

TECHNICAL MASTER

With his state-of-the-art custom restorations, Joshua Polansky and his Niche Dental Studio are helping doctors loop patients directly into their outcomes.

BY LINDA PECKEL

THE SON OF A FAMILY DENTIST, Joshua Polansky always planned to attend dental school. But while studying for the DAT at Rutgers, he found himself inspired by his part-time job at a large production lab. "I thought it was so cool, because I got my hands dirty," he recalls. "Since my dad had all these books and magazines, I began researching for myself who the best technicians in the world were. I hit the phones to try to get an opportunity to work with some of these people."

Thus was a master born. Polansky, 32, now runs Niche Dental Studio in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, which is reinventing the standard for innovation in restorations. Dentists and patients from around the world seek him out for his work, which he has presented at major conferences and which is thoroughly customized to each individual's needs.

Hiring Niche means hiring Polansky: He works on every piece himself from start to finish. "Once something comes to my lab, it never leaves my hands," he says. That starts with the initial consultation and continues through stone work, model work, wax work, metal work and the final ceramic. Polansky is also present at the fittings to customize adjustments.

"The people who do ceramics in my field are generally considered the artists, but for me, every step is important," he observes. "You can be an amazing ceramist, but if you have people doing your prep work who are less talented, it's going to bring down the quality of your product. My way is more tedious and a lot more work, but it's the only way I can do it."

Polansky, who wound up with a master's in dental ceramics rather than a DDS, learned from some of the greats in the field. His first apprenticeship was under the tutelage of Olivier Tric, who runs a highly respected eponymous technical lab in Chicago. From there, he headed to Europe, studying in Germany under Klaus Mutertheis before heading to UCLA to get his master's. He remained in Los Angeles for a time, working in the Oral Facial Arts lab at the Esthetic Dentistry Design Center under Dr. Ed McLaren, one of the most experienced and innovative practitioners of the oral facial arts. Polansky also worked in a residency under Jungo Endo and Hiroaki Okabe at UCLA's advanced prosthodontics and maxillofacial program. Eager to work directly with dentists and patients, he eventually moved back east, setting up shop inside his father's office in New Jersey.



PRACTICE PROFILE

NICHE DENTAL STUDIO
CHERRY HILL, NEW JERSEY

JOSHUA POLANSKY
B.A., RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
M.D.C. IN DENTAL CERAMICS,
UCLA CENTER FOR ESTHETIC DENTISTRY

PRACTICE PHILOSOPHY:

Polansky takes a minimally invasive approach to custom-fit ceramics and veneers, including no-prep veneers, no teeth cutting and no needles. For the actual ceramic product, he insists on doing all the work, from prep to final fittings, himself. "Once something comes to my lab, it never leaves my hands," he says.

FAVORITE EQUIPMENT:

"My favorite ceramic is GC Initials' whole ceramic line, and for equipment it's my Dekema D4 ceramic furnace. My favorite camera is a Nikon."

His timing was perfect, as patients have taken an increasingly active role in designing their own outcomes. Niche encourages patient input at every stage, including the design of the ceramics. “They come to me with strong ideas of what they want and how they want me to achieve it for them,” he says, likening the process to the tailoring of bespoke suits, which are cut to fit the client. “I like to do multiple fittings to make sure the piece really fits the patient perfectly. Many people in the field think of this as wasted non-production time, but if you don’t do it, you’ll often end up having to remake the piece — or having a totally unsatisfied patient.”

Satisfied patients mean satisfied doctors, which is why many of his dentist clients view Polansky as part of their suite of services. He has adopted a minimally invasive approach to custom-fit ceramics and veneers that appeals to patients and dentists alike, including no-prep veneers, no teeth cutting and no needles. “All I need is an impression,” he says. “I’m really big into conservation, without sacrificing the outcome.”



RAINBOW CONNECTION: Looking at optically lit cross-sections of natural tooth fiber helps Polansky mimic natural dentition in his work.

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EVEN BETTER THAN THE REAL THING: “These teeth show the complexity and beauty that can be replicated,” Polansky says.

A lot of technicians are introverted and prefer to work in isolation, he says, but he enjoys patient interaction. “The way my practice is set up, the doctors all have my cell number, and they will see me at the office with the patient for every fitting. That’s the best way to give them the custom-designed piece that’s going to work for them.”

Because of his expertise, Polansky has become something of a “situational technician,” meaning that dentists come to him less for basic work than for tough custom fits, such as single central matches or big full-mouth cases. “I’ve become a problem solver — which is cool, but kind of hard,” he says. “I don’t get easy stuff anymore, and it’s pretty demanding.”

Custom ceramics are evolving, led by Polansky and a like-minded cohort. “There’s a core group of us who are trying to push custom oral facial reconstruction and renovation,” Polansky says. “The industry has really gone toward computers, and I think there has to be a group of people who preserve the craft.” ■