

# DESIGNING Your Practice to Impress

Text by Mike Watson

*This article was first published in The Private Practice.*

When designing your practice, always put your patients' requirements at the forefront. From the moment they walk in, you have the opportunity to influence their mood and opinion through the use of colours and finishes.

A 2011 Harvard study showed that it will take up to eight positive encounters to reverse a negative opinion formed from a poor first impression.<sup>1</sup> First impressions are thus vital. They will influence the patient's expectations of the service he will receive and the professionalism with which those services will be delivered.

The same Harvard study also concluded that we have five seconds to create that first positive impression. If this is true, we have a very limited window of opportunity and have to focus on the waiting area with the following aspects in particular: (1) Colours, (2) Finishes and (3) Ambience.

## Maximise the opportunity

The colours in the waiting area should help to calm your patients; they should immediately feel comfortable and at ease. Use tranquil colours and avoid sharp-

edged design features. Remember: people notice flooring before ceilings as we tend to walk with our heads down. Therefore, if you have a limited budget, spend it on good quality, low maintenance flooring that will remain stain-free. Lighting should be used to create the atmosphere you want; it need not be expensive but it can make a huge difference.

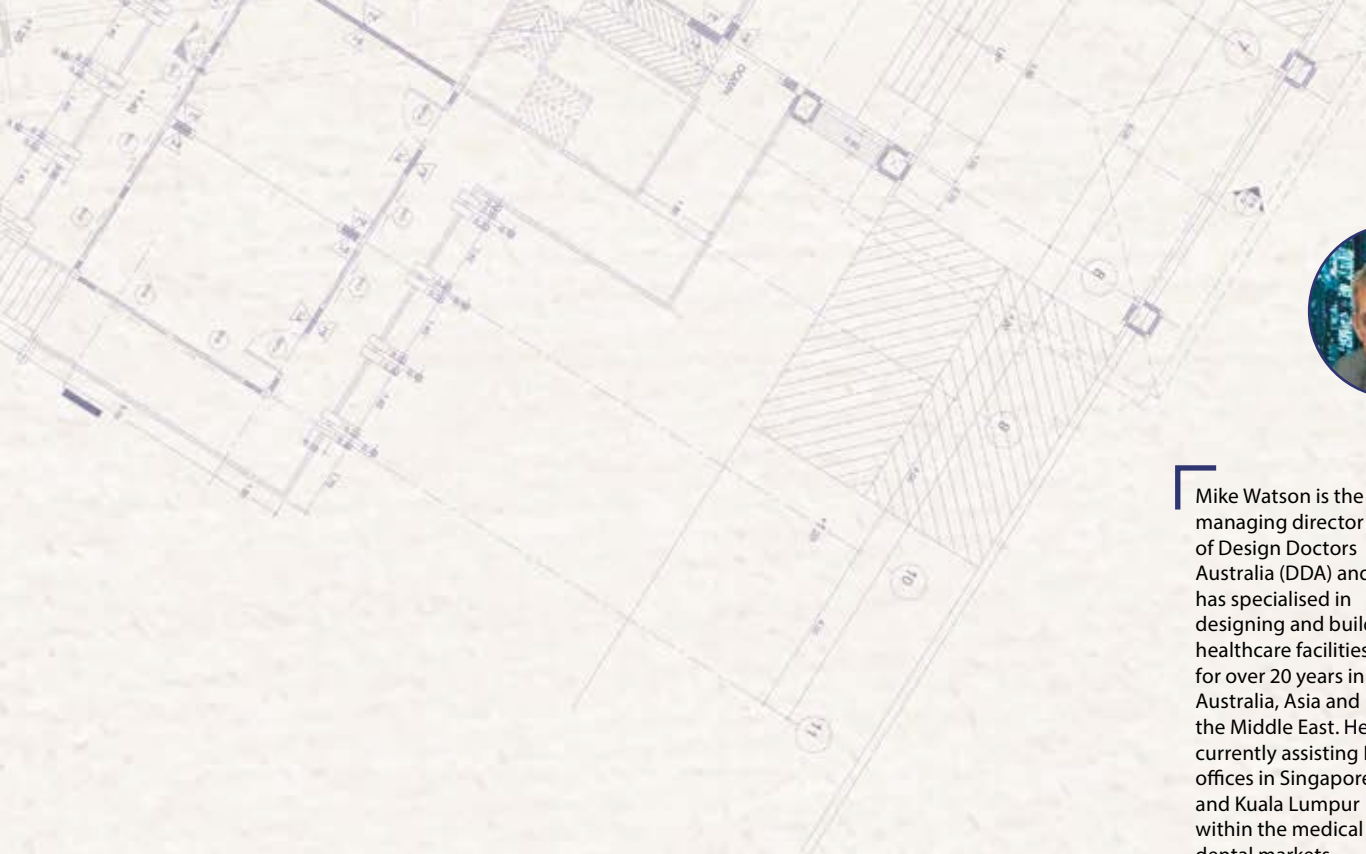
Opt for tried-and-tested waiting chairs, and always consider the cleaning and maintenance needed when selecting finishes. It is vital that surfaces always look clean as this is a big influence on that first impression and will definitely affect the perception of the service your patient is about to receive. I have even experienced aromatherapy being used in waiting areas to create a memorable (and calming) experience. Above all, the decor should reflect how you want your services to be perceived as this is exactly what will happen. If you have a television playing, be aware of what is being shown. The waiting area should aim to help your patients settle down before consultation, so avoid news channels reporting on the latest disasters or atrocities. Let the

patient feel safe away from the world while in your care. National Geographic or other similar channels could be useful here!

The concierge system is increasing in popularity now. It replaces the traditional reception desk – which can be a communication barrier – with a personalised welcome by a concierge that has the patients' appointment details on hand.

In your consulting rooms, you need the patient's focus and concentration, and your decor should assist this. Sports memorabilia or family photographs are not recommended as you need your patient to be free from distractions and to focus on you alone. Simple finishes will be sufficient to keep the patient focused on your advice.

The journey through your practice is also an experience to be considered. While we know the importance of the first impression, there is no doubt that the remainder of the visit also influences your patients' view. The path of travel can be highlighted by use of floor finishes or ceilings to make the path more obvious.



Mike Watson is the managing director of Design Doctors Australia (DDA) and has specialised in designing and building healthcare facilities for over 20 years in Australia, Asia and the Middle East. He is currently assisting DDA offices in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur within the medical and dental markets.

Try to take your patients in a circular motion through the practice if possible, with minimal retracing of steps. Prevent crisscrossing corridors and bottlenecks with incoming patients registering and outgoing ones paying. If space permits, a separate payment area, even if part of the reception desk, would be ideal.

Your target market is very important. If your patients are mainly families, then a children's play area would be useful and the aromatherapy less so! If your patients are spending big on high value cosmetic procedures, then the ambience should reflect this. If your practice is bursting at the seams, then focus on the patient journey. ♦

**References**

1. Hedges K. *The do-over: how to correct a bad first impression.* Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/work-in-progress/2015/02/10/the-do-over-how-to-correct-a-bad-first-impression/#1120483a55f6>.

**Legend**

- 1. The use of blue in the waiting area has a calming effect and gives an expectation of high-quality service
- 2. A minimalist consult room provides no distractions for your patient and will ensure that they focus on your advice

