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Harper's

FEBRUARY 2025

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How fashion fell for RANIA BENCHEGRA

*Photographed by JACK WATERLOT*

# The Quiet Revolution:

*Rethinking the pursuit of perfection*

Words by  
FRANKIE JABARKHYL

Has the Hollywood Smile Finally Lost its Lustre?

**T**en years ago, the pursuit of the “perfect” smile in Dubai, much like in Hollywood and reality TV, was often synonymous with bright white, uniformly shaped veneers – a dazzling display of dental work. Think blindingly white, almost cartoonish. Think Tom Cruise. But as Apa Aesthetic celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Dubai, having witnessed firsthand the evolution of dental aesthetics, a quiet revolution is taking place. The era of the overtly “done” smile is fading faster than last season’s It bag, replaced by a nuanced appreciation for natural beauty and a more considered approach to dental enhancement. This shift echoes a broader trend in luxury: a move away from ostentatious displays of wealth (think logo-mania) towards a more understated, sophisticated aesthetic – a concept known as ‘quiet luxury.’

This evolution mirrors a larger societal conversation about the pressure to achieve an often unattainable ideal of physical perfection. Demi Moore powerfully articulated this in her

Golden Globes acceptance speech for *The Substance*, which – through a darkly satirical lens – explores the dangerous obsession with achieving an impossible ideal of beauty, revealing the psychological toll it takes on those who relentlessly chase it. “In those moments where we don’t think we’re smart enough, or pretty enough, or skinny enough, or successful enough – or basically just not enough, I had a woman say to me, ‘Just know you will never be enough. But you can know the value of your worth if you just put down the measuring stick,’” Demi stated, highlighting the damaging effects of striving for an illusion.

This sentiment resonates deeply within the beauty sphere, particularly in the world of cosmetic dentistry, where the quest for “perfection” has often led to homogenous, artificial-looking results. The “*Love Island* effect,” with its emphasis on ultra-white, perfectly aligned teeth, became a dominant trend, particularly in image-conscious cities like Dubai. But as Dr. Tarek Hafez of Apa Aesthetic says, “People are shifting ➤



away from getting big, bright, white teeth and are moving towards something that fits them. Something that's going to last for a long time. People don't want that big white, fake grin anymore."

This shift is not simply a change in aesthetic preference; it represents a deeper understanding of what constitutes true beauty – and true luxury. As Dr. Michael Apa himself eloquently puts it, "It's not about having the perfect smile; it's about having the perfect smile for you. I always say you shouldn't be able to tell where dentistry begins and ends in the mouth. Restored teeth should look like teeth." This philosophy aligns perfectly with the principles of quiet luxury, which prioritises quality, craftsmanship, and individuality over blatant displays of wealth. In the world of dentistry, this translates to a focus on creating natural-looking enhancements that complement an individual's unique facial features and personality. As Dr. Tarek explains, "If you compare quiet luxury to anything else, it doesn't scream. It's not loud. We're looking at finesse, quality... it's about being harmonious with what you have. You don't want people coming up to you saying, 'Oh my god, I love your teeth. Where did you get them done?' It's like walking around with designer logos all over your clothes. It's classier now to be understated."

**T**his move towards a more natural aesthetic has been driven by several factors. As Dr. Tarek points out, social media, while sometimes a source of misinformation (like the viral "shark teeth" TikTok videos that misrepresent veneers), has also played a crucial role in educating patients about the possibilities of modern dentistry. "Because of social media, people are realising there's better work out there," he says. "People see that, and they want to be more aware of it and their options." Dr. Apa echoes this sentiment, acknowledging the influence of trends set by celebrities and social media figures: "Trends play out in dentistry the way they do in every industry. If it's 'in', someone somewhere is selling it. My practice and my work aren't influenced by trends. I favour natural aesthetics and the patients who see me generally do too." He also emphasises the power of observation, noting, "So much of life is aspirational and most people want 'the best', whatever the best means in any given moment." It's a case of seeing the difference between a fleeting trend and timeless style.

The advancements in dental technology over the past decade have also contributed significantly to this shift. As Dr. Tarek explains, while truly groundbreaking advancements are less frequent than some might imagine, the past ten years have seen a crucial change in patient mentality and awareness, coupled with refinements in materials and techniques. This has allowed dentists and ceramists to achieve incredibly natural-looking results, moving away from the "Chiclet" smiles of the past. As Dr. Apa notes, "If we're talking about modern veneers, it's only been 40-50 years since they were introduced to patients. Those early restorations are a product of what was available at the time. Cosmetic dentistry has come so far. With that, the meaning of 'Hollywood smile' has changed. It used to suggest chiclets or white picket fence... Now, results are much more understated."

The pursuit of the perfect Hollywood smile has undergone a significant evolution. Once synonymous with blindingly white, uniformly sized teeth, the ideal now leans towards a more nuanced, natural aesthetic. This shift reflects a broader societal movement away from overt displays of wealth and towards a more understated, refined approach to luxury. The quiet luxury trend, evident in fashion and lifestyle, has permeated the world of dentistry.



Above: Dr Tarek Hafez in the contemporary Apa Aesthetic clinic in Dubai

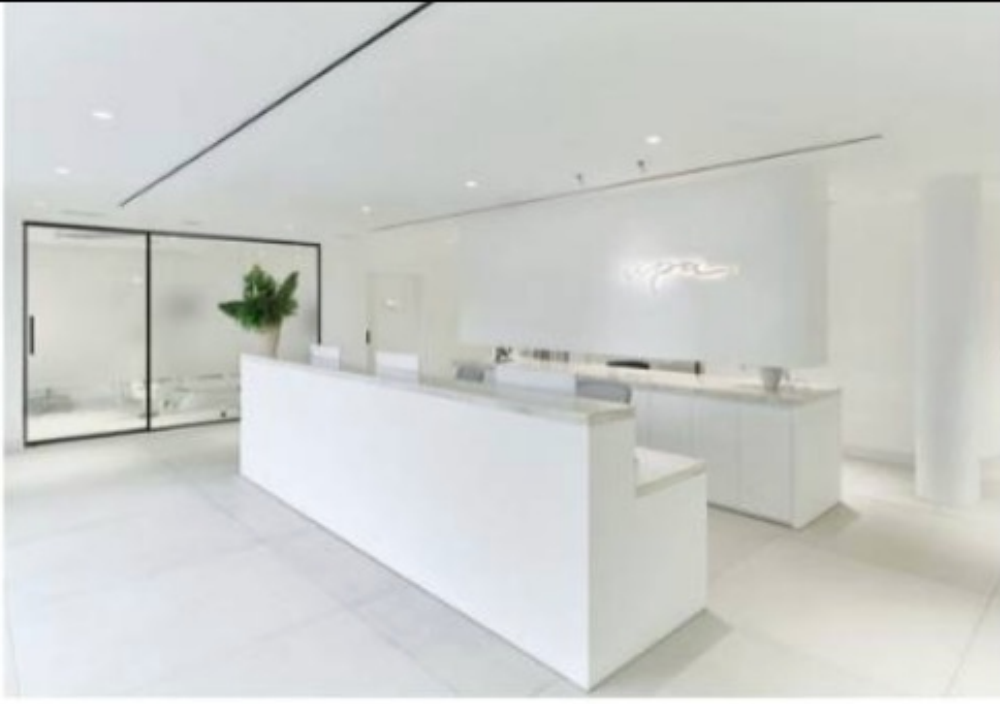
Gone are the days of the toothy grin that screamed 'I've had work done.' Now, the emphasis is on subtle enhancements that complement an individual's unique facial features, creating a smile that looks natural, healthy, and effortlessly beautiful. This shift is not merely cosmetic; it's a reflection of a deeper understanding of beauty, one that values authenticity and individuality over manufactured perfection.

As Dr. Apa astutely observes, "There's a relationship between edited imagery and self-esteem, and it's not a good one." The constant bombardment of filtered images and unrealistic beauty standards on social media can create a distorted perception of reality and contribute to a dangerous quest for unattainable perfection. This pressure to conform to idealised aesthetics can have a detrimental impact on mental health and self-esteem. By embracing a more natural and personalised approach to dental aesthetics, we can move away from these harmful ideals and cultivate a healthier relationship with our own unique appearance."

It's therefore no surprise that the focus has shifted from a 'quick fix' approach to a more personalised and artistic process. As Dr. Tarek describes the work of their in-house ceramists, "A ceramist needs to understand the composition of the tooth. There are different structures and different layers to it – underlying tones and structures that need to be studied in incredible detail. They're able to build ceramic in a way that looks natural and completely bespoke to you. They must study under another Master Ceramist for 10 to 15 years to get to that level. The only thing that comes close to that is a watchmaker or a sushi master." This emphasis on craftsmanship and artistry is central to the concept of quiet luxury in dentistry. It's about investing in bespoke work that enhances natural beauty, rather than creating an artificial façade. It's the difference between fast fashion and haute couture.

This dedication to quality and craftsmanship naturally comes at a higher cost, as Dr. Tarek acknowledges: "I think people will start understanding the appreciation of handmade and that kind of skill level, but realistically, they also have to understand that this all comes on the more expensive side." However, as with other forms of quiet luxury, the value lies in the lasting quality and the subtle, yet significant, enhancement it provides. It's about investing in a smile that not only looks beautiful but also functions optimally and contributes to overall oral health. "A lot of patients are now much more aware of gum health, their bites... all the elements that are also really instrumental in creating a beautiful, healthy smile," says Dr. Tarek, emphasising the importance of a holistic approach. He also highlights the importance of preventative care, focusing on educating patients on how to protect their teeth structure and prevent wear. It's about long-term investment, not a fleeting trend.

As we look towards the next decade, the trend towards natural-looking enhancements and preventative care is likely to continue. As Dr. Tarek observes, "The biggest change we've seen in the last 10 years is this shift of patients' mentality and their approach towards dentistry, which has created more awareness." This, combined with advancements in materials and techniques, will likely lead to even more personalised and natural-looking results in the future. The era of the Hollywood smile as a symbol of overt cosmetic intervention is waning. In its place, a new era of quiet luxury in dentistry is dawning – one that celebrates individuality, prioritises health, and embraces the art of subtle, yet transformative, enhancement. Now that's something to smile about. ■



Above and left: The Apa Aesthetic Clinic in Dubai.  
Below: Dr Michael Apa



“IT’S NOT ABOUT HAVING THE PERFECT SMILE, IT’S ABOUT HAVING THE PERFECT SMILE FOR YOU” DR MICHAEL APA

