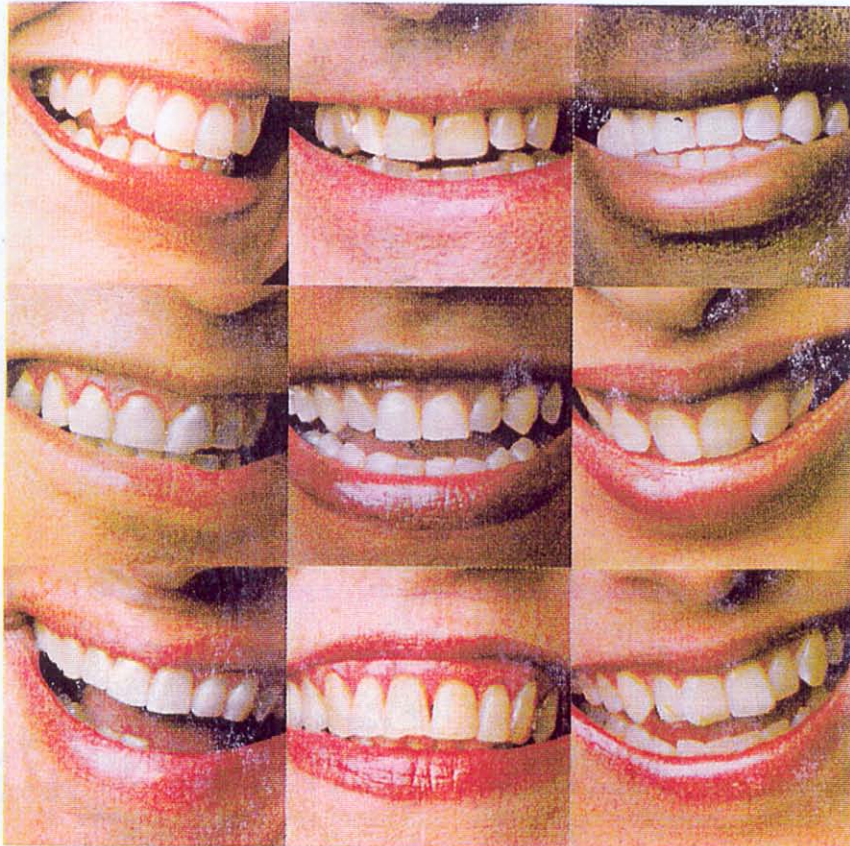


The Smiles Have It!

Tooth whitening from bleaching to brushing | by Claudia M. Caruana



A movie-star smile has never come easy—not even for movie stars. Marilyn Monroe, impatient with over-the-counter toothpaste, used to brighten her teeth by brushing with baking soda and lemon juice. Had she been a screen star in today's world, Marilyn, like the rest of us mere mortals, would be amazed at the baffling array of tooth-whitening options we face.

Just ask Paula Hansen. The first time the Valley Stream, New York, high school teacher tried to whiten her teeth, she chose a pricey toothpaste that was supposed to make

her teeth as radiant as Marilyn's glistening Chiclets. Before long, however, Hansen's teeth became painfully sensitive to anything hot or cold she ate or drank. Her dentist said the toothpaste, which was brutally abrasive, was eating the enamel off her teeth. Suggesting that she give up the quest for the perfect smile, he urged her to use toothpaste designed for a more mundane purpose—cleaning sensitive teeth.

That was several years ago, before drugstore shelves—not to mention the airwaves—became

flooded with tooth-whitening products. Last fall, Hansen's dentist endorsed one of the many at-home tooth-bleaching kits now available over the counter. After two weeks of trying the kits, in which a gel is applied to the teeth using specially designed trays, Hansen was happy with the results—and suffered no adverse effects when she ate a bowl of ice cream or sipped a steaming hot cup of coffee. "My teeth look a lot better," she says, "and I'm pleased."

Welcome to the brave new world of do-it-yourself dental beautification, where the demand has never been higher, nor the results more varied. The demand is understandable. Close to 92 percent of adults, reports the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, believe a whiter smile is an important social asset, and 74 percent think an unattractive one can hurt one's opportunities for professional success. As pharmacy shelves pile up with pastes, gels, strips and kits, the number of tooth-whitening procedures has increased more than 300 percent over the past five years, while sales of such products are expected to more than double, from \$187 million in 2002 to \$400 million in 2003.

This desire to "give your mouth sex appeal," as the Pepsodent jingle used to say, is nothing new, of course. From time immemorial, humans have equated bright smiles with good health—and even great wealth. Mummies and other artifacts indicate that even ancient