



Now it's perfect!

Dr Mark Casiglia reconnects with original builder nine years later for a major overhaul

By Danny Chan

In the business of healthcare fit out, it isn't very common to find repeat customers simply because you do not set up a new practice as often as say, buying a smartphone or designer jeans. Granted it is not unusual for a dental owner to refresh the look of an existing practice or build a new one.

Yet given the time span between projects – typically measured in years, if not decades – during which new builders and design concepts would have emerged jostling for attention, to expect customer loyalty would be highly unrealistic. Still, when you do find a repeat customer, especially one whose last job you worked on was almost a decade ago, it says a lot about the quality of your service, not to mention enduring credibility of your business.



The last time Dr Mark Casiglia employed the services of Levitch Design Australia was in 2007, to design and construct a practice building from the ground up. Fast forward to 2016, as Dr Casiglia decided it was time to update the clinic's look and feel, he was happy to rekindle old ties, albeit in a new form:

"I originally became familiarised with Levitch Design through magazine design feature articles, perhaps 15 or more years ago. I asked them to do my original project because I perceived them to be the best in the business," says the practice owner of Apple Dental, a general practice located in Lane Cove, NSW.

"When it came time to renovate, I found that they were now under new ownership, significantly, the same owners as Perfect Practice who are also very highly regarded in the industry, so the choice was clear to use the same team again."

Apple Dental is Dr Casiglia's third practice within the same suburb. He felt that although the original fit out still holds up reasonably well in terms of layout, workflow and functionality, he did not want to wait beyond the expiry date of the building design to contemporize the clinic. With the benefit of hindsight, he was also more aware of areas to improve:

"There were a few things I wanted to correct from the original fit out, things that only came to light after working and testing the environment over the years."

"My main desires were to reduce noise, add more carpet to soften the feel and change cabinetry in the treatment rooms to create a better workflow. Also, most importantly, I didn't want to risk anything starting to look tired or dated, because then it's too late. The right time to renovate is before that happens."

The main challenge for the project, common with most business fit outs, was to "reduce the downtime" – which in building terms, is translated as "very tight deadline". In what seems like record time, it took the builders 18 days in total – from 23 December to 9 January – to completely overhaul the building facade and interiors.

"The fully integrated one-stop-shop aspect is irresistible when you're busy and time poor. Project management was particularly

good because the entire thing wrapped up in less than 3 weeks over the Christmas holidays. This obviously minimised my downtime, which could potentially incur a higher cost than the cost of the project. In short, they totally met my brief and exceeded it!"

Dr Casiglia is equally stoked by the finished product, which has been receiving what he calls "universal praise" from the clinic's staff, patients and visitors.

From the building exterior, you get a foretaste of the modernistic design that awaits you indoors. The dual grey and beige cladding looks fresh yet elegant, nicely contrasted with the leafy background of trees and boxwood shrubs. This restful colour theme flows throughout the interiors: The walls and furnishings alternate between grey and light brown while green serves as the accent colour.

Upon entering, you are greeted by the undisputed eye candy display of the entire clinic: A faux separation wall that encases a giant fish tank. Shimmering with aquatic life, the majestic display makes a great conversation starter for patients on the other side of the wall, where the waiting area is cleverly appointed. The reception desk looks grand yet understated, with hidden strip lights completing the clean, modern presentation. "The reception counter redesign using Calcutta stone was excellent," Dr Casiglia enthuses, "and a wonderful centrepiece upon arrival. They managed to modify our existing counter and make it look brand new."

While many LDA trademark features were evident, the dentist was most impressed by the subtle design concepts, choice of materials and great ideas "that never crossed (his) mind". Interestingly, he reckons the single best design feature from the experienced builders lies in their use of a special acoustic ceiling, saying: "The noise reduction was unbelievable." He considered the builder's selection of textured wallpaper, carpet tiles, custom-designed patterned window films inspired choices that came with years of healthcare fit out expertise.

In terms of layout and space usage, the Sydney clinician had clear concepts of what he wanted, all of which were duly fleshed out. "From a workflow perspective, we wanted things within better reach, which we've achieved perfectly. Also we wanted to create more space to walk around the dental chair in each room, so we tightened up the depth of the cabinetry. This had no impact on usable bench space or what we could or couldn't fit into drawers, but allowed us freer passage around the dental chair."

Although Dr Casiglia admits that some aspects of the renovation are more difficult to quantify than others, he ventures a connection between the new surroundings and a perceived mood change at the office:

"Everybody was instantly happier. Great surroundings are conducive to better workplace mood. It's difficult to prove, but I feel patient's acceptance of treatment may be higher because everything just looks so "together", which of course extends to the way we deliver the treatment as well."

"Personally, it is difficult to express what exactly makes the design work for me. It's just the way in which all the elements came together, to create an environment that feels right – that's not too clinical or too homey. This is something only a good designer can imagine, and it worked out beautifully."

As someone who has kept up with prevailing design concepts, Dr Casiglia notes: "Certain aspects of design and selections seem to run a common theme with other Levitch projects."

Subconsciously explaining his decision for choosing Perfect Practice – and by extension reconnecting with Levitch Design – he adds: "This is fine by me. If you're on a good thing, why change it."

"The (repeat) customer experience was in a word, exceptional", he says unequivocally, "they are clearly experts with a wealth of experience and they will be able to offer insights that you may never think of yourself. All the while, they'll get it all done while you can be busy doing what you do best – being a dentist." ♦

