

Dream pays off with big smiles Dentist restores patients' pride

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Dan Luzadder Special to The Denver Post

**Caption:** PHOTO: The Denver Post/Jerry Cleveland Dr. Charles Barotz, whose office on the 16th Street Mall in Denver specializes in dentures, was a finalist for the top cosmetic dentist of the year, an annual award presented by the Levin Group.

For Charles Barotz, a crooked smile can break the heart.

The cosmetic dentist on Denver's 16th Street Mall specializes in custom-fit dentures and calls himself a "smile doctor."

"I like to call what we do here my 'dental spa,'" he says.

Barotz was a finalist this year for the top cosmetic dentist of the year, an annual award by the Levin Group, which consults internationally on dental practices. It was a high honor for a man who has been fascinated by dentistry since he was 8 years old.

"My high school yearbook predicts I'd be a dentist," he says. "It's all I ever wanted to do."

Barotz has practiced in Colorado since he graduated from the dental school at Georgetown University in 1980.

"I try to learn a new technique every six months," says Barotz, who is a contributor to dental magazines and a lecturer.

That has made it possible for Barotz and the two other dentists in his practice to perform 95 percent of the dental work that would usually be referred to by specialists.

But he doesn't always look like an academic.

He occasionally dons the garb of a rock star and does rap imitations at convention speaking engagements, just to get other dentists' attention.

Writing and lecturing about dental practices, he says, stems in part from what he sees as the stepchild of dental technology- dentures. He insists that they are often given little attention, and that poor- fitting plates contribute to personal misery for thousands of people.

"Denture patients are treated as second-class by many dentists," he says. "It's not the best part of their practice, and they look at it as a cut-rate procedure. So they cut corners, and people leave with dentures that don't fit."

He keeps a large folio of before-and-after color photos of patients, and notes how poorly-fit dentures can alter a person's facial structure, adding years to their looks, even pushing jawbones out of kilter.

"We study smile design here," he says. "We evaluate people to understand what gives them an attractive smile."

Barotz grew up in the Bronx and his family dentist worked down the street in a second-story apartment. Unlike most kids, Barotz liked to go there.

"The living room of the apartment was his waiting room, and the two bedrooms were where he did his work," Barotz recalls. "A shot for pain cost a dollar extra, and I always begged my parents for the dollar."

He was most fascinated by the drills and gadgets that the dentist used, and he didn't mind two-hour waits while the dentist worked on other patients.

He liked to listen to the whirl of the drill - and even to the noisy patients who didn't have the extra dollar.

But pain is something hard to find in Barotz's office, which overlooks Broadway and 16th Street. His "spa" is designed around creature comforts that include a dose of laughing gas, if necessary.

Amenities? He has them - and they are "choreographed," he says. Patients are greeted with the smell of fresh baked cookies and roses on their arrival; tea, juice and other treats await.

Dentist chairs look out large windows at the cityscape, and patients get a portable massage pillow.

His staff will even clean the jewelry of female patients while they're in the chair.

A Barotz makeover - he specializes in custom, hand-fitted dentures that he says restore not only teeth, but also dignity - isn't expensive.

But patient Sharon Cranston claims his artful work is priceless.

"He gave me a million-dollar smile," Cranston, a hair stylist, says with a laugh. "So what if it cost about that much? Whatever he charges, it's worth it."

Cranston said she grew up on welfare in California, with parents who could not afford dental care. She associated a dentist's office with pain - usually from extractions.}

When she moved to Denver nearly three decades ago, she had only four front teeth.

She was lucky, she says. Her first dental plate fit well. But last summer, after 27 years, it cracked.

The dentist who replaced it, she says, made a set that looked like horse teeth.

"The dentures hurt. I felt like I had a wad of bubble gum in my mouth all the time."

She says a teller at her bank saw the new work and asked her what had happened to her mouth.

When Cranston kept complaining to the dentist, "... he finally told me to just take them out except to eat."

A friend at work told her about Barotz.

"They treated me like royalty," Cranston says. The result of a painstaking denture replacement, hand crafted by Barotz, "made me feel like a princess. I got my smile back."

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