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## A Brief History of Teeth Jewels

Brennan Kilbane | August 18, 2022



Two out of three models in this story mentioned an unexpected benefit of accessorizing one's teeth: "It's a conversation starter," says Chloé Véro. "People love to ask questions about them." Alicia Drayton continues, saying, "I can be a little anxious when it comes to, you know, interaction... so this helps with the icebreaker." Maybe one of your questions is: Who came up with the concept of a bejeweled smile?

We're not sure, but we do know that Etruscans had rings of gold welded onto their incisors and Mayans studded their mouths with jade. As early cosmetic pioneers, the Egyptians are often credited with creating some of history's first grills, but this an archeological misconception: two teeth found bound together with gold from 2,500 BC-era Giza probably weren't fashioned together as a mouthpiece, but a pendant worn by somebody with poor dental hygiene. A form of tooth jewelry indeed, if a less currently fashionable one.

Some more iconic grills in history: Grace Jones' fronts on a 1975 cover of *Vogue Hommes*; the Boliano skull, of a presumed nobleman found in Pangasinan, Philippines, with its full set of gold teeth etched to resemble fish fins; Jaws from *The Spy Who Loved Me*; the diamond lower Justin

Bieber wore to marry to Hailey Baldwin in 2019. A grill can be a statement. Unless it's a question, as in rapper A\$AP Rocky's 2022 [video for \*D.M.B.\*](#), co-starring the mother of his child, Rihanna. Rocky smiles, and his grill asks "Marry me?" in gold. Rihanna smiles and reveals her answer, in matching font: "I do."

In the late '70s, jewelry began twinkling in more and more mouths in New York City, often those of [West Indian](#) immigrants. The '80s saw the opening of [Famous Eddie's Gold Teeth](#), where

Eddie Plein crafted custom grills for rappers Kool G Rap, Just-Ice, and Flavor Flav. [The most expensive grill on record](#) was created under different musical circumstances. [Bill Dorfman](#), cosmetic dentist and author of *Billion Dollar Smile*, helped mint a million dollar piece for Katy Perry; a floral motif in purple, blue, and white diamonds gleams out from Perry's [Dark Horse music video](#) in something like a snarl — the size of the stones prohibits mouth closure.

The smile decor of the moment is pared-back metalwork, colorful stones, and a royal air — mingled with tradition. If Plein peddles in gold, [Johnny Dang](#) of Houston trades almost exclusively in diamonds — Dang met the rapper Paul Wall working in his family's jewelry repair shop and the two went into the lucrative business of chandelier-style mouthpieces. In New York, Helen Harris, or [@helenwiththegoldteeth](#), corners the model market, with sculptural, often understated caps and sets.

Ahead, three models with their own signature, bedazzled smiles share the stories behind their dental accessories.

### Chloé Véro



To create a similar makeup look: Eye Shadow in Mint Condition and Lipglass in Spite by MAC.

Born in Queens, Véro moved to South Florida at 10 and yearned to return to her birthplace. She signed with a modeling agency in New York after contacting them through a submission portal. "I sent some pictures that I took on my MacBook. And this one fire selfie that I took in a dressing room," she recalls. An hour later, they replied, asking for a meeting. Lately, the 26-year-old has smiled for the camera wearing jewelry crafted by Harris: a trio of floating diamond, solid gold, and silhouetted gold caps (all are removable). "Especially being Caribbean, something about gold just fits," Véro says.

### Solange van Doorn



To create a similar makeup look: MicroLiner Ink in Yellow, LipLiner InkDuo in Magenta, and VisionAiry Gel Lipstick in Pixel Pink by Shiseido.

The model remembers when she knew she wanted grills — it was after she heard the song "Grillz" by Nelly, which had a video she used to play on a loop growing up in New York City. "I told myself when I was older and made my own money I'd invest in some," she says. More than a few modeling paychecks later (thank you, Kim's Skims, [Rihanna's Savage x Fenty](#), Victoria's, well, Victoria's Secret), the 23-year-old did just that. Helen Harris crafted her a set of open windows in gold for the bottom and dueling statement gems on top. They bring daily joy to van Doorn's innermost preteen: "My grills make little Solange happy."

Alicia Drayton



To create a similar makeup look: Powerchrome Loose Eye Pigment in Castaway and High-Pigment Longwear Eyeliner in Ocean Drive by Nars.

Drayton has an array of winking stones affixed to her front teeth. There's an A for Alicia on this lateral incisor, and a multicolor window arranged across that lateral incisor, plus a small constellation of others. She wore a tiny butterfly charm until recently, when she lost it in a charcuterie-related incident. The model and singer-songwriter, who was born in Japan and raised between Maryland and Virginia, has always taken care of her teeth and not long ago began "manifesting" work that allows her to make the most of them; *Allure* emailed her shortly thereafter. Her next manifest destinies include a beauty campaign and a music video budget.

**Hair:** Erol Karadag. **Makeup:** William Scott

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