



Importance of aesthetics

By Anne Levitch, B.Ind.Des, FDIA, AIMM

Aesthetic elements including light, colour, texture, sound and space all contribute to the effective design of a dental facility, explains Anne Levitch.

Why is the aesthetic of a practice important? Let's look again at the paradigm of dentistry. FUNCTION is the starting point when addressing a patient's treatment plan and AESTHETICS is what completes it. Without the two elements working hand in hand, an optimum result will not be created. There is another facet here. While the patient will appreciate the restoration of optimum function, everyone who knows the patient will notice the improvement of his or her appearance.

We all respond strongly to the AESTHETIC of every element around us. From our homes, to our neighbourhoods and our cities,



the environments we spend time in influence us all. We all respond to the aesthetic difference between a cathedral and K-Mart. The AESTHETIC sets the tone of our response. Our response to AESTHETICS is mostly subconscious which is far more powerful than many acknowledge. We mostly use our conscious minds to provide the rationale for our subconscious responses.

Every day, the sun comes up and our world is filled with LIGHT. We have an instant response to the level of light/sunshine. Likewise, the quality of LIGHT has a strong influence in a healthcare practice. Maximum use of natural LIGHT is important. Bringing natural LIGHT through to waiting, treatment and circulation areas helps to relax, demystify the treatment and energise the staff and patients. Variation in LIGHT levels is also effective. Changing from cosy and relaxing in waiting areas to appropriate lighting for effective treatment and perception of

cleanliness in clinical areas. A blanket of fluorescent light throughout a practice can breed distrust, as it feels 'artificial' and visually cold.

The effect of COLOUR on our perception of environment is a very solid thesis topic. Technical definitions such as hue, chromatic value, brightness, tint, shade and reflectivity all apply. Our response to colour is influenced by our psychology, physiology, ethnicity, age, gender, class and income among others. COLOUR has a powerful influence on responses and as designers, we treat it with great respect. Gratuitous and blanketing use of colour should be avoided. We respond well to colour which resonates with the physical location. The upper socio-economic bracket generally responds more effectively to more natural and limited use of colour. Aspirational classes love strong colour.

TEXTURE in finishes creates a visual experience affecting our perception of space. A high gloss finish throughout an environment will reflect light as well as sound. A textured surface evokes a more natural environment, creating a more natural response, whether fabric, stone or paint. Combination of textures can be used to great effect to create reflectance and comfort as required.

The effects of SOUND whether muted, loud, muffled, sharp or reverberating will influence our comfort levels in any space. Here the level of textural finish works hand in hand with the absorption or reflection of sound. White noise can be comforting and disguise other sounds.

SPACE needs to be balanced effectively. If your patients need to pull their legs in every time someone walks past in the waiting area, they will feel discomfort. Spaces that are large and unfilled feel unloved and cavernous. Spaces need to be balanced whether small, or large. Gracious lofty spaces can be inspirational and comfortable and small compact spaces can be cosy and relaxing if designed well.

All of the above factors outlined have cross relationships in creating a response. A healthcare environment needs to create a strong positive response for health and well being of staff and patients alike. While your ideal patients should have sparkling gorgeous smiles, your ideal practice should sparkle and smile just the same.

About the author

Anne Levitch has managed Levitch Design Associates, a health-care design consultancy for over 25 years. During this time, LDA has worked with over 300 practitioners, designing dental and specialist surgeries across Australia and New Zealand. Anne is a Fellow of the Design Institute of Australia. LDA can be contacted on +(02) 9880-9300 or visit www.levitch.com.au