

Ample Treatment,

These small medical practices illustrate exact design for specific services—each in a unique environment.

By Kerry O’Leary



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The internal waiting area for patients waiting to have blood drawn is a private alternative to the main waiting space and is convenient to consultation and other preliminary procedures.

DAVIS PARTNERSHIP ARCHITECTS

THE FOUR DOCTORS OF THE NOW STAND-ALONE COLORADO CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE MEDICINE FACILITY (CCRM) HAD ONE COMMON MOTIVE IN DEVELOPING THEIR BRAND NEW FACILITY: TREAT THE SPACE WITH THE SAME LEVEL OF COMPLEX CARE THAT THE FERTILITY SPECIALISTS PROVIDE TO THEIR VERY DISTINCT CLIENTS. THE SMALL DENVER PRACTICE, RANKED FIRST IN THE NATION BY *CHILD* MAGAZINE, HOSTS CLIENTS FROM ALL OVER WORLD WHO SACRIFICE GEOGRAPHICAL CONVENIENCE, TIME AND LARGE AMOUNTS OF OUT-OF-POCKET FINANCES IN THE NAME OF PARENTHOOD. A STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITY FOCUSED ON HIGHLY TECHNICAL SURGICAL PROCEDURES REQUIRED SPACE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF THE SAME CALIBER, WHICH IS WHERE JANETTE RAY, ASID, OF DAVIS PARTNERSHIP ARCHITECTS, CAME IN.

Ray, whose experience spans the health care sector, has a thorough understanding of the challenges of meeting doctors’ and patients’ needs through design, and the specifics of the CCRM project proved no less challenging. Only the building’s exterior was designed by the Davis Partnership architectural team. Ray placed everything from elevators and stairwells to wayfinding structures and lighting to best manipulate patients’ experiences from the moment they park their cars in reserved areas of the underground garage that coincide with unique entry points for donors, recipients and those coming into the surgery center.

Having worked with the doctors on several remodels of their previous space, which was contained in large medical office building, Ray knew what the doctors were looking for. “Doctors look at their offices as an extension of themselves,” says Ray, noting that throughout planning there was also a “huge amount of consultancy that lasted more than two years” with the doctors and practice manager. The design called for waiting areas, offices, blood draw labs, clinical labs, traditional exam

rooms, surgery suites and even a wellness center for acupuncture and massage. Requiring the most stringent mechanics is the IVF lab, adjacent to the surgery rooms on the second floor. Surgery suites are “the hardest component for this type of project due to a huge amount of structural, mechanical and electrical needs, along with building codes and the Joint Commission compliance regulations,” says Ray. The IVF lab requires perfect humidity levels, special surgery-grade components, custom lighting and a sterile pass-through for eggs to travel safely and efficiently into the operating rooms.

Science and technology aside, the fertilization process, from consultation to surgery, is an extremely confidential and emotional experience for patients. At the forefront of Ray’s design was privacy and serenity. She talks about separate waiting rooms, stating “you never want to have donors and recipients crossing the same path.” Many fertility donations are given the day of an IVF procedure, so the identities of donors and recipients need to be kept confidential. “The way it flowed and how a patient walks through the space had to be a

Measureable Space



priority in the planning,” attests Ray to the vitality of wayfinding. With the specific paths of patients nailed down, the space could then be transformed into a calming environment for patients under the tense process of fertility consultation and IVF. “A lot of the patients are stressed and their minds are racing,” says Ray, adding that in order to achieve a “calming, quiet, beautiful, non-jarring atmosphere,” warm materials, such as travertine, granite, wood, glass and hospitality-like finishes that are still up to stringent health-grade codes, were used, keeping state-of-the-art and client experience as the lead considerations.

Warm wood tones, indoor greenery, a water feature (not shown) and natural light from a two-story plate glass window contribute to the calming atmosphere of the entryway to the Colorado Center for Reproductive Medicine.

Strategic design considerations, such as privacy and wayfinding, as well as flexibility, are reflected in the space plan for the center’s lower level.





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This cool lime green dental operatory suite features custom-colored chair upholstery, raised glass countertops and indirect/direct lighting for a color-drenched feel.

No two small practices are alike, but for Laura Bordeaux, ASID, the overall trend toward “luxury” services in the dental market translates across the board in designing dentists’ offices. “The trend for dentistry is moving the focus away from the standard operatory procedure and going toward the cosmetic side of dentistry.” In a competitive market, dentists are going after the clients looking for high-end, beauty-based services, most of which are not covered by insurance, and the lavish treatments call for a spa-like environment. “Dentists are turning to design to get that share of the market,” explains Bordeaux, noting that medical practitioners are not typically visual learners and need designers.

Designing dental offices requires many unique technical considerations, especially with practices in smaller buildings or nontraditional spaces such as former residences, historical spaces or other commercial properties. Indirect/direct lighting in operatory suites is another critical consideration, as patients undergoing treatment look directly into overhead and ceiling lighting. “In the operatory suites, you need to know where water and air is going to come into the floor,” continues Bordeaux. Dental equipment relies on several air compressors and air valves, and items such as plaster traps and wet vacuums are used in every space.

Cofferred ceiling panels and dental waiting rooms don’t usually go together, but Bordeaux’s traditional design plan for a federal-style Connecticut dental office offers patients an elegant respite from the standard, often sterile medical interior. Bordeaux transformed the historic space into a seamless hybrid of classic aesthetics and modern technology, maintaining a hospitality/spa-like feel throughout to keep in tune with clients’ experiences. In the main waiting area, Bordeaux used downlights, dimmers and candlelight lamps to

maintain a tranquil, residential atmosphere. A second-floor dental suite provides privacy for a patient undergoing four-hour or longer treatments. The suite has a private restroom, a lounge area and even a kitchen where patients can relax to prepare for a surgical procedure.

Furthering the idea of using design to positively influence client experience is another one of Bordeaux’s dental designs, also in Connecticut, but this time with a modern approach. When Dr. Alla Gorenbeyn came to Bordeaux to re-design her small, suburban office, she had one request. “Comfortable dentistry is her motto,” says Bordeaux, continuing, “People always associate the word ‘ouch’ with going to the dentist, and she wanted that shift in what you expect in a dental office, a psychological change.” Patients can enjoy a drink and some down time at the coffee bar, an area with high-top tables and chairs that also offers Internet access for those taking time out of their work day to undergo treatment or get routine dental work done.

The challenges in designing for small medical practices are twofold: equipment and technology demand and competition, combined with an overall unawareness that doctors and dentists alike have about the value interior design holds for their businesses. “Things change every year, technology changes every year,” says Ray, who also stresses the importance of bearing in mind how many hours the doctors themselves spend at their respective practices. Doctors seek the same spa-like environment to contribute to their productivity, alertness and overall well being. “Budget is always a challenge,” says Bordeaux. “There is still a learning curve with doctors and owners to buy into the financial commitment of quality equipment.”

Where do designers fit in? Many doctors or facilities managers in these small practices seek out designers



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Cherry floors accent the sherbet-inspired color scheme of the operatory suites in this Connecticut dental practice designed by Laura Bordeaux, ASID.

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only after equipment and furniture has been ordered. Bordeaux notes that “the market competition is actually about competing against equipment companies, dental companies that provide chairs.” Equipment manufacturers will sell the dentist or facilities manager the operatory chairs and charge an additional fee for a CAD layout. “Designers need to reach the doctor [or practice owner] before they make the commitment to purchase equipment,” says Bordeaux, as equipment firms often impose large markups on items such as cabinetry and other storage fixtures. “They want to do it, but they don’t know how,” explains Bordeaux about small practice owners looking to create a pleasing, well-planned and designed environment.]

Kerry O’Leary is associate editor for ASID ICON.

See the Resource Guide on page 50 for additional resources and information about “Ample Treatment, Measureable Space.”



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