



Southern chic that's practically timeless

Fitout specialist Dentec races against time to deliver broad smiles on customers.

By Danny Chan



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From a distance, Geelong's new landmark on 107 Gheringhap Street resembles more a boutique art gallery than the dental clinic it really is. Indeed, the sophisticated building that houses Southern Dental Specialists will not be out of place on the cover of a gallery brochure. And while the four-chair specialist restorative dental practice opened its doors end-March 2009, it doesn't look a day older.

Next to one of the town's busiest traffic arteries, the clinic sits on a spacious lot with ample front of building parking. From the looks of it, it has clearly optimized its prime location and excellent exposure with a sublime display.

If you're visiting for the first time, the brand spanking new façade of the building and its elegant design are the two things that immediately shine through. Wall-to-wall, clear glass panels framed by a chocolate brown roof and pillars present a classy but down-to-earth look-

ing exterior. The front signage is emblazoned across a unique rectangular roof structure that cuts through the skyline with its razor sharp edges. Even before you step inside, the front desk reception is resplendent in full view, at once exuding an inviting presence to the approaching guest.

Room for expansion

When Southern's principal owners, Dr Kurien Mamootil and Dr Simon Wylie, started looking for new premises towards the end of 2007, eventually finding the present location almost a year later, they had in mind to create a four-chair practice with dedicated space for the prosthodontic and endodontic sides of the practice. Although they took on the lease of the premises on 1st October 2008, they had started planning the renovation from the time they laid eyes on the location.



"We required an environment in which we could work comfortably in our own spaces whilst also having the capability to expand each of our services with the addition of more clinicians.

"We were looking for a sophisticated design to suit our main clientele who are generally adult patients. We wanted a modern but not overstated look and we were particularly conscious of trying to develop a design that would not date quickly," says Dr Kurien Mamootil, the practice's Partner and Principal Endodontist.

After completing a Doctorate of Clinical Dentistry in Endodontics in 2004, Dr Mamootil joined a specialist group practice in Geelong as a visiting endodontist. While working as an associate in an endodontic practice in Melbourne, Dr Mamootil initially committed a day per week to the Geelong practice – but that was before patients started pouring in.

"Over the next three years, the practice grew to three days per week with other endodontists attending from Melbourne. By the end of 2007, we were beginning to outgrow the then available space. Dr Simon Wylie, who is a prosthodontist, and I began to seek a new location to work from so that we could expand each of our services."

Holidays compromised... but not quality

Although Dr Wylie had a joint practice in Geelong, he wanted to start his own practice, one with enough room for other specialists. Upon finding the Gheringhap Street prop-

erty in Geelong CBD, he decided to renovate the existing space formerly occupied by a real estate firm by engaging the fitout services of Dentec. Billed as 'a complete solutions provider for healthcare professionals', Dentec is one of Australia's leading dental and medical equipment supply and installation companies.

The fitout firm conducted an onsite feasibility study with excellent results and proceeded to draft plans and layout proposals for the surgery's partners. After various options had been discussed, a final layout was agreed upon and the project was underway.

Hayden Earl, Design and Fitout Manager for Dentec, remembers: "The walls and partitioning on the original site were beyond keeping. The first thing we decided on was to completely strip the place and start afresh with an empty shell."

The customer's specifications were simple enough: Four large surgeries; private offices; a large reception area with file storage; lab; consult room; large sterilization room; and staff room. The layout was to be "inviting and organized". In terms of presentation, the client wanted the clinic to be "bright and clean with high quality furnishings and finish."

"We found the project to be fairly straightforward, although the main challenge we faced was a tight timeline from start to completion," Hayden adds.

Acknowledging the time crunch as their biggest challenge, Dr Mamootil concurs: "We had to have the practice up and running quickly as our space in the previous practice was required. In addition to a fast turnaround, we also wanted to make sure corners were not being cut and finishes were maintained at a high standard."



This meant that the Dentec team had to construct over the Christmas break, during which time trades people were hard to come by. Despite major inconveniences, interruptions to the project were kept to a minimum and the practice was operational by the end of March.

Tasteful ergonomics

If the project was squeezed for time at all, you couldn't tell by looking at the end result. There wasn't the slightest hint of a rushed job; much less reasons to suggest corners were being cut.

In consultation with the dental partners, Dentec had constructed an ergonomic workplace that does not compromise on the client's ideals of patient comfort. The design allowed free-flowing access between the various clinical rooms, while non-clinical rooms were cleverly obscured

from view through clever partitioning based on a logical workflow.

Generous space was allocated towards the treatment rooms, enough to accommodate a roomful of clinicians, assistants, patients and other family members. Design of treatment rooms was specific to the nature of dental work, varying between endodontics and prosthodontics. To minimize noise, the plant room was kept well away from the waiting area and treatment rooms.

Subscribing to the notion that "you can never have enough storage space", the clinical wall space was well utilized with the usual row of cabinets. The pristine white cabinetry with gloss finish never crosses the line from providing functional ergonomics into claustrophobic territory. Space consumption of the furniture is kept in check within a reasonable floorspace-to-furniture ratio. This important layout consideration is also apparent in the treatments rooms, where space is usually a luxury. Although the designers had a little more room to play around with compared to most other surgeries, they stuck to the conventional wisdom of 'less is more'. For example, the side benches for family members neatly occupy the corner spaces to create more legroom while reducing interference to the clinical workspace.

Aesthetic considerations were subtle but effective. The black leather cushions on the dental chairs and side benches



provide a stark contrast to the rest of the treatment room awash in melamine white. Safe for touches of colour on tastefully positioned square framed artworks on the walls, the black and white colour theme is used throughout the clinic – from the treatment to the steri rooms; corridors to the staff lounge.

The atmosphere at the reception and open-space

waiting area is warm and cozy, with nary a hint of the clinical environment that one would expect in a dental surgery. While waiting, patients can browse through their favourite magazines in a relaxing environment, while soothing music piped in via a six-channel sound system, plays in the background. For relieving eye fatigue, floor to ceiling windows provide a balmy view to outdoor greenery and a moderate sized landscaped garden.



Value-for-money renovation

The little aesthetic touches provide an excellent counterbalance to the ergonomics of function and practicality. And while the building and its interiors may suggest a trendy and up-market practice, the overall design is ageless and downright practical – which exactly conforms to the partners' wishes.

Happy with the results, Dr Mamootil assesses his fitout contractors: "We are pleased by the way they interacted and consulted with us. The team was friendly and approachable. The attention to detail was very good and even though the renovation was completed quickly, the quality of the work was excellent."

Overall, Dr Mamootil was most impressed by Dentec's turnaround speed, which lack is perhaps one of the biggest complaints heard against Australia's building contractors. On Dentec's efficiency in setting up the practice in time for an early move in, Dr Mamootil says: "I felt that we got true value for the money that we have invested in the practice."

Despite such glowing comments, Dr Mamootil reserves his biggest compliment for the renovation outfit in this parting shot: "All of us in the practice agree that Dentec has developed a workplace where we truly enjoy coming in to." ♦

