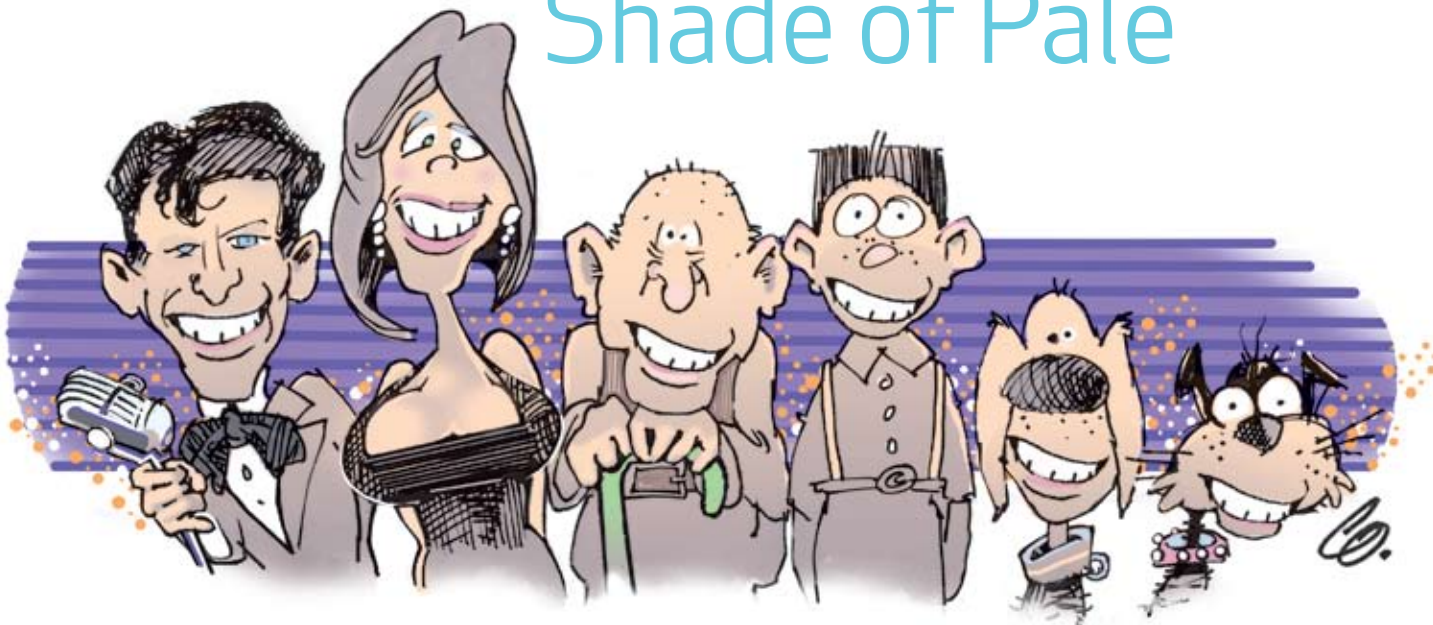


A Whiter Shade of Pale



Fashions are the only induced epidemics, proving that epidemics can be induced by tradesmen.

— BERNARD SHAW

The result was the frightening exposure on a large CinemaScope screen of an ancient face 15-feet high, flashing teeth that have been compared unflatteringly to Chiclets.

→ Robert E. Horseman, DDS

ILLUSTRATION
BY CHARLIE O.
HAYWARD

In 1919 when Vladimir Cornwhistle first stumbled upon the curious result of mixing grape juice, coffee and tea together with the combustible products of unfiltered Camels, he had no idea the impact of his discovery would have upon the mores of the nation. Actually, the grape juice, having reached a degree of fermentation rendering it toxic to small woodland creatures, had a similar effect on Cornwhistle, leaving it to others to capitalize on his research.

Women of a certain age (55) were already comfortable with blue rinses and facial powders featuring a shade of white that would become the signature look of Lily Munster years later. Young women of the time (flappers) fancied precollagen lips the color of Midwestern Bull Durham barns. Color was in the spirit of the times.

But fashion is a fickle mistress, enslaving women without taste just as etiquette is for people without breeding, otherwise

the present depressing black-on-black haute couture would have never gotten off the boards.

It was the perfect moment to introduce gray teeth. As a new trendy fashion statement that contrasted fair complexions and fire engine lips against teeth the color of gravestones in 18th century cemeteries, Vladimir's serendipitous concoction was an instant success. But, alas, a short one. Marketed as Cornwhistle's Devilishly Dismal Dentifrice, it was a top seller until Jan. 16, 1920, when the 18th Amendment, unpopularly known as the Volstead Act among other things, was passed. The supply of legal red wine dried up and the illegal variety, dubbed "rotgut" by connoisseurs, not only turned teeth gray, but dissolved the enamel as well, proving the most attractive thing about fashion is that it doesn't last.

CONTINUES ON 149

DR. BOB, CONTINUED FROM 150

Fashionistas gradually allowed their teeth to resume their default color (somewhere between A3 and C4) as Prohibition ended in 1933. The Depression, the advent of talking pictures, and the introduction of World War II in 1939 combined to place tooth coloring on the back burner, simmering until ... 1945.

Aging movie stars, having exhausted the antiaging properties of plastic surgery and American Express, discovered their teeth had attained an unattractive shade of brownish yellow. Lon Chaney, Sir Aubrey Smith, and Dame May Whitty, all of whom were well over 100 years old, continued to appear in public with teeth commensurate with their age, for which we can be eternally grateful. Younger actors such as Frank Sinatra were quick to recognize the advantage of capping all their upper anterior teeth with porcelain the shade of an upright Kelvinator, giving them the appearance of a youth just getting used to wearing long pants.

This unfortunate trend was soon adopted by 75-year-old actors of both genders as well as anyone else with the money and diminished self-esteem to afford it. The result was the frightening exposure on a large CinemaScope screen of an ancient face 15-feet high, flashing teeth that have been compared unflatteringly to Chiclets. Cadbury Adams, the makers of Chiclets, tried unsuccessfully to serve “cease and desist” orders on certain stars to prohibit them from opening their mouths in public, declaring sales declined each time they did.

Just as it appeared the fashion for enormous pure white teeth might be reaching its peak, a new and less expensive alternative burst on the scene, for which the profession of dentistry can be held partially to blame.

The porcelain veneer arrived hand-in-hand with an avalanche of media hype

offering the Perfect Smile as the answer to a life buffeted by rejection, failure, an inability to laugh at Howie Mandel. The age bracket for the Perfect Smile dramatically lowered to include youths barely out of puberty as portrayed in a dozen magazines featuring entertainment celebrities with identical smiles, dazzling and uniformly vapid. The only way to differentiate them was to tag them visibly with the name of their current boyfriend/girlfriend, necessitating the publishing of magazines on a weekly basis.

Many things, such as women’s Gucci handbags and some Italian guy’s shoes

consisting of two narrow straps and a sliver of leather are expensive because they are fashionable and fashionable because they are expensive. Ladies buy these things because they want to look different or because they want to look the same. But *teeth*? Absolutely! Function isn’t fashionable, but maybe there is another Vladimir Cornwhistle out there someplace with some whacky idea that could reverse all this whitening madness. Let’s all have another look at Dustin Hoffman in *Papillon* or his memorable “Ratso” Rizzo in *Midnight Cowboy*.

He tried, anyway. ■■■■