

# Legends of Laboratories

Award-winning dental technician Paul Gerrard from Bremadent Dental Laboratory speaks to Laboratory about his passion for high-end work and keeping on top the game



**What or who made you first decide to become a dental technician?**

My father started his own laboratory in the mid 1970s and I spent a lot of time at the lab during school holidays. I was more interested in computers as a teenager but maths was not a strong point so that never worked out as a career option. Fortunately I also had a strong flair for art and design so the lab industry seemed like a good place to apply myself.

**What made you set up Bremadent in Bristol, and can you tell us briefly about your career prior to that?**

My brother is a dentist with his own practice in Bristol and when he started the BACD accreditation process, it meant that we had to up our game. At the time it was difficult meeting the standard required whilst in different parts of the country so we decided the best solution would be to set up a lab on site at his practice. The regular patient contact and exposure to clinical procedures

helped immensely in developing my skills. Prior to that, I had attended Lambeth College in London and worked at my father's laboratory for around 15 years where I gained experience with most of the disciplines related to dental technology.

**What kind of work does your laboratory carry out?**

Our laboratory in London is a full service mainstream laboratory but at the Bristol site where I work, most of my time is spent on complex cosmetic and restorative rehabilitation cases and implant related fixed and removable work. I service a small group of like-minded clients that have a passion and dedication to providing high-quality dental treatment.

**You are regarded as one of the UK's leading dental ceramists, with a passion for artistry in an effort to reproduce a natural look. Is it that passion for art that drives you the most?**

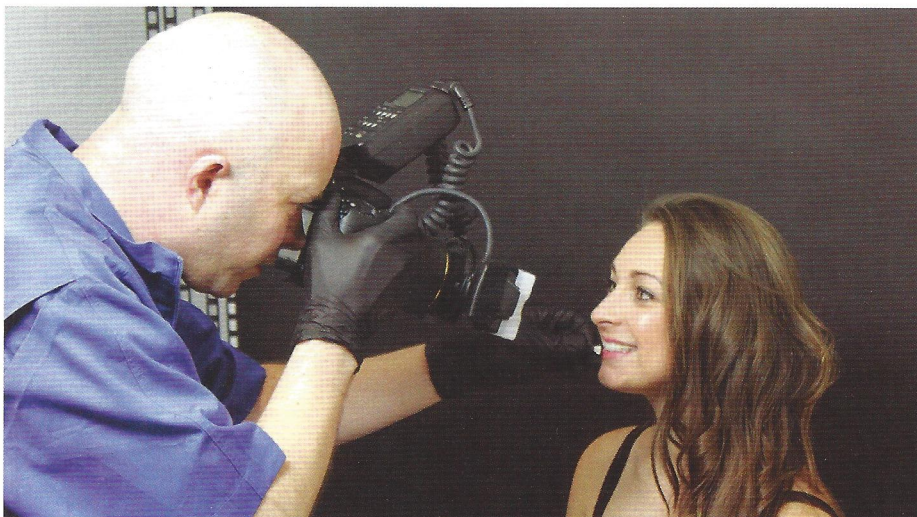
I'd say what really drives me is the desire to be the best I can at whatever I do. Seeing the patients also gives a different perspective as you are suddenly dealing with a person with feelings instead of model on a bench. I just try to do every case as if it was a member of my own family and when we see the difference it makes to people lives it can be extremely rewarding.

**In 2011 you were awarded Accredited Status with the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry and you are only the second technician to achieve this prestigious award. You have also won many awards. What do you think is the secret to your success?**

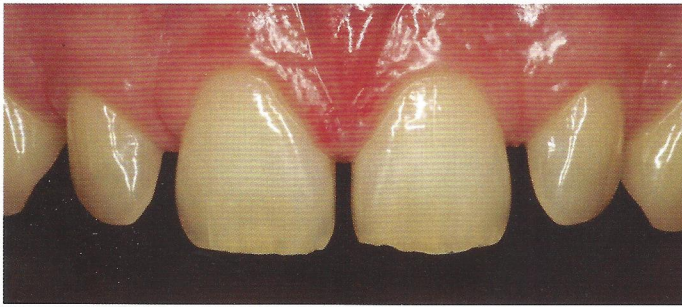
Obviously passion and hard work play a huge role, but being able to work closely with a dentist such as my brother who has high standards and is very demanding has made a big difference. Although it can be tiring, he is always pushing me to improve and raise the bar and this is why I'm producing the type of work I do today.

**How do you stay on top of the latest developments in products and techniques, and at what stage do you decide to integrate them into your lab?**

The internet and social media have made it easy to stay up to date with the industry. Groups such as the 'Dental Technicians Guild' on Facebook allow me to interact with many of the world's top technicians and it's a great way to share ideas and techniques. I also buy lots of books and attend courses and meetings regularly. I am always looking for a better way to do something or to improve my results so if I see promise in a product or technique then I will usually bring it into the lab to 'play' with.







An example of Paul's work

As I work on my own its easy to switch products or techniques as soon as I find a way to improve something.

**Who were your mentors or fellow professionals who have been most influential in your career so far?**

Oliver Brix's work was a big influence to me early on though his books and articles and I had the pleasure of attending a course with him at IDEA in San-Francisco a few years

back. I have also followed Michelle Magne's work for many years and it always gives me something to aspire to.

**How can technicians best develop an effective relationship with their dentist clients?**

I think the most important thing is to search for dentists that have the same passions and aspirations as you. If you are both working towards a common goal and standard then

it is mutually beneficial to communicate and develop a good rapport and push each other to achieve your goals.

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

Attaining accredited status with the British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry is obviously something I'm very proud of as it took many years of hard work to reach the standards required. I'm also now working in

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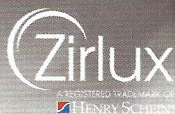
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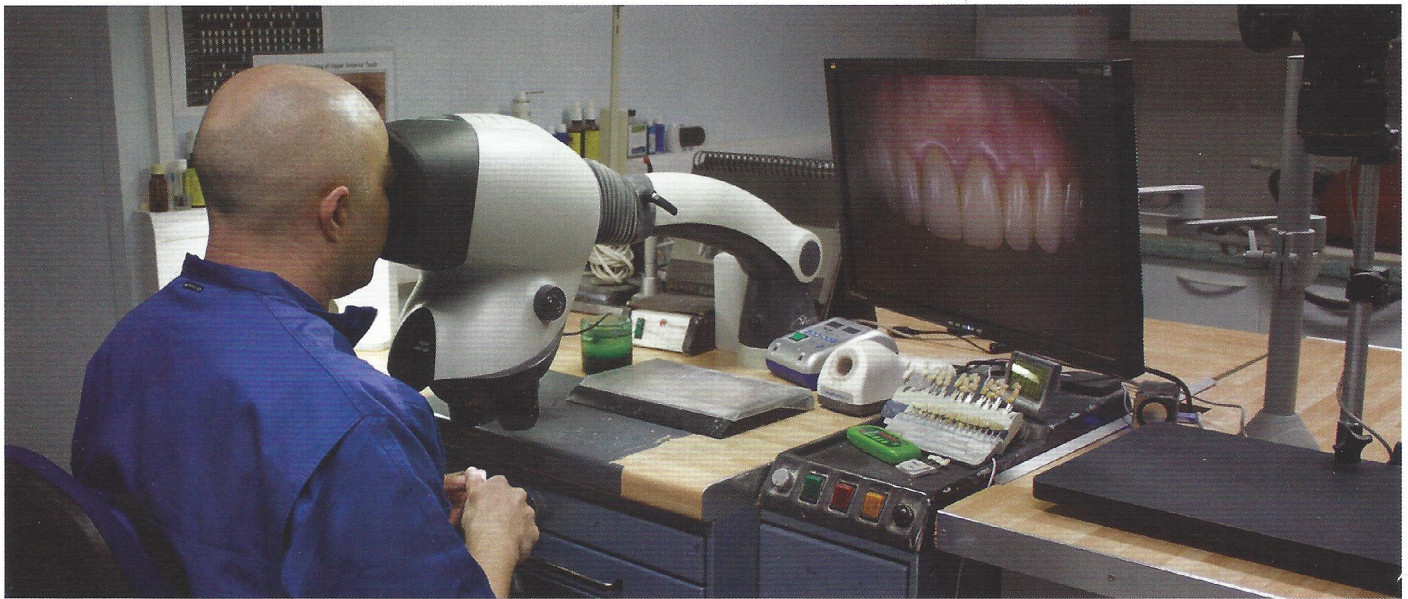


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clinic and seeing my own patients as part of the clinical dental technicians diploma and although there's an immense amount of work ahead before I qualify, it's something I never thought I would be doing so I'm proud of how well that is progressing.

**What do you enjoy most about your job?**

The satisfaction of seeing fitted cases and the positive effect the treatment has to a patient's well being.

**What do you enjoy the least/get most frustrated by?**

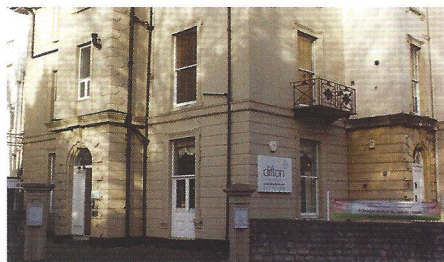
There are dozens of answers I could give you here but let's start with dentistry's free remake culture.

**How do you relax in your spare time?**

Well I have very little spare time at the moment but I'm a bit of a geek and computer nerd so anything to do with that. I like building geeky things and my last project was a full sized virtual pinball machine, which now sits in the living room. Luckily I have an understanding girlfriend!

**With modern enhancements in dental technology, is there still a heavy 'creative art' element to the job?**

Yes, but only for a certain sector of the market and I feel the divide between mainstream dentistry and the bespoke quality driven end of the market is bigger than ever. The gradual de-skilling of the industry through automation and pressure for faster and cheaper mean this will soon be lost for a large part of our industry.



The Bristol site

**The Dental Laboratories Association (DLA) recently launched the 'British Bite Mark' to help show patients that their dental appliances were made in the UK. Will this help buck the trend of dentists looking to send their prescriptions to labs abroad?**

Possibly - but only if money is spent on raising public awareness. Many practices still do not offer this information readily (although I believe it is now a requirement) so the majority of patients have no idea where their work is made or the negative impact that offshore outsourcing is having on our domestic industry. In fact it is still common to encounter patients that think the dentist makes the work and have no idea that technicians even exist.

**As a respected opinion leader in the profession, where do you see dental technology going in the next decade or so?**

Without trying to sound negative I see more automation, more deskilling and a general lowering of standards due to economic pressures and skills shortage. On a positive



Before and after photos of the case that recently won the full arch category at the Aesthetic Dentistry awards

note, technicians with the right skills will be in even higher demand due to the skills shortage. We have never had a better opportunity with the advent of clinical dental technology where I see more technicians making the transition to clinicians to fill the skills shortage in this area.

**What are your top tips for maintaining a successful laboratory?**

Keep up to date with materials and techniques and keep raising your game. Offer the highest quality work possible so that you can charge the fee's necessary to run a viable business, rather than commoditising yourself and joining the race to the bottom.