to the human eye when their shorter dimension is 61.8 percent of their longer dimension (if you're really curious, the formula is $S/L=L/(S+L)=.618$).

Most of Kirtley's patients have taken good care of their teeth, and Connie is no exception. But her perfect smile will require the deconstruction and veneering of 12 uppers and four lowers—almost half her teeth. Hygienist Lisa Countz, a pretty brunette



in her twenties, will assist Kirtley. Wearing a surgical mask, she straddles a stool that features a low-slung bar half-encircling the seat; it is designed for work that requires leaning forward without falling over. Countz spends about 15 minutes giving the half-awake Connie shot after shot of anesthetic from a stainless-steel syringe whose short, angled needle is designed for reaching the gums and roof of the

mouth. In any other context, the scene would have at least an R rating.

Next, Kirtley tugs gently on Connie's upper lip to test its numbness and is met with a satisfactory Silly

athlete left with a better smile, which in the end is all people really seem to want—a more attractive smile, for themselves and others. Trina, the housewife, has come in for a

AFTER HOURS OF GRINDING CONNIE'S TEETH, KIRTLEY STOPS, AND CONNIE OPENS WIDE, REVEALING A MOUTHFUL OF SHOEPEG CORN. AT THIS POINT, CONNIE COULD FLOSS WITH A SHOELACE, BUT THE ENLARGED SPACES BETWEEN HER TEETH MEAN KIRTLEY CAN BEGIN THE PROCESS OF MAKING MOLDS FOR HER PERMANENT VENEERS.

WHO'S HOT Tooth Picks

Many dentists in the Indianapolis area offer a range of cosmetic services, from simple teeth-whitening to complete overhauls, but only five are members of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. To be included in the AACD list, dentists must be members of the academy and attend annual Scientific Sessions, which typically include hands-on demonstrations of new clinical techniques, presentations of new materials and seminars on how to improve patients' experiences. Only Dr. George Kirtley is accredited by the AACD, which means he has passed its Accreditation Board exam.

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The Academy of Esthetic Dentistry lists one member in Indiana:

» Donald E. Arens, DDS, MSD «

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The American Dental Association's Web site (www.ada.org) can help you find a dentist near your home or office and answers common questions about dentistry. Its affiliate organizations, the Indiana Dental Association (www.indental.org or 634-2610) and Indianapolis District Dental Society (www.indydentalsociety.org or 471-8131), are good resources as well. Many local dentists use nationally marketed systems for procedures such as whitening and straightening teeth, and those dentists can be located using the systems' Web sites or toll-free numbers. Two of the most popular are BriteSmile, www.britesmile.com or 888-746-0984, and Invisalign, www.invisalign.com or 800-468-4742.

Putty consistency. Reconstruction is a tedious process performed using a drill and grinders, and an hour into it Kirtley is leaning into a steady mist of moisture and tooth debris spraying up out of Connie's mouth. Countz shadows Kirtley's every move with a suction wand, and silently hands him new tools and bits.

After hours of grinding, Kirtley stops, and Connie opens wide, revealing a mouthful of shoepeg corn, the peg part pointing toward the gums. At this point, Connie could floss with a shoelace, but the enlarged spaces between her teeth mean Kirtley can begin the process of making molds for her temporaries and permanent veneers.

"Are you okay, Connie?" Kirtley asks, as he has asked every so often during the grinding. "It's all about your comfort, so you make sure to let me know."

Which brings us back to a former Pacer. Kirtley says some celebrities, including pro athletes, didn't have good dental care as children because their families simply couldn't afford it. When they did get professional care, it was usually in the midst of a dental crisis, so they equate time at the dentist with pain. This Pacer, raised on the mean streets of a large northern city, had a terrible history with dentists that carried over into adulthood. "The dentists who treated him before said 'good luck,'" says Kirtley. "So we babied him. We went to extremes that were pretty incredible." One assistant was assigned to stay by the player's side for every single second of the procedure, his favorite CDs were brought in and, unlike Connie, he was given nitrous oxide to take the edge off before any work got underway.

Like Kirtley's other patients, this

BriteSmile treatment at the urging of her husband. As a result of the Tetracycline she took as a child, Trina's teeth are now the color of old gym socks, and for \$600, the BriteSmile process will lighten them considerably in just one hour.

"I've been like this my whole life," Trina says. "I don't want to look like my parents as I get older. At least not my teeth." Trina has short, dark hair, a pretty face and a quick smile. She's wearing khaki slacks, a sweater and brown ankle boots. Her husband tells her she'll look like a different woman when she comes home. If she feels hurt that her husband wants her to have a new look, you'd never know it. "Maybe I won't look like I had four kids," she says. What she doesn't want to look like, though, is a movie star. "I work inside the home. Who am I going to smile at?" she asks.

For Kevin, the pharmacy student here for a free smile consultation, the need is a little trickier. Wearing strong piney cologne, he is covered from head to toe in Abercrombie & Fitch, complete with untucked shirt. Lanky and dark-haired, Kevin is a handsome kid, except his smile looks like that of *Mad* magazine's Alfred E. Neuman. Kevin understandably tells Kirtley he wants to "deemphasize" the gaps.

During the 30-minute consultation, Kirtley uses computer imaging to show the before and after. "We're going to take some digital photographs and show you the variations and possibilities," Kirtley says. "We can also show you variations in color and shade." The 24-year-old is fluent in computers and their possibilities. "That'd be cool," he says.

Kirtley explains the pros and cons of bonding versus (Continued on Page 148)

when they went to New York to launch Emmett's line of haircare products. "She had no conditioners in her apartment!" Naicem says. "Emmett had to go out to one of the shops carrying his line and buy conditioner!" (Emmett started his own product line because, as he says, "I was tired of working with hair that was styled with terrible products. Like Thermasilk—it leaves such a shiny, gross film. Yuck.")

Before the sisters leave, Naicem sits them down for a touch of makeup from his line, Paint Cosmetique. They don't buy anything; in fact, the stylists rarely suggest products. Because so many clients are regulars, they already know what they need.

The end results of Emmett's work are impressive, though few people leave with a significant metamorphosis, and even fewer leave with severely stylish or outrageous looks. Most of Emmett's salon's clients end up just looking like themselves, only better. This is the logic of a \$175 haircut. "With a bad haircut, you feel like you need another haircut after two or three weeks," explains Emmett. "With a good haircut, after two months you still look great." ■

> BEAUTY AND THE TEETH

(Continued from Page 93)

veneering. Though both would solve Kevin's problem, bonding probably wouldn't last as long. But the cost difference between bonding and veneering is substantial. Cost of bonding? \$400 to \$600 per tooth. Cost of veneering? \$1,100 per tooth. Parents willing to pick up the tab? *Priceless.*

Kevin, however, doesn't know if the sky's the limit. "I'm sure there's a max someplace, but I don't know where it falls," he says. "If it's bonding, that's fine by me. I just want a nice smile and nice-looking teeth." He says it's not a self-esteem issue, and that there's no pressure to get the work done. There is, however, his friend—who just happens to be a young woman—who is thinking about having her smile done, too, and is excited to see what Kevin's teeth look like first.

Connie, too, came to Kirtley because of a friend. She saw the results of Kirtley's handiwork on the friend, and asked Kirtley to do the same for her.

Kirtley stresses that there is no one-fits-all perfect smile. "A lot of times

they'll say 'give me *that* smile,' but in reality what they're saying is 'make my smile prettier,'" he says. "Everybody's smile is unique to them. The patient she's referring to—the structure of her face is totally different, the color of her hair, totally different."

Four hours after she first reclined in the dentist's chair, Connie is sitting up, temporaries firmly in place. She is surprisingly small. Earlier, during the morning staff meeting, someone mentioned that Connie had recently battled breast cancer. Now she lays down the hand mirror, and tears stain her cheeks. "This is better than I ever thought it could be. You reach a certain age and you want to know that you're still attractive," she says. "My husband told me to go for it, and once he said it was okay, it didn't take too long to make the decision."

With that she picks up the mirror again. A friend will drive her back to her home in southern Indiana. "Maybe we'll stop in and see all my friends on our way through town," she says. She glances in the mirror again, smiling like a young girl who is at once surprised and pleased by her own face. ■

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