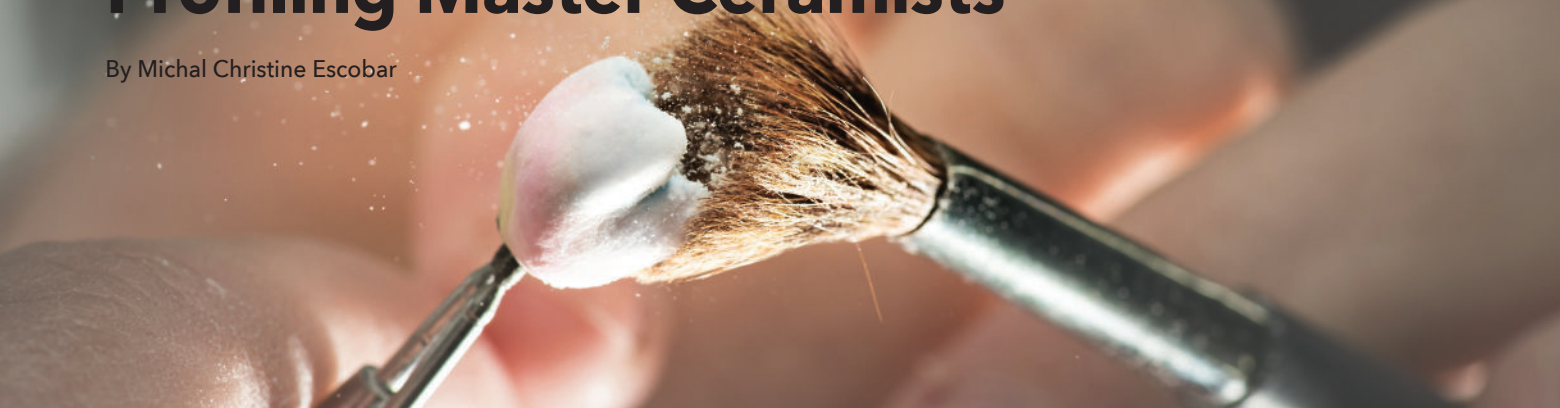


# Where Artistry Meets Exceptional Skill: Profiling Master Ceramists

By Michal Christine Escobar



Discover the personal journeys that led three dental technicians to become masters of their craft, pushing the boundaries and elevating dental esthetics to new heights.

In the realm of dental restoration, the distinction between a typical ceramist and a master ceramist is profound. While both possess the foundational skills to create functional and esthetically pleasing dental prostheses, a master ceramist elevates the craft to an art form. Master ceramists are distinguished by their extensive experience, advanced certifications and exceptional artistry. They meticulously craft restorations that are virtually indistinguishable from natural teeth, achieving the highest standards of beauty and precision.

Below are profiles of three exemplary master ceramists who have not only perfected their technical skills but also dedicated their careers to pushing the boundaries of dental esthetics. Through their unique journeys, they have transformed the ordinary into the extraordinary, showcasing the pinnacle of what can be achieved in the field of dental ceramics.

## Nancy Gausz, CDT

In 1978, a military-trained master ceramist named Gerald Brosco hired 18-year-old Nancy Gausz straight out of high school to work at OCA Dental Laboratory.

“He didn’t want his technicians to have any experience [so that he could] train them his way,” she explained. “This was in the days of porcelain-fused-to-gold restorations, and I am most proud of my



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– Nancy Gausz, CDT

skill in chairside custom shading, which I learned from Brosco.”

A few years later, in 1984, Gausz became certified as a ceramist by completing all the duties of a dental technician, which ranged from pouring impressions and creating a working model to completing a porcelain crown and a full gold crown.

Over the years, Gausz has worked for several dental laboratories. Currently, she is the master ceramist for Pi Dental Center’s in-house porcelain laboratory. Pi Dental Center specializes in implant and restorative prosthodontics, and Gausz

has the opportunity to work directly with patients, doing chairside custom shading. Gausz visits with the patient during two different appointments to evaluate the color and characterization of each tooth. During the first appointment, she chooses the base shade for the prostheses. At the second appointment, she makes custom modifications to refine the color and detail of the restorations to perfectly match the adjoining teeth. This process is rather unique, as most offices send their cases to external laboratories with photos and instructions.

## **Teamwork: The Key to Master Ceramist Success**

When asked what the difference is between a good ceramist and a master ceramist, Gausz said a master ceramist title comes from a combination of advanced training and years of hands-on experience. With 45 years of experience, Gausz certainly has had years of training, building cases, learning tooth morphology and function, and learning the esthetics of natural shade-blending between dentin and the translucent incisal edge.

Additionally, Gausz emphasizes that a master ceramist knows how important it is to work well with others when crafting beautiful custom dental prostheses.

“Teamwork is vital to a successful outcome for the patient,” she explained. “The doctor and ceramist work closely together to provide a functioning restoration that is esthetically pleasing to the patient.”

For example, Gausz and the doctor will take into consideration the patient’s individ-



Both of Pi Dental Center’s patients received beautiful all-ceramic crowns for their two upper central incisors (Nos. 8 and 9). Translucence and chairside custom shading helps make them blend well with adjoining teeth. Gausz custom-stained the crowns chairside and glazed them in the oven. This baking process usually takes about 20 to 30 minutes. As soon as the baking is completed, the final crowns were delivered to the patients.

ual facial characteristics. Gausz will look at the patient’s natural dentition and eye, skin and hair color to help decide on the shade of the restoration. And, as a team, Gausz and the doctor will assess the patient’s personality and preferences for shading, tooth shapes and special characteristics of the crown.

### **Tech-Driven Excellence: The Shift in Dental Ceramics**

Over the years, technology has changed the way Gausz works.

“As a ceramist, I have had to pivot from a hands-on buildup approach to digital design,” using CAD/CAM technology, she explained. While this transition can be challenging, “faster turnaround, less chair time for the patient, greater strength and durability, and the ability to replace a lost or damaged prosthesis quickly are advantages of the monolithic crown and digital dentistry.”

While she maintains there will always be a place for a creative hands-on approach to ceramics, especially for custom chairside shading, she also believes that digital dentistry has already replaced the hands-on approach to crown and bridge prostheses in many cases.

“However, there are occasions when a cutback of the full digital crown is necessary to achieve a more esthetic result. This allows the ceramist to build in certain characterizations by hand,” she noted.

Regardless of whether digital technologies are used to craft dental prostheses, Gausz believes that all dentists should strive to work with a master ceramist on every

project to provide their clients with the best esthetic outcome. To find a nearby master ceramist, she recommends interviewing well-established dental labs, which likely employ highly-trained and experienced master ceramists.

### **Calvin Mun, CDT**

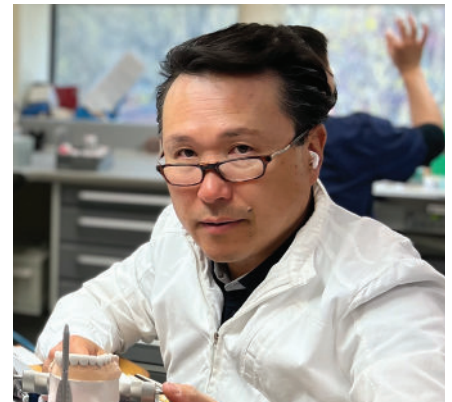
In 1997, Jason Kim, CDT, a world-renowned master ceramist, was chatting with his wife’s cousin — Calvin Mun — about Kim’s job as a CDT and ceramist. One thing led to another, and Kim asked Mun if he would be interested in trying his hand in the dental lab.

“My college degrees are in economics and business,” Mun said. “So, I never expected to work in dentistry. But, I took a chance, flew to New York, and, after working with Kim, I really started to love what I was learning and doing.”

When Kim realized that Mun had not only the eye but also the love for the craft, he sent him to study with master ceramist Walter Gebhard, MDT. Mun attended the world-famous Oral Design International Foundation and trained shoulder-to-shoulder with the best ceramists in the world.

As Mun’s expertise grew, so did his reputation. In the early 2010s, New York University asked Mun to be an instructor for its course, “Mastering Aesthetics & Ceramics for the Advanced Dental Technician,” which he taught for three years.

Currently, Mun is a master ceramist overseeing a team of 30 technicians for the dental laboratory Jason J. Kim Dental Aesthetics in New York. His role keeps him



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– Calvin Mun, CDT

quite busy, ensuring quality and artistic excellence while mentoring the lab’s next generation of ceramists.

### **The Journey of Mastery: Continuous Learning and Artistic Improvement**

While Mun is undisputedly a master of his craft, he’ll never admit it.

“My teacher, Walter Gebhard, once told me that if you’re ever satisfied with your



Feldspathic veneers, as crafted by Calvin Mun, allow for minimal prep to the patient's original teeth and enable the dentist to provide proper occlusion with a natural, highly esthetic result.

work, you'll never progress. You always have to try harder to get better at what you do, and I know that I still have room to grow and improve. I'm not sure I'll ever consider myself a master ceramist," he said.

When asked what the difference is between a good ceramist and a master ceramist, Mun explained that a master ceramist "has to know everything." It's not enough to just know how to craft the prostheses out of ceramics. They must know every step in the production process and understand the nuances needed to control the outcomes. They must also have an excellent grasp of the science behind different materials to the point where they could fashion whatever product a patient needed, from the very first step to the last. Then, they should be able to use their artistic side to turn those functional prostheses into something beautiful.

### ***Balancing Tradition and Technology: The Future of Dental Craftsmanship***

As Mun looks to the future, he readily admits that technology is evolving to quickly produce many types of restorations. But, so far, minimally invasive, health-driven, artistic restorations cannot be produced in a fully digital environment.

"There will always be the need for handcrafted artistic works of dentistry," he explained. "For example, if you're creating a single central incisor, in order to match the rest of the teeth, we use more than 10 different types of ceramics to match the shade. Digital just can't accomplish that yet. It can do many things, but there will

always be work that needs the artistic eye and hand of an experienced ceramist."

This is why Jason J. Kim Dental Aesthetics puts such a focus on mentoring and training the next generation of ceramists.

While Mun remains optimistic about how technology will affect the future of his craft, a different form of technology has created a bit of a headache for the master ceramist.

"My biggest challenge is social media," he said. "Dentists see our work on social media, and they expect their patients' prostheses to come out the same way. But the best restorations start with the dentist: impressions, models, measurements, photos — this is the foundation upon which we build beautiful smiles. Then we partner with the dentist to consider the architecture and symmetry of the patient's face, occlusal aspects and functionality, all with an eye toward minimal prep of the natural teeth. We want to create health for the patient and hopefully surpass their expectations of esthetics. A lot goes into creating that beautiful smile, and it isn't always apparent from pictures on Instagram! For doctors who want to begin this journey, we create mentorships and educational opportunities to help them achieve their goals in this type of dentistry, just as I did as a ceramist."

When it comes to working with a master ceramist, Mun says that dentists should look for a partner they can learn from and grow with, where workflow is consistent, and experience and artistry are apparent in every case. To find a master ceramist, Mun says dentists will have to rely on recom-

mendations from colleagues and — perhaps a bit ironically — social media.

### **Olivier Tric, MDT**

When Olivier Tric was a young teenager in France, he had his heart set on becoming an architect. However, the summer before he was to begin his formal schooling for architecture, he took a job working as an assistant in a dental laboratory that belonged to a family friend. Within weeks, Tric realized he had found his calling, and he never looked back. He switched his field of study and began attending the College of Leonardo da Vinci and Aix-Marseille University at the Palais du Pharo while concurrently pursuing a five-year apprenticeship in dental technology.

Interestingly, Tric can recall the very moment he realized that he wanted to be the best master ceramist in the world. During one of his first few years working as an apprentice, he had a run-in with a client who was rather disrespectful. After that interaction, Tric vowed that he would pour his heart and soul into his work so that all professionals would respect him from then on.

Upon completing his schooling and apprenticeship, Tric devoted himself to thoroughly understanding the principles of dental esthetics and mastering specialized techniques in dental laboratory technology. He continued to study under other master ceramists, such as Willi Geller. After more than 25 years in this field of work, Tric is recognized not only as a master ceramist, but also as a pioneer within the industry





Examples of Olivier Tric's work.



**"For those of us who excel at our work and who have patients who want the very best, technology is still nowhere near close to touching us."**

– Olivier Tric, MDT

for developing new and unique methodologies that are now taught worldwide.

### **Key Traits of a Master Ceramist: Passion and a Unique Style**

According to Tric, intelligence, decades of experience and adaptability are the fundamental requirements for someone who wishes to become a master ceramist. However, he believes two other qualities really elevate masters above all others within their field.

First, a passion for their work.

"I've become a master ceramist not because of the schools I attended or even the

mentors I studied under," Tric explained, "but because of my passion, being a perspicuous person, and the love that I have for my craft."

Second, a unique style.

"I also feel that a master ceramist has to have his or her own style," Tric said. "It's natural to copy others when you're learning something for the first time, but a master is someone who evolves, who does unique things with what they have learned, and who can express themselves and be detached from their work while becoming the person who is copied by the next generation."

In order for all dental professionals to practice their craft at the highest level and offer total freedom and independence, Tric created a group — Atelier Dentaire — based on ethics, knowledge and experience. Dental professionals who are members of Atelier Dentaire are highly sought after by patients because the brand evokes respect, integrity and excellence.

"During my career, I've given dozens of hands-on courses and have taught dental technicians from around the world in order to elevate this profession and educate both dentists and dental technicians," he said.

### **Embracing Technology Without Fear**

Over the years, Tric has seen many different dental laboratory technologies come and go. And, for decades, none of these technologies was able to produce a product "that came even close to what I was producing with my own two hands. So, I never saw the advantage in investing in them," he said.

This doesn't mean Tric is against the use of technology. In fact, he very much understands and believes that technology is becoming an integral part of dentistry. For instance, Tric will be investing in a 3D printer because it will save him time creating alveolar casts. The quality and predictability of 3D-printed products has improved to the point where even an apprentice can easily learn how to use the technology and create high-quality products. This will ultimately give Tric significantly more time to focus on his art and the more complicated aspects of his craft.

"If we refuse to adapt to technology, our businesses will die," Tric said. "Dental school graduates are well versed and highly skilled at using new technologies, so we need to be willing to evolve and adopt technology when it makes sense."

However, he isn't worried that machines are coming for his job any time soon.

"At best, machines are making dental prostheses that are on par with the average CDT technicians. Those are the individuals who should worry that technology is coming for their jobs. But for those of us who excel at our work and who have patients who want the very best, technology is still nowhere near close to touching us," he said. ♦

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