

The Dental Barns

David Drew and Keely Thorne view their dental clinic as a 'celebratory destination'. Located next to an exclusive wedding venue, it sits comfortably alongside the other wellness and lifestyle businesses within this private courtyard setting

Two factors inspired us to create The Dental Barns. My wife, dentist Keely Thorne, felt frustrated in her associate positions because she could not provide what she believed to be the best possible care for her patients. I was made redundant as general manager at Dental Monitoring. Both experiences served as catalysts for change. I enjoy challenging the status quo and have always been passionate about delivering exceptional customer service. With The Dental Barns, we aimed to combine both.

FITTING IN

Location is key. Blackbrook Barns is an exclusive, luxury wedding venue set in the picturesque surroundings of Lichfield, Staffordshire.

The barns blend historical charm with modern elegance and wellness- and lifestyle-focused studios and shops complement the setting. There's a bridal shop, florist, coffee bar, yoga space, hair and beauty lounge, a nail salon, and family photographer.

We believe our vision for a luxury cosmetic dental clinic fits perfectly.

We want to create effortless, personal moments that elevate the everyday. For instance, the practice's waiting room provides views of the

**THE AIM WAS
TO REPLICATE
HIGH-END HOME
INTERIOR DESIGN.
WE DEVOTED
CONSIDERABLE
TIME TO EXPLORING
BOUTIQUE HOTELS
AND SPAS**

Step inside...

THE PRACTICE
The Dental Barns
Unit 2 & 3
Blackbrook Barns
London Road
Lichfield
WS14 0PS

TELEPHONE
01543 753357

WEBSITE
thedentalbarns.co.uk

Blackbrook stream, making each appointment feel unique.

Since we are located among other wellness businesses, that ambience is sensed as soon as you travel down the private driveway. There's no traffic, ample free parking and everything feels exclusive.

People are here only as visitors to our practice or other businesses, so patients feel at ease from the beginning – even before entering the building.

DESIGN FREEDOM

The interior design was a joint effort; we had an empty shell, a stone floor, exposed brick and rafters supporting the pitched roof. There were no partitions, so it allowed us free rein.

I designed the structural elements, including the feature designs, the flow for patients and staff, and surgery layouts. Keely meticulously crafted every décor aspect, from paint colours and cabinetry to light fixtures. Our skill sets complemented each other perfectly.

Our inspiration came from interior designers – a passion of Keely's – and the aim was to replicate high-end home interior design. We devoted considerable time to exploring boutique hotels, spas and various interior designers online.

The ethos

The Dental Barns is a destination where luxury, comfort and innovation redefine the traditional patient journey. Its ethos is grounded in three ideals: wellness, bespoke service/care, and exceptional quality. Designed to transform the dental experience into an enjoyable and calming journey, it aligns with self-care and integrates with surrounding high-end wellness and lifestyle businesses. Ultimately, the message is that dentistry can be both a positive and luxurious experience. Committed to remaining at the forefront of technology and patient experience, The Dental Barns continually refines its approach to ensure that every patient feels valued.





The lifestyle businesses reinforce the message that you can look forward to a dentist appointment just as much as getting your nails done or attending a yoga session.

We all acquired units at the same time and have built a friendly community here. The relationships we've formed have significantly impacted our business, helping us move forward. For example, the family photographer captured images and advised us on how best to light the practice when taking patient photos. The collaborative marketing approach broadens our reach.

A CHANGE IN PLAN

We signed the lease a few days before discovering we were expecting Delilah, our second daughter. Our first, Evelyn, was just 15 months old when Delilah was born. We had to take time out to make it work, so this was built into our plans. We had a run at establishing ourselves for four months before Keely needed to take three months off for a short maternity leave.

Since we had barely laid the foundations, we chose not to bring in support from another dentist. This carried too much risk of diverting



us from our vision, which was more important than finances then, but we managed to keep hygiene running smoothly. It's pretty exhausting, but you get through it.

Setting aside time is essential, and my best advice is to 'design' a sustainable working week that accommodates ample time for the business, family and self. Then, revisit this plan as needed. For example, we adjusted our schedule to accommodate nursery runs, starting each day at 10am for the first patient.

My other advice is to include small treats in your workplace – simple pleasures are crucial, especially when a day proves challenging.

EQUIPPING THE PRACTICE

One of our best achievements is our bespoke dentist and patient station. This system integrates all our diagnostic tools on a single platform, including digital X-ray sensors, intraoral cameras, and a 3D scanner, allowing us to share everything with patients in real-time on two 55-inch 4K screens.

When treatment begins, it transforms into a fully equipped entertainment system for the patient. Why am I so proud? Patient feedback has been exceptional, and it is the most utilised piece of dental equipment in the practice, which is the clearest sign of a successful implementation. We have invested significantly in technology

and compromised on very little. We either did things right or chose to delay implementation. This has added weight and credibility to our efforts; not only are we offering a tranquil experience, which can be very difficult to find in a healthcare setting, but we are also providing the absolute best care. To achieve this, we need the latest technology (not always, but most of the time).

The technology enhances the patient experience in many areas – smoother workflows, better transparency and improved communication.

Selecting suppliers and technology was a meticulous process driven by our commitment to excellence. Reliability was paramount, but so was the service – our suppliers had to meet our own high standards for care and responsiveness. In some cases, having direct access to engineers and software experts played a crucial role in bringing parts of our vision to life, allowing us to push boundaries and refine our approach.

SENSE DRIVEN

We were highly commended for treating nervous patients at the Private Dentistry Awards. The priority here is not feeling like a traditional dental practice. Most nervous patients have had a negative experience at some point and are easily reminded/triggered.

We challenged ourselves on the senses: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. We looked at each sense and drilled down to how we could move away from traditions. For example, we opted to locate our lounge (waiting room) as far away as possible from reception and the noise of the surgeries and decorate it as though it were a snug living room.

Pop a freshly ground cappuccino in the patient's hand, and you've tackled all the senses right there!

To create a comfortable patient experience, we chose a Belmont treatment centre. It resonated with our core values, which when simplified, centre on three ideals: wellness, bespoke service/care and exceptional quality. Belmont embodies all three features. A folding leg-rest avoids appearing overly 'dental' – patients initially sit comfortably for a chat rather than immediately propping their legs up for treatment. The design allows for





instruments to be concealed from view so patients aren't confronted with them as soon as they walk in. We also appreciated the luxurious fabric options and plush feel. It was the most comfortable chair we tried, and we sat in a fair few!

The most rewarding part of our journey has been making a real difference in people's lives. It has been incredibly fulfilling to witness patients transform from arriving in tears due to dental phobia during their first visit to eagerly anticipating their appointments after just a few sessions.

The Dental Barns focuses on helping patients manage anxiety associated with dental procedures, using techniques such as aromatherapy, noise-cancelling headphones, and ceiling-mounted TV screens. We feel fortunate to have a career that creates such a meaningful impact!

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

I like that our practice will become an ever-evolving business and never really be 'complete' or 'perfect', which will keep me much more entertained and enjoy business ownership!

The first (and most important) goal is to maintain our edge and continuously stay in the lead regarding technology and patient experience, which will be an ever-growing challenge.

Secondly, we want to add more value to the 'routine dental visit' to see it as a true wellness treat rather than an unpleasant rushed tick box. For example, we recently held a hygiene and reflexology session for VIP patients, which was exceptionally well received.

I envision the practice becoming a 'destination practice', where patients will be willing to travel to receive the



treatments and outcomes they want in a relaxing, tranquil location.

Our VIP list emerged from necessity more than anything else. Our priority is to deliver the highest possible standard of patient care, but due to our limited capacity, we had to be strategic.

The VIP list lets us prioritise our existing patients; the service is exceptional once you're with us. To maintain this level of care, we must limit the number of new patients we accept.

We only open up appointments to our waitlist members when we're confident that all existing treatments are booked and have 'white space' available. This sometimes means new patients may have to wait a few months for an appointment.

This approach isn't for everyone; however, it's worth the wait for those who value our bespoke, patient-first experience.

Who was involved?

Builder and cabinets
Pomec Dental

Marketing partners
Dengro

Decontamination and plant
NSK, Ultrawave, Cattani

Treatment centre
Belmont

Digital imaging
Dürr Dental

Suppliers
Align Technology, EMS, Enlighten, Ormco Spark, Trycare, 3shape