



Inspired by nature

**Riverview Dental gets a wildly
imaginative fit out by
Levitch Design Australia**

By Danny Chan

The symbiotic relationship between employee, customers and business success is the recurring theme of many corporate speeches. With the help of Levitch Design Australia (LDA), Dr Stuart Malone recently rebuilt his dental surgery in an inspired effort to transplant this concept into the physical space. He wanted to recreate an ecosystem in which employees would feel supported in every way – so they were better positioned to meet the needs of patients in their care.

“Our staff should feel supported at the workplace. That’s why our renovation plans included a fully functional kitchen where meals can be prepared. Uniforms can be laundered onsite with washing machine and dryer in a utility room. We also designated an area where the team can meet in comfortable surroundings and a private lounge area where dentists can study and write patient notes away from the clinical environment.”

These were just some of Dr Malone’s main ideas for redeveloping the 40-year-old building that houses Riverview Dental, a family clinic located up in northern Victoria’s Shepparton. The clinician also wanted to blend the surgery into its native bushland surrounds



using a combination of natural and modern finishes as inspiration for the renovation. With 3 dentists and 2 hygienists working part time out of 3 rooms, the layout needed to be reconfigured into 5 rooms and allocate more space for waiting room, reception area and sterilization area.

The last time the Riverview Dental building was worked on in 2004, the dentist had project managed the interior fit out himself. At the time, the 1976 purpose-built dental facility had never been updated – and not until recently. The former experience proved “too stressful” for Dr Malone, who decided this time to enlist the expertise of Levitch Design Australia.

“I wanted a company that was experienced in Dental Surgery design. From the first meeting with Andrew Arnott (LDA’s Project Consultant), I was extremely impressed with the level of detail he had already gone into. He ticked all the boxes, some of which I haven’t even considered.”

A major challenge from the outset was, in Dr Malone’s words, “working to keep working” during the construction phase. Eschewing the idea of running the clinic onsite in the midst of the



building process – although LDA did propose plausible side-by-side working solutions – Dr Malone decided to move the surgery to a temporary location.

After much searching, an old 3-bedroom house was converted into a fully functioning 3-chair surgery in just two weeks by the dentist and the LDA builders. Dr Malone reckoned the cost of \$50,000 was a small price to pay for the ability to continue working in a safe and clean environment.

Meanwhile, back at the construction site, everything progressed swimmingly.

“LDA was very creative with the ideas and design brief they were given. It was a joy to watch the design team being creative during the design meetings. I did not want to interfere with the process as I was most impressed with what they were creating. I felt confident a beautiful building would be built.”

The stress-free coordination, ease of communication and quality of work delivered by tradespeople made it a joy for Dr Malone to visit the site every day.

“The folks at LDA went out of their way to ease any concerns I had during construction. There was a positive vibe onsite which I believe translated into raising the quality of the building.”

Dr Malone remembers the time he overheard Ash Pollard, LDA's project manager, telling one of the painters how the finished work will be recognised when people walk through the building. “Little things like these all contribute to the eventual success of the project,” the dentist enthuses.

He is right. The final results did not disappoint. If not for the eye-catching company logo at the front of the building, existing customers can be forgiven for doing a double take beholding the new facade for the first time.

What was once an ordinary looking, single story building had completely transformed into avant-garde architecture. Drawing inspiration from neighbouring bushlands, the slate stack stone and spotted gum timber-panelled cladding is as easy on the eyes as the picturesque nature it borrowed from. Complete with modern finishes, by way of Alucobond and COR-TEN steel frames and panels, the sublime structure is an arresting sight in the busy CBD of Shepparton on Welsford Street.

The bushland theme extends indoors in simple yet surprisingly effective ways. Married with earthy toned fixtures and furnishings, evocative images and coloured panels positioned for maximum exposure somehow manage to be tasteful in charm and character.

A squarish brown pillar repurposed with three inset magazine racks – in zesty green no less – stands next to a wall covered by a photographic render of the trees that inspired it. On an adjacent wall hang three instagram-style, highly detailed close-ups of tree



trunks. Below the portraits sits a long custom-built bench wrapped in matching fabric and leather upholstery. Dual-toned carpet nails the theme with tree-textured motifs as it delineates artificial zones for lounging chairs. All these design ingenuity hails from just the waiting room alone. Inspired touches abound throughout the 230-sqm facility.

As requested by Dr Malone, the front desk area looks every inch the lobby of a luxury motel – complete with timber-laminated reception counter, stack stone feature wall, hanging lights and potted plants. In the steri room, recess-hidden red and orange strip lights provide a futuristic glow to accentuate the modern clean room and its hi-tech equipment. The surgery rooms assume a pared-down, minimalistic look with subtle reminders of the flowing theme outside. From the vantage point of the dental chair, patients are treated to natural vistas afforded by well-placed windows and the bushlands beyond. The brightly lit surgery rooms are cleverly apportioned with bespoke cabinetry clinging to available wall space leaving ample walking room.

“It now looks like a state-of-the-art building again,” remarks Dr Malone, harking back to the grandiose intent of the original 70s construction. That the concept was fleshed out so exquisitely owes much to excellent teamwork and coordination, he stresses.

“LDA has a great team that you can trust to transfer intricate plans on paper to such a high quality and detailed build. It takes a committed team to pull off such a massive undertaking and to deliver it on time and budget as they have.”

Reiterating the guiding concept behind the project, Dr Malone concludes his assessment: “This is ultimately a building that supports my staff who in turn support our patients and is reflective of the natural environment which I love.”

“The idea of being immersed in nature and surrounded by a great team delivering an exceptional patient experience is something close to my heart. I'm very pleased that the building now reflects that commitment so elegantly!” ♦