

Stars of aesthetic dentistry: Zaki Kanaan

Award-winning cosmetic dentist **Zaki Kanaan** speaks to Versha Miyanger about the path that led him to success

VM: What or who made you choose a career in dentistry?

ZK: My dad (in a way). When I was taking my GCSEs, I was advised by a career advisor to do languages for A-levels as I already had As in French, Spanish and Arabic, having taken them a year early. I just thought to myself, what am I going to do with that? What I really enjoyed were the sciences: Chemistry, Physics and Biology, which is what I ended up doing for A-levels. I initially thought of doing medicine, and briefly contemplated a career in ophthalmics. I decided against eyes and opted on teeth. My dad being a banker/businessman wanted me to follow in his footsteps. He took me to his office for the day to encourage me to go into business. As he sat behind his desk with the phone going off, conference calls and clients visiting, I thought this isn't what I wanted to do. As a compromise he suggested that by being a dentist rather than a medic, I could own my own business, be my own boss, choose my hours, and I could decide how, when and what I wanted to work. Apart from this he knew I was artistic (art and design and technology were another favourite subject of mine) and as we know dentistry enjoys a symbiotic relationship between art and science. He had the foresight and to this day I am grateful for this pep talk, that steered me to a career in dentistry. I've never looked back since.

VM: Where and when did you qualify and what training have you undertaken apart from your University education?

ZK: I qualified in 1996 from Guys Hospital. I then did a Diploma in Dental Sedation at Guys in 1998. I followed this up with an MSc in Implant Dentistry again at Guys hospital from 1999-2001. In between this I did a non-dental Diploma in Hypnosis and self-hypnosis from the Atkinson Ball College of Hypnotherapy in 1998. Most recently my wife, Dominique and I became Licentiates of the Faculty of Homeopathy. Apart from these I love going on courses and conferences around the world not just for the education but also to meet new people, network and socialise. The BACD conference is a must for me every year. It has a great 'vibe' that I don't experience at any other conference. It helps to keep

you ahead of the game and makes learning fun.

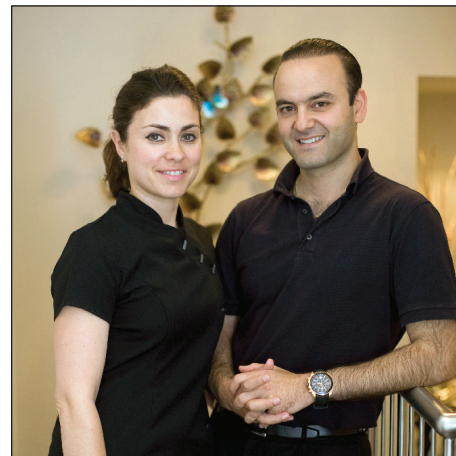
VM: When did you become a practice owner and how did you build your business?

ZK: Actually it was only last year that my wife and I opened K2 Dental. I have been quite spoilt in that I work and have worked in very prestigious practices throughout my career. I never felt the urge to set up on my own. It was nice going to work at several practices on various days (and receiving several pay cheques at the end of the month!). However, with two young boys, a healthy work life balance was proving difficult for Dominique and I and this was the trigger to start up on our own. Eventually we started K2 Dental from scratch. We did it around the corner from our home, which made things easy with the school run and the commute, which was a two-minute walk!

Since I already receive referrals for implants this gave us a good grounding from day one. When we opened, I believe we were the first practice to offer free implant placements in the country. This of course was on the condition that the restorative part was paid for up front. It was the easiest and quickest way to get a decent cashflow going. Since I was carrying out all stages of treatment it was still financially viable and it actually worked better than we expected and put us well ahead of our business plan.

VM: Why did you decide to concentrate on aesthetics and implant dentistry?

ZK: After VT I was deciding on where I wanted to go with my career. I was doing a Diploma in Sedation at Guys Hospital in 1998, when I bumped into Professor Richard Palmer in the lift. He taught me as an undergraduate and he asked me what my future career plans were. I said that I was considering doing an MSc in Conservative Dentistry at the Eastman. He then talked me into applying for the MSc in Implants that he was running at Guys. When I thought about it, I was taught crown and bridge as an undergraduate and I am doing it in practice already. Okay - I will become better at it if I did an Msc in Conservative Dentistry, but I still knew how to do it! With no or very little teaching on implants at undergraduate level, I didn't know



the first thing about implants. I also didn't feel it appropriate to go on a weekend course and learn about it. In addition, I didn't want to go through my practicing life referring all those patients to someone else to have implants, rather than bridges. I applied and got in as the youngest Implant MSc student, a fact I was very proud of. It was the best decision I made and was down to a chance encounter. Thanks Richard.

VM: Your diplomas in both Sedation and Hypnosis. How does this help in your field of work and how can it help patients?

ZK: After graduating I looked in depth at my chosen career and wanted to broaden my dental armamentarium after VT. I felt that by far the most important aspect of dentistry to get to grips with is the patient experience. If I could harness the ability of giving my patients the most comfortable 'ride' during their dental visit, that would give me good grounding for the future. Although intravenous sedation works a treat with nervous patients, it isn't for everyone.

I found that Relative Analgesia combined with hypnosis works wonders for a whole group of patients, including children, that are needle phobic or who don't need to go to the extent of IV sedation. It is simpler, quicker and cheaper to administer than IV and can be used for much simpler treatments. I even had patients coming to see me for a scale and polish asking for 'the strawberry gas' that I used for their friends (I used flavoured masks that patients loved, I even had Pina Colada flavour!). Getting a few more letters after my name early on with these Diplomas also allowed me to break into private practice and get a few part time private jobs while I was doing my MSc.

VM: Many dentists are now incorporating facial aesthetics procedures within their practices. What is your opinion on this?

ZK: That's an easy one. Without doubt I feel that dentists are best placed to offer facial aesthetics procedures to patients. At the end of the day we are experts at delivering injections intraorally and with some training on the theory and science of facial aesthetics, why not deliver injections periodically? It makes complete sense.

VM: What is the most satisfying aspect of your work?

ZK: Of course the ability to transform someone's smile is something to be proud of and is satisfying in itself, but what really gives me a buzz is being able to treat a patient who comes in as a nervous wreck, citing the usual clichés 'I hate dentists' and asking for general anaesthesia for their treatment. Initially IV sedation may be needed but then turning them round to accept treatment without sedation and by the end of their treatment they admit that they actually now enjoy their visits! The other satisfying aspect is the variety. Dentistry is one of those professions that encompasses and demands so many attributes from the science, art, the interpersonal skills, as well as the business side. It really keeps you on your toes and with the pace that the profession is moving currently with all the latest innovations and techniques available to us, it really is a satisfying profession to be in.

VM: What is the most popular treatment you offer?

ZK: General preventative and family dentistry still forms the backbone of our treatment modalities at our practice. The treatments that are proving extremely popular however, are implants as well as the host of teeth straightening options available such as The Inman Aligner, Invisalign, ClearStep and of course whitening, which always keeps ticking over nicely as one of the most popular and cost effective cosmetic treatments we carry out. We even get referrals for whitening, since Dominique and I run K2 Dental Seminars, where we run hands on courses to train dentists, hygienists and therapists on all aspects of tooth whitening.

VM: Professionally, what are you most proud of?

ZK: I would say getting our new practice off the ground in the middle of a recession and during the summer holidays would count as one of my biggest professional challenges. Doing my MSc in Implants was also a big challenge that I am proud of achieving. As a final year student, I was also very proud of the fact that I won the Newland Pedley Medal and Prize for my year. This prize

FACT FILE

Trained:
Guys Hospital

Practice:
K2 Dental, Bow Lane Dental, The London Smile Clinic

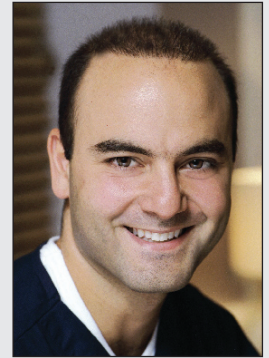
Lives:
Fulham

Book I'm reading at the moment:
One of Clarkson's Rants

Professional interests:
All aspects of Implant Dentistry, Surgical Dentistry, Whitening and Cosmetics

Other interests:
Holidays, Restaurants, Theatre, Racket Sports, oh and did I mention holidays!

What would you be if you weren't a dentist:
An aeronautical engineer, car designer or Top Gear presenter!



was awarded for the best complex case that was treated. It had to incorporate several disciplines and all treatment AND labwork had to be carried out by the clinician. It also involved writing a 10,000 word thesis on a current topic (mine was on dental amalgam). This won't mean much to most people but if you were a Guy's graduate you will know how much work and late nights in the lab this involved.

VM: What has been your biggest challenge?

ZK: Starting a bespoke private practice from scratch was a big challenge. The challenge now is to grow it and take it from strength to strength. Dominique and I are climbing Kilimanjaro in 2011 for Bridge2aid, so that may be the next one, if I make it!

VM: What has been your biggest mistake?

ZK: Not opening our own practice sooner!

VM: What do you think is the future of aesthetic dentistry?

ZK: It is clear that there is a definite shift towards minimally invasive treatment. The acceptance by adults of having orthodontics alone or combining this prior to prepless veneers, such as Durathin veneers, is another booming area. Also the advent of CAD/CAM and digital dentistry is beginning to take hold with manufacturers competing for supremacy in this sector (Cerec-Sirona, Itero-Straumann and COS - Chairside Oral Scanner, 3M). Where the US used to lead the way in Cosmetic Dentistry, this has come full circle and I would be bold enough

to say that the UK is now flying the flag and leading the way in making teeth look like teeth, taking us back to 'Natural Aesthetics'.

VM: What are your top tips in maintaining a successful aesthetic practice?

ZK: I would say that above all being honest with your patients in everything that you do, is a prerequisite for a successful practice. By far our best referral source is word of mouth. If patients trust you, they will refer their friends, relatives and colleagues. We are very bad at asking for referrals. Don't be. If you have carried out a smile makeover on someone or even a simple whitening procedure ask them to send their friends, relatives or work colleagues.

Stay ahead of the game...joining an organisation like the BACD will keep you up to date with new developments and ideas, will allow you to network and see what other colleagues are doing. Don't forget the backbone of any practice is the routine bread and butter dentistry as well, but don't forget to also offer the latest in cutting edge techniques and the latest treatments as soon as they become available, this will set you apart from the practice down the road. Offering 'in vogue' treatments such as the Inman Aligner, Invisalign and CAD/CAM dentistry will attract a whole group of patients that may not otherwise have come to your practice.

VM: What is your greatest achievement?

ZK: As Winston Churchill said 'My most brilliant achievement was my ability to be able to persuade my wife to marry me'. **A**