

Visual Clues in Dental

by Anne Levitch BA Ind Des FDIA and Genna Levitch BDS

The healthcare facility that has a therapeutic function

The general public responds strongly to the different options that are now available to them. Since marketing has been allowed to the professions, there has been a move to explore what is effective and indeed appropriate. Generally there is well-founded hesitation to tarnish the excellent reputation the profession enjoys by engaging in loud, brash or demeaning 'look at me' marketing.

This does not mean that dentists are oblivious to the commercial reality that surrounds all of us. Indeed many practitioners struggle to find a way of presenting their services in a unique, ethical yet personable way. One pathway that has met with success is the utilization of professional interior designers and architects in designing healthcare facilities. The concept is quite simple: the uniqueness of a practice is centred on its location and the personalities of the practitioners.

If a dental practice could be designed that reflected the demographics of its location, incorporated the personality of the practice or incumbent dentist and fulfilled all the technical healthcare requirements, would that be a way of signalling to potential patients the quality of services

provided?

The answer is a resounding yes!

Dentists who have gone down this route have been astonished to find a huge increase in treatment plan acceptance and new patient flow. Financial growth of 80% within 12 months is not uncommon. The sedate and conservative, accountant/banker look that was popular for many decades no longer engenders patients with the confidence it used to do. The general public is now more attuned to the contemporary chic of major shopping centres than the interiors of cathedrals. For instance, Westfield shopping centres have developed brand awareness, not through selling a product, but by just building high quality centres.

Environment is a powerful indicator, as people find it easier to judge the quality of a service by the environment in which it is offered, rather than the service itself. By using visual cues to promote relaxation, it is possible to design surgeries that provide comfort and context to patients, in indicating the high standard of health-care being offered.



Surgery Design

Take a moment to consider that your premises may be the most powerful non-verbal marketing tool available to you as a practitioner. Like it or not, your practice is already saying a lot about you.

To bring a dentist's personality into the look and feel of a practice may sound far-fetched, but designers do it every day for a living. Designing it yourself will certainly make you happy and proud, but are you sure you have been able to project your uniqueness into the finish? Using a designer should only add around 10% to the overall cost, but often that professional touch will produce a look that will put your practice into a completely new level, returning far more than it costs.

The public is still apprehensive, as indicated by a recent survey in the *ADJ 2006; 51: 78-85* which reported that 1 in 6 women have 'a high dental fear'. This is in the primary baby-boomer demographic of women in the 40 -64 age bracket.

Cont'd on next page.



Visual Clues in Dental



By using atmospheric lighting and specific colours which promote psychological comfort, a dental surgery can be less intimidating. When premises are designed so they do not even look like a dental practice there is less resistance to attendance. We all support clinical dentistry of a high standard, but it cannot be practiced unless the patients come through the door. Your premises can attract patients or keep them away. Every practice environment indicates your eye for detail, your technical credibility, your aesthetic sensitivity, and how much you care about your patients; you have a choice as to how your practice presents.

Dental surgery design has come a long way in the past 25 years. The changes have been driven in part by dentists wanting to surround themselves with a comfortable and supportive environment that can act to reduce stress levels. Floor plans need to do more than just put in walls and corridors.



Surgery Design Cont'd

Good planning will separate public, clinical, administrative and private space. It will allow for natural light where possible, optimal traffic flow, auditory privacy, OHS issues, Building Code and Australian Standard prescriptions, as well as visual destinations, and ergonomic considerations.

The modern healthcare facility has a therapeutic role in its own right. Well-planned, well-designed facilities add a further dimension; they can contribute to the health of the patients and the practitioners alike.

Photos provided by Levitch Design Associates. Anne Levitch is an interior designer who has worked with dentists for over 20 years, across Australia and specialises in Healthcare Design. She is a Fellow of the Design Institute of Australia, has lectured in the Faculty of Built Environment at UNSW; Dr Genna Levitch is a dentist with 25 years experience in promoting and marketing dental practices. Contact on (02) 9880 9300.

