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***IDOL* MAKEOVER**
Elliott Yamin's New Smile

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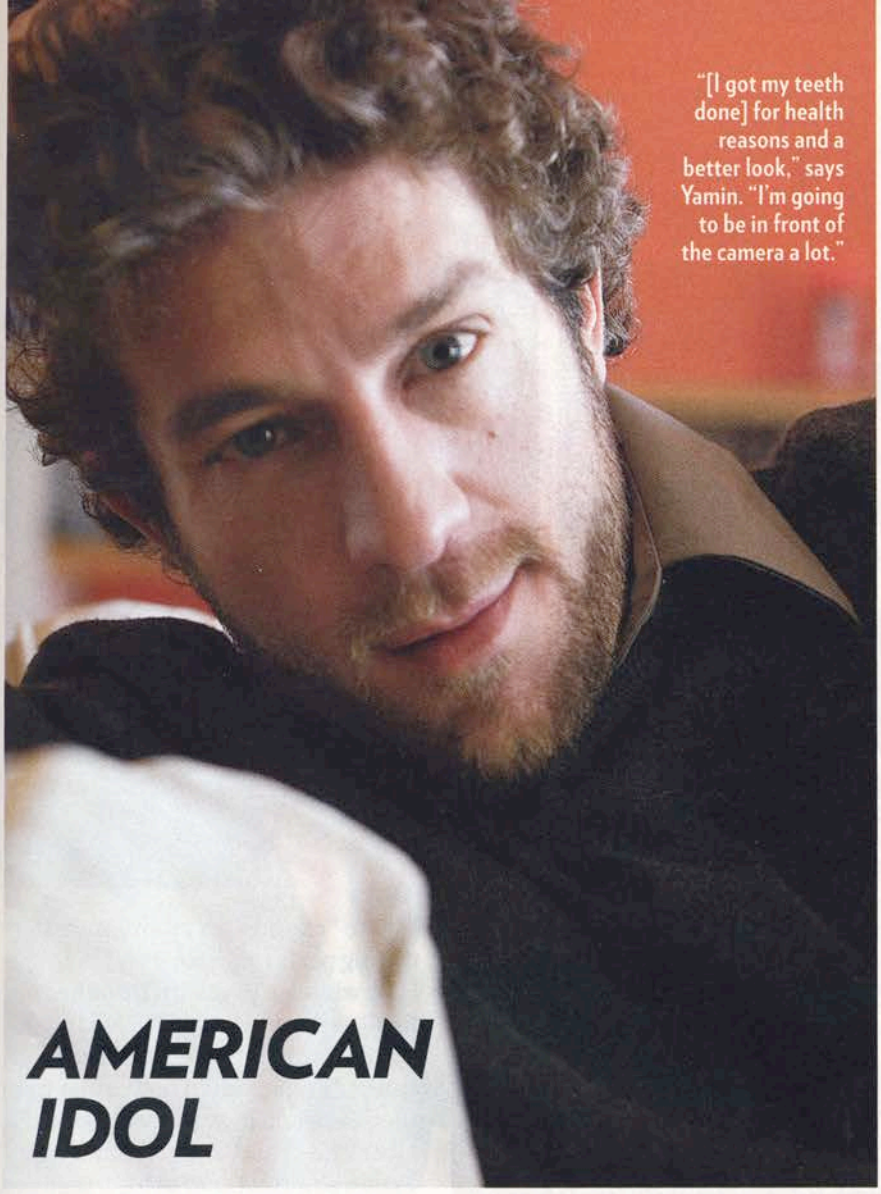
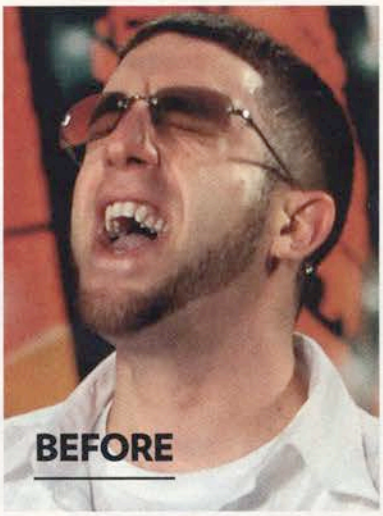


"[I got my teeth done] for health reasons and a better look," says Yamin. "I'm going to be in front of the camera a lot."

AMERICAN IDOL



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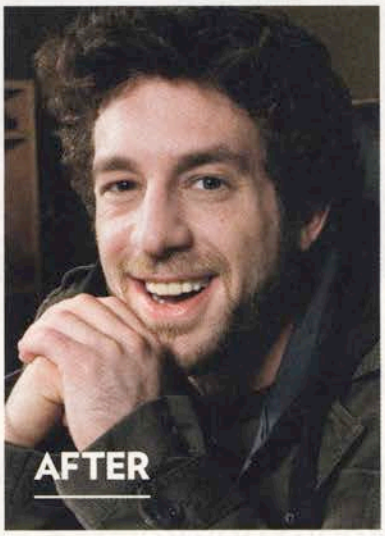


AFTER

MAKEOVER

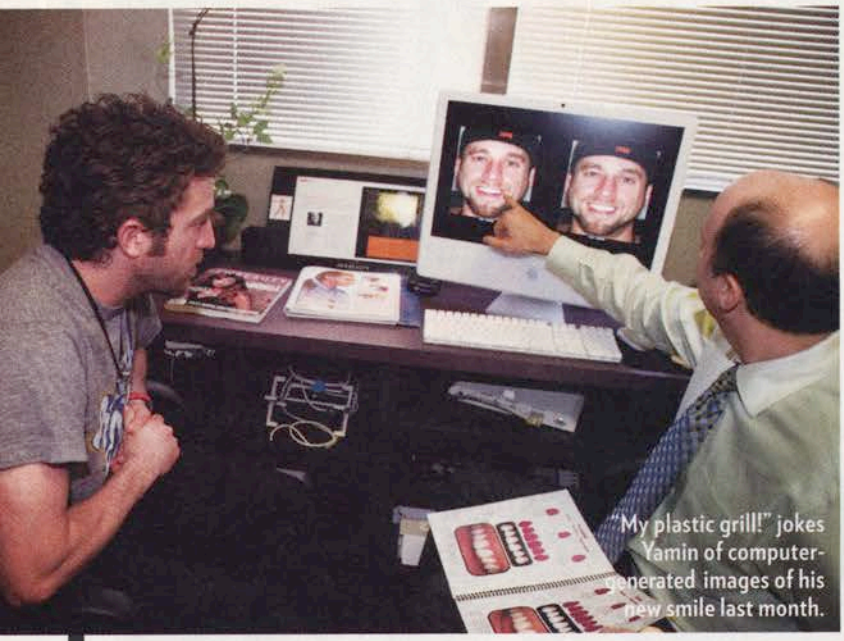
Teased for years about his teeth, finalist Elliott Yamin finds a reason to smile after 20 hours in the dentist's chair

When Elliott Yamin first got temporary veneers put on his teeth in November, his girlfriend Jaime Paetz says he kept showing them off to her with silly, exaggerated grins. And why not? "I've always wanted to have a nicer smile," says Yamin, who for much of his life was teased for his crooked teeth. "I used to look at old pictures of myself, and I figured out how to kind of smile without displaying all my teeth."

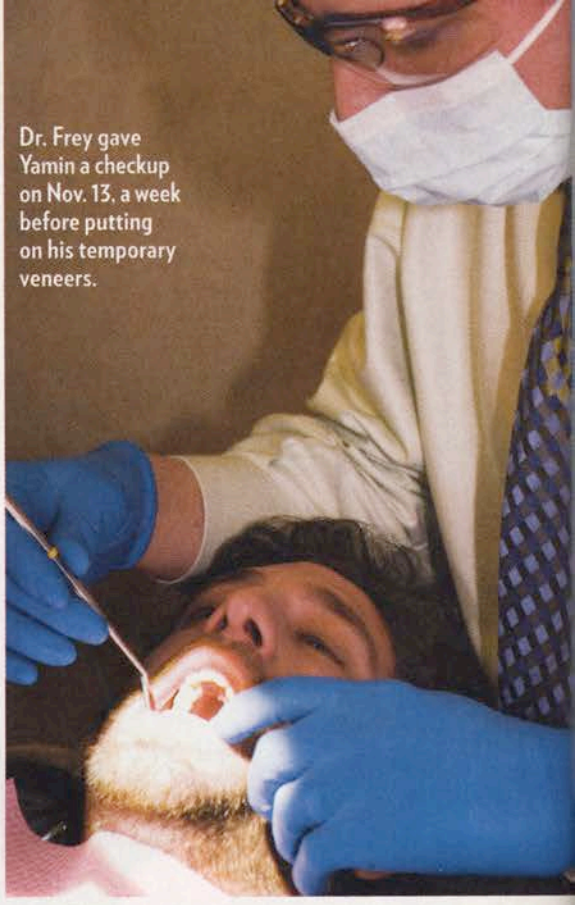
Thanks to $50,000 worth of porcelain veneers and other dental work, and 20 sometimes painful hours in the dentist's chair to fix his crossbite, these days Yamin, 28, can't seem to wipe the smile off his face. "He loves to laugh, he loves to smile," says Paetz, 28, a model who met Yamin after he appeared on *American Idol*. "I liked his old teeth, but if [the veneers] make him happy, then I'm happy." The changes aren't just cosmetic either. "It is going to help muscle function, it is going to increase the volume [of his voice] maybe," says Yamin's Beverly Hills dentist David Frey, who provided his services free of charge. "So if anything, he could become an even better singer."

Like all *American Idol* contestants, the Virginia native began his makeover on the show with a little help from a stylist and a flatiron. (Since then, he's grown out his hair for a hipper look

Photographs by TAMMY KENNEDY



"My plastic grill!" jokes Yamin of computer-generated images of his new smile last month.



Dr. Frey gave Yamin a checkup on Nov. 13, a week before putting on his temporary veneers.

> "It was real cool. I mean, I've never seen myself with straight teeth before!"

and has worked with a stylist.) He lost out to Taylor Hicks last season, but as the underdog—Yamin is 90 percent deaf in one ear and was diagnosed with diabetes as a teen—he won over many fans. Still, he recalls, "people wrote things in magazines, called me Snaggletooth and things like that."

But he got positive attention too: Dentists from all over the country offered to fix his teeth at no charge. "It's very flattering," he says, although he adds that he worried about turning into a superficial "Hollywood type." What finally persuaded him to go through with the dental work? "The bottom line was, I was long overdue for a dentist appointment," explains Yamin. He also realized that having properly aligned teeth might allow him to "express my emotions better" during performances.

Yamin (at Pulse Recording Studio in L.A.) just released a single, "This Christmas."

So while on tour with the other *Idol* finalists, he was introduced to Dr. Frey by his publicist, and after receiving computer-generated renderings from the dentist of what he would look like after the "total mouth makeover," Yamin showed them to his friends on the bus. "Everyone was liking it," he says—particularly Ace Young, who had encouraged Yamin to have the procedures done. "It's something that I know he was self-conscious about, and now he doesn't ever have to worry about it again," says Young. "I told him, 'It's time to show your teeth!'" Yamin agreed. "I thought it was real cool," he says. "I mean, I've never seen myself with straight teeth before!"

And now there are even more reasons for Yamin to smile: He just signed a songwriting deal with Sony's publishing division and his "soulful-sounding" debut album is due early next year. He finished in third place on *Idol*, but so what? Says Yamin: "I feel like I am the winner."

By Jenny Sundel in Los Angeles