

Blue space thinking

A look at how one practice is embracing its natural environment.



There are many studies to support the notion that exposure to ‘green space’ is fundamental to our physical and mental health. Quite simply, the great outdoors offers many therapeutic benefits – the pandemic lockdowns made us all much more aware of the importance of spending time in more natural surroundings.

However, there has been less research on the positive effects on our wellness of ‘blue spaces’. The studies that do exist largely suggest that being close to water can benefit our health, prompt overwhelming feelings of calm and tranquillity, lower stress and anxiety, and ultimately, enhance our overall psychological wellbeing.

The Waterside Dental Clinic’s proximity to water demonstrates the relaxing, restorative benefits of H₂O. The two-storey waterfront clinic sits near the banks of the River Ribble in Preston and offers calming views across the prestigious Dockland Marina, a 1990 redevelopment now widely considered the jewel in the city’s crown.

The clinic is the culmination of practice principal and owner Tim Williams’ innovative desire to create a dental practice that is truly different. It is just a stone’s throw from where his successful career began, and patients who attend here certainly experience dentistry in an incredible setting.

As one patient notes, “When you are feeling stressed or apprehensive about a visit, the last thing you want is a TV or radio blaring away with depressing news or music as you sit waiting. At The Waterside Dental Clinic, you walk into the most tranquil atmosphere of a spa and the sounds of nature. And, if you are lucky enough, you are met by an angel called Linda. You quickly become relaxed and at ease.”

The aforementioned ‘angel’ is clinic manager and Tim’s wife, Linda. She has supported Tim since he opened his first clinic in the heart of Lytham in 2005. Unsurprisingly, she knows the business inside-out. In some respects, theirs has been a journey of luck ➡



When they happened upon this perfectly tranquil setting quite by accident, Linda recalls. “Tim called me and asked me to look at some premises that had become available. The building had not been updated for some years and was a plain, relatively uninspiring suite of offices. However, as soon as we walked towards the front entrance and caught sight of the beautiful marina, with the boats bobbing up and down, we fell in love with the site.

“We walked through the glass atrium and our imaginations were set on fire. We tried not to show our delight too much to the estate agent who showed us around, which was difficult as we immediately realised its potential. We are truly blessed with this location, and it demonstrates that we have put the patients’ wellbeing first in

choosing such a lovely spot.”

In the summer months, the staff offer patients the opportunity to sit in their ‘outdoor patient lounge’ – several benches outside the clinic that overlook the water. “We invite them in when the clinician is ready,” says Linda.

And whilst the setting might offer the comfort of that all essential ‘blue space’, the clinic and the team also have the capacity to calm. The ‘friendly font’ signage is welcoming and, once visitors step inside, the opulent patient lounge feels more akin to a luxurious hotel than a dental practice, with centrepiece virtual skylights throughout that bring clear blue skies into the indoor space.

Linda explains, “When designing the clinic, we didn’t want to hand over all the responsibility to a designer. We wanted to add a personal touch

to the clinic. If we like it and feel comfortable here, then our relaxed approach to care will come across to patients. We tried to look at the clinic through the eyes of our patients. We walked through the clinic and imagined the flow and the patient experience, and wanted it to be uncomplicated, comfortable, luxurious, homely and welcoming.”

When it came to the decor, they studiously avoided the clichés of a nautical theme, instead opting for natural materials, such as wood and stone, to give the essence of a timeless and enduring environment.

Linda adds, “We have purposely cultivated a safe space for our patients that is unlike a traditional dental setting. This is especially important for nervous patients as their heightened sense of awareness can make them more anxious if they sense an environment they associate with their fear. We wanted our patients to feel like they are in a five-star hotel, a luxurious lounge, or even their home.”

The sumptuous sofas add to this hotel spa ambience with refreshments, magazines and wi-fi access readily available. There are complimentary toothbrushes so patients may freshen up before their appointment and a choice of perfumes, aftershaves and deodorants to refresh afterwards. Framed affirmations are scattered amongst the wall art and add positivity and encouragement to those less confident in a dental clinic. And these confidence-boosting words are reflected in the commitment of the care givers, too.

Linda says, “Naturally, we provide a service that offers the obvious expectations of a high-end clinic, but much of what we offer is subtle and can’t be manufactured. We always employ team members who are, first and foremost, kind and caring. Patients sense this the moment they walk through the door. Having now established a wonderful team, it is magic. It makes the patients feel welcome and part of the family. Although this is the experience at the front of house, this is also followed through in the treatment rooms. The clinicians genuinely care. They treat patients with the same kindness, ☺



Compassion and treatment planning that they would for their own family. It is an approach that involves the whole team, to ensure that the patient journey is a seamless and enjoyable one.”

They have just completed the refurbishment of a new hygiene suite. A compact room, which has made a big impression on the team – but, more importantly, the patients. The light on the ceiling gives a more open feel to the room and is mounted alongside ‘blossom tree’ feature lighting. The bespoke cabinetry with glass handles and the light oak floor bring opulence to the room. Once again, they opted for a Belmont chair – a Voyager 3 package in ultra-leather pro white wash. This is in addition to a Belmont Cleo II and a Belmont Compass already installed

Linda says, “We had a Belmont chair in our last clinic, and it was reliable, extremely comfortable for the patient and easy to use. So, it was a no-brainer for us to equip all three of our surgeries with Belmont again. When choosing the chair for each surgery, we spent a lot of time researching the options, attended several dental shows and even travelled down to London, to the Belmont showroom to try them out.

We went for white as it gives such a beautiful effect. And the chairs are still gleaming white even after three years. We hadn’t worked with McKillop before but from the moment we met Simon Pearce, its MD, we knew we were in safe hands. He is a true problem solver which is so important as you often have little headspace left when focusing on dentistry.”

Having created a dedicated hygiene space that offers a different ambience to the clinic’s other treatment rooms, they hope it will help patients psychologically separate the treatments and the clinicians.

“When patients attend for a hygiene visit, they feel that it is a separate treatment that requires a different mindset. They understand they are in control of their hygiene care and know that this is the room where they receive coaching and advice. We call it the Blossom Suite as it has a lovely blossom light box above the chair and the colour scheme has hues of delicate pink.”

And their expansion doesn’t stop there. They are now considering fitting out a fourth surgery, “not bad for a fully private squat,” says Linda. “It is an



exciting time for us as we have space to further expand to at least another two surgeries, possibly three. We are blessed with a fabulous team, who are so supportive and aligned with our values, and all want to see the clinic expand and be successful, so watch this space.”