Surgical crown lengthening for aesthetics—aka ‘the gum lift’

Correctly diagnosing the need for gingival surgery should not be overlooked as a less important part of smile improvement. Here’s an example of how to perform the procedure with a predictable technique that promotes rapid healing.

Don’t ignore gingivae!

Smile design, golden proportions, embrasure form, labial anatomy—just some of the terms used in so many of the articles published in journals today. Cosmetic dental education is so popular because patients are asking dentists for this type of work. As a result, dentists have to understand the latest techniques and materials to exceed their patients’ increasingly high expectations.

Many after-shots of cosmetic dentistry are published in the press and very often one aspect of an otherwise excellent case leaps out—‘Why did no-one treat the gingivae?’

The gingival aesthetics

Healthy, pink, well-contoured, symmetrical gum tissue complements and frames the teeth. Patients may describe how they wish to change the aesthetics of their teeth not their gums but what patients really want is a great smile. In over 50 per cent of all cosmetic procedures we undertake, crown lengthening is involved. This figure is not surprising, many clients’ aesthetic concerns are related to poorly aligned/crowded teeth; a protruding central will almost certainly have a gingival margin that is more apical than a tooth that is retroclined due to the relative positions of the crestal bone and thickness of the gingiva.

Classic smile design describes ideal gingival aesthetics as:
1. Lip line at or just above the gingival margin when smiling wide.
2. Symmetry between the upper central incisors.
3. Canines and central incisors have gingival margins at the same level when looking from the front.
4. Lateral incisors ideally 1-1.5mm below the level of centrals and canines, although it is acceptable if the levels are the same.

Asymmetrical gum tissue, for example, where the tissue is more coronal on one central, can give the appearance that one tooth is longer than the other. Ultimately, this can affect the emer-