

# Through the keyhole



## Dr. David Alpan Orthodontics in the fast lane



### What can you tell us about your background?

I was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. I am a third generation dentist, with DDS stranded in my DNA. I cut my first tooth when I was 6 yrs old, and I started working in my dad's office as early as age 10. I worked for an orthodontist when I was attending Pepperdine University, learned orthodontic assisting and some lab work. My father and grandfather were both dentists, and each practiced for 30 years respectively.

I earned my Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) degree from the University of the Pacific (UOP) School of Dentistry in San Francisco and became licensed to practice dentistry in California and Nevada in 1996. After completing the orthodontic training program at UOP in 1998, I received my Orthodontic Specialty certificate. I was awarded a Master of Science in Dentistry (MSD) degree for my master's thesis written on the results of a 2-year TMJ research project that I completed during my orthodontic specialty training.

I founded Aesthetic Orthodontics in Los Angeles, Beverly Hills and Las Vegas in 1999. Every year, I and every member of my team take continuing education courses to keep current with the most modern orthodontic and TMJ treatment methods available today.

### Why did you decide to focus on orthodontics?

I made my decision when I was 15 years old visiting an orthodontic office with a friend of mine that had braces. I saw the orthodontist tell five very good looking assistants

what to do, and then he supervised their work. One of the patients got his braces off and was so happy. If I could make people happy every day, that would make my life amazing. I decided to specialize in orthodontics because I love the challenges and rewards of improving a person's smile along with his/her self-esteem. Every patient leaves our office with a bigger, brighter smile with more self-confidence. Our team strives to make every patient feel like he or she is a member of our family.

### How long have you been practicing, and what systems do you use?

I have been in private practice since 1998. I opened all three offices in the first year of completing my training.

In 1999, I became certified as an Invisalign® provider. I have been an Elite premier provider since 2001. I worked on behalf of Align Technology in 2001 to teach orthodontists and general dentists how to become certified Invisalign providers. Since then, I have taught over 10,000 dentists and over 1,000 orthodontists how to use Invisalign to its full potential. Align Technology also asked me to lead Invisalign study clubs in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Beverly Hills, and Orange County to help general dentists and orthodontists feel more comfortable about using the Invisalign system after their initial training. The company then invited me to train the sales forces at Discus Dental and Align Technology. I served as a consultant and was an integral part of the clinical education department for Align Technology for over

6 years. With this extensive knowledge, I decided to then focus solely on my practice and have treated over 1,400 patients with Invisalign.

In 1996, I started treating patients with lingual braces as an orthodontic resident. After many years of working with various lingual bracket systems (3M Unitek, Creekmore, Ormco™, AOA Lingual, Lingualcare, and iBraces™), I became the number one provider for Incognito lingual braces in Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, and Las Vegas and have continued to hold that position. I work closely with 3M Unitek, the manufacturer of Incognito™ lingual braces, and I have been invited to be a clinical/technical consultant to help improve the Incognito system. I am currently working with 3M on new brackets designs.

I also started using self-ligating braces in 1996, and I am now the number one provider in Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, and Las Vegas for the Damon self-ligating braces. I am a member of the Ormco Insiders group, a select group of orthodontists from around the world that meets biannually to make suggestions and discuss improvements for products manufactured by Ormco.

### What training have you undertaken?

I completed three externships at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, Parkland Hospital in Dallas, and Charity Hospital in New Orleans. I decided after all these externships that I would make a better orthodontist than an oral surgeon. This preliminary training has helped me understand how to plan and incorporate surgical approaches and techniques to help create the most ideal results. I was trained as an orthodontist and am certified as a specialist in both California and Nevada. I completed my masters in dentistry for a TMJ project in 1998. I subspecialize in treating TMD. I incorporate my TMD philosophies into my orthodontic treatment. I was trained to do Invisalign in 1999. I go to continuing education courses every year, averaging 50 hours per year. I was trained to place TADs in 2006 and have been placing them myself ever since. Gingival laser surgeries have been part of my armamentarium for more than 10 years.

### Who has inspired you?

I have been inspired by many people, but mainly my father Dr. Jack Alpan who practiced dentistry for 30+ yrs. During my dental school training, my father would come to the lab with me and sit there for hours with me, showing me how to carve wax teeth and amalgam. He showed me how to cut teeth, shape teeth, and restore them. My father was my mentor, teacher, and best friend. Unfortunately, he passed away September 22, 2010. I learned more from him than anyone in my life. I have had many who have inspired me in my profession: Drs. Ricketts, Jacobson, Poulton, Rutter, Baumrind, Boyd, Brody, Griffin, Shuman and Dugoni. These doctors taught me about the world of orthodontics, and I owe much of my skills, techniques, and success to these people.

### What is the most satisfying aspect of your practice?

The most satisfying part of my practice is creating incredible



**Aesthetic Orthodontics team, Los Angeles and Beverly Hills**



**(Above and Below) Los Angeles office**



### Professionally, what are you most proud of?

Professionally, I am most proud of my practice. Building three successful practices from scratch has been a huge reward. The daily challenges and rewards are all worth it. I am also proud of my accomplishments with teaching. I am also most proud about the part where I get to pass on my knowledge and allow another doctor to treat his/her patients better. I feel like I am compounding my effect on the world. It is not just about my treatment outcomes but now all my students.



# Practice profile



(Above) Las Vegas office treatment bay

(Left) Dr. Alpan checking bite for a TMJ patient

and amazing finished results. Changing a person's smile is like changing the disposition of his/her soul. The subconscious impact on a person's self-confidence and self-esteem is paramount and many times life changing. Watching a person transition from low confidence to a heightened level of confidence, just from improving his/her smile is my favorite part of orthodontics. It isn't the thank you or the money. It is knowing I have changed the world, one smile at a time.

## What do you think is unique about your practice?

We have the largest collection of dental animated art on the West Coast, with nearly 40 pieces of orthodontic and dental art from the 1960s to present time. We have calculated nearly 200 years of combined experience in our team of 25 at AO. The artwork is displayed in the office for all the patients and team to enjoy. We offer free Sonicare toothbrushes to help promote oral hygiene. We offer 1 year of free retention visits and always free Wi-Fi. I think the attention to customer care is unique. Social media through Facebook®, Twitter®, Yelp® and Google+™ has helped to build our reputation in our community. We really go out of our way to make the experience in the office pleasant, fun, and painless. We offer the highest quality of orthodontic care at an affordable price. Smile creation is not just straightening people's teeth. Gingival recontouring is done with our newest cordless laser. We use Philips Zoom bleaching to brighten and whiten every smile we finish, TADs to prevent implants, and some orthognathic surgery. We also offer TMJ therapy for patients with TMD. I take a comprehensive approach to treating every patient that comes to Aesthetic Orthodontics.

## What has been your biggest challenge?

Orthodontics is fun and challenging, but practice management is the biggest challenge. Creating a cohesive team where all of the players understand the goals and objectives is the key to success. It all starts with a vision. If the team understands the policies and procedures, our days work out great. If players participate in the process,



Dr. Alpan's Las Vegas team

it can be a very rewarding day, month, and year. This does not happen on its own. We have meetings to discuss the issues, and we create policies that we revise as we improve our systems. Reminding and chasing after everyone seems to still be part of my job that I am not sure I will ever relieve myself from.

## What would you have become if you had not become a dentist?

I would have become a race car driver. My passion for driving fast started at age 6, probably unfortunately for my parents. Street racing is dangerous and illegal, so racing on a track is way more fun and safer. The cars are all going in the same direction, no traffic lights, no police, and no speed limit. Nothing about racing cars is safe, but I am very cautious and take all safety precautions available. The skill level with racing has some similarities to orthodontics. I have to be very focused, or someone will get hurt. The attention to detail is paramount. The focus of attention and determination to win is similar to my education. It's funny to me; all my patients seem to be in a race to complete treatment, and my best analogy is the turtle and hare. All orthodontic patients need to act like the turtle, even though they want me to act like the rabbit.



**2011 Pirelli Cup Race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway; Dr. Alpan's 2007 Porsche 997 GT3 Cup car**



**Alpan family, June 2012**

## What is the future of orthodontics and dentistry?

The future of orthodontics and dentistry is very exciting. Since everyone has teeth, we will always be busy helping others. New technologies make our lives seem easier, yet we deal with way more complexities than ever before. We have become so efficient, and effective. The future will have less caries, less bone loss, less tooth loss, but a lot more orthodontics. As the world becomes more educated about oral hygiene and lifelong improvements from improved oral health, more and more people will seek orthodontic care. We are in the greatest profession this world has to offer. We are in the top 1% of earners on the planet. I have been told that I have a fancy title and a cool job, but there is nothing better than changing a person's life. Many of my patients don't even know exactly how I am truly changing their interactions with life. I have patients who start with depression, anxiety, and horrible self-esteem, and leave with their chin up, an incredible smile, and whole new outlook on life. The career won't afford a G5 or a 200-foot yacht, but at the end of the day, I know I improved my patients' lives. It is not how much money one makes, but how much they can improve the world. Our profession is the first to advocate prevention of disease and will always be on the cutting edge of technology. I believe we are role models to our patients, team, and community.

## What are your top tips for maintaining a successful practice?


1. Number one concern is the patient, not my pocket.
2. Finish treatment on time.
3. Finish like every case is for the ABO or your mother.
4. Team = together everyone achieves more.
5. Incentivize your team, so they are in the game with you.
6. The patient is the boss.
7. Always keep patients' best interests in mind.

## What advice would you give to budding orthodontists?

Look out for number 1, so you don't step in number 2. Don't be the first, and don't be the last one to try the new technology. Always accept that you can be wrong. The patients and team are looking to you for guidance and

direction. Your team will make you or break you. Don't ever think things are going to just be OK because you think it so. Your environment is what you create it to be. The results are a direct effect of your efforts, so when you point the finger at others, you are really pointing the other four fingers at yourself. Tell all patients that things get worse before they get better. There is no "I" in team, which includes you, the doctor.

## What are your hobbies, and what do you do in your spare time?

When I'm not working, I spend time with my wife Mary and my son Zephyr. I like to read about racing, finance, and leadership. I enjoy working out, going mountain biking, skeet shooting, researching on the Internet, traveling, and watching movies. My childhood dream of becoming a race car driver is realized every time I race my Porsche GT3 Cup Car with Porsche Owners Club, NASA, BMW CCA, and Pirelli Cup Competent Motors now called Trophy Cup West. I also enjoy spending time with my family and friends. 

### Top Ten List:

1. Damon® System and Häagen-Dazs® ice cream
2. TADs and preventing implants and orthognathic surgery
3. Half Hollenback for positioning brackets
4. Bite adjustments and incisal edge recontouring for all cases
5. TENS machine for TMD patients
6. Any Porsche or BMW racing stuff
7. Knight Armaments Company, Browning, Leupold and L-3 Eotech
8. My team at Aesthetic Orthodontics
9. My son's new bouncer and watching him smile when he bounces up and down
10. Buying my wife jewelry and watching her face light up