

Form and function

The latest low-maintenance, high-performance design elements are transforming dental practices into stylish suites of quiet professionalism. By **Frank Leggett**

When building, refurbishing or remodelling a dental surgery, there's more to think about than just the high-tech equipment. It's important to consider the latest ranges of surfaces, lighting systems and sound insulation that are both functional and aesthetically appealing.

Up-to-the-minute materials have resulted in high-performing, low-maintenance products—it's where style and substance come together seamlessly in a contemporary practice.

Once exorbitantly expensive, LED lighting is now affordable and effective. Architect Sam Russell of Create Dental, a design firm specialising in dental practices, explains that while the initial outlay is more expensive, there is a long-term saving. "Research shows that by factoring in the typical lifespan of the fitting (10 to 15 years), significantly lower energy consumption, reduced maintenance and increased reliability, LED lighting can cover this initial investment within the first 18 months of installation," he says. "And consider the environmental impact—LEDs can be around twice as efficient as fluorescent fittings, and LED downlights are up to

five times as efficient in comparison to halogen alternatives. There's also a component of mercury in fluorescent lighting that isn't present in LEDs."

Russell selects LED panels for clinical areas to give even lighting of 5500K (pure day light). This is suitable for colour matching any cosmetic and

of surgeries in Brisbane and along the Sunshine Coast. He selects a warmer spectrum downlight to create a more comfortable, homely ambience in the reception, waiting room and corridors.

Over the past decade, luxury tiles have upped the ante in regard to both performance and aesthetics.

Quote

Sam Russell, Create Dental

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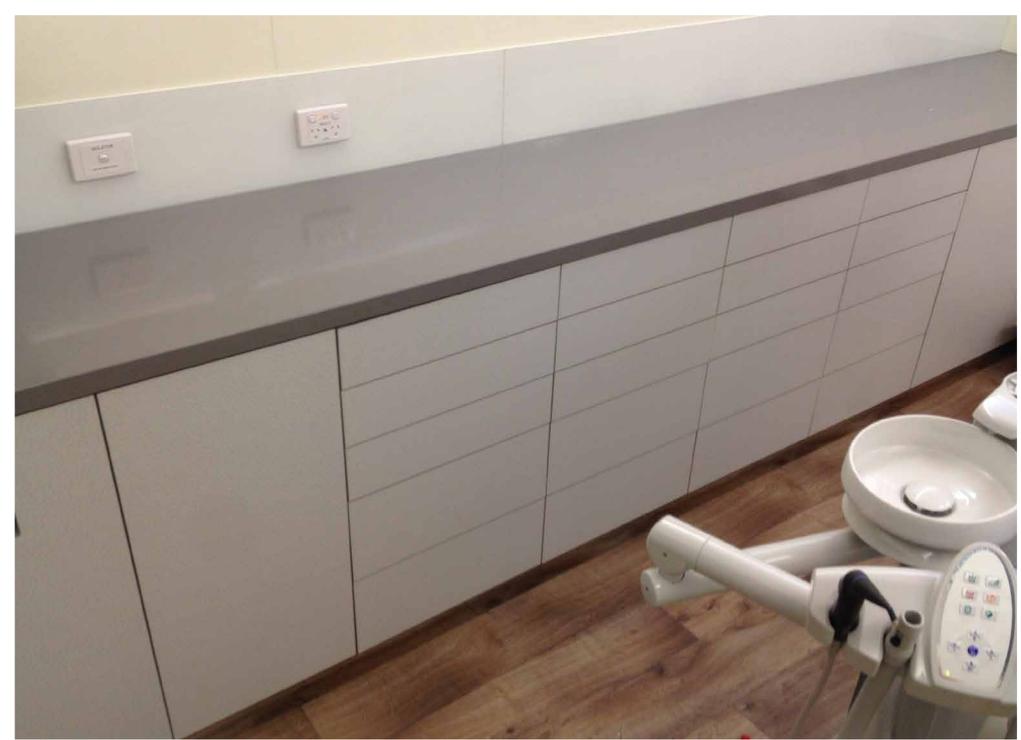
prosthetic work.

Architect Joe Adsett agrees that LED lighting is perfect as underlit lighting around cabinets, creating an even warm glow in the surgery. "Apart from specific lighting provided by suppliers like Henry Schein Halas, LED can be used as task lighting for sterilisation rooms and laboratories," he says.

In terms of the actual fixtures and fittings, however, downlighting is an effective, cost-saving option. "The costs have come down significantly," says Adsett whose firm has designed a raft

A good example is HDP (high definition porcelain) tiles, which utilises digital printing technology to achieve porcelain tile patterns with a higher resolution but with reduced pattern repetition. "This means that very realistic options are available for tiles to take the appearance of timber, natural stone and even fabrics and mosaics," says Russell. He says that HDP tiles are hard-wearing and easy to clean—an excellent option for high-traffic areas, such as in front of reception, and corridors.

"There are outstanding vinyl options



now available on the market that satisfy the slip ratings and cleaning criteria for surgeries. They can achieve many different design aesthetics including sleek polished concrete and rustic slate, as well as warm timbers,” says Russell.

Adsett notes that vinyl has a brilliant resilient finish for any surgery and there are a range of colours and patterns from

which to choose. He has often selected vinyl flooring from Armstrong’s sheeting range (www.armstrong-aust.com.au) that has a light tone with a speckle through it. “We also like to cover the skirtings and cornices to create a seamless environment,” he says.

Adsett has also installed woven vinyl from Bolon (www.bolon.com.au) that

Vinyl flooring has a brilliant resilient finish that works well in surgeries. Covering the skirtings and cornices creates a seamless environment.

gives “an extremely luxurious feel and look”. It’s more suitable for common areas, rather than surgeries as it’s harder to clean and quite expensive.

For a touch of elegance, carpet works a treat for the reception and waiting room. Russell says there are great advancements in carpet printing technology, and “custom colours and designs are easily printed onto commercial-grade carpet tiles at very high resolution for only a slight increase in cost to a standard carpet tile”.

Adsett points out that wear and tear is an issue when it comes to carpet. “You get track marks so you have to replace it—that’s why carpet tiles are a great solution compared to broadloom. We usually specify that an extra couple of boxes of tiles are delivered to the site so the owner can put them in storage. Replacing worn tiles is then quick and easy.”

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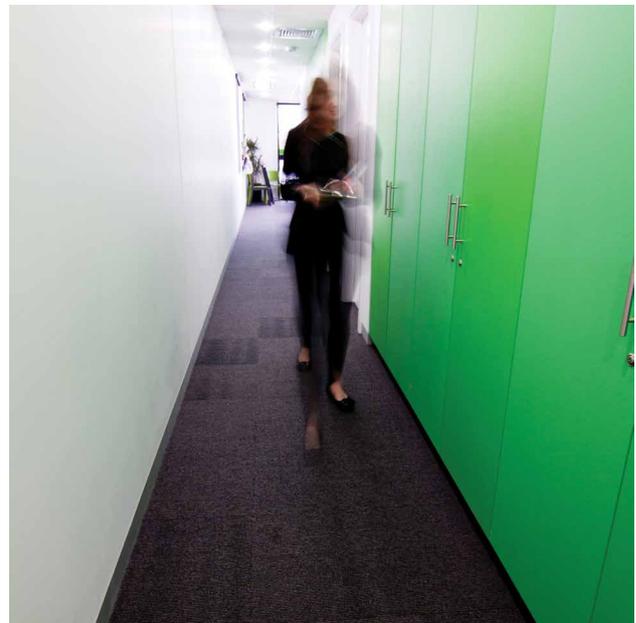
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Acoustic panelling can be installed using a variety of materials from fabric tiles to MDF wall and ceiling panels.

A recent material to emerge for flooring is bamboo. "It's cost effective and in the right setting, can bring a warm and comfortable aesthetic into the practice," says Russell.

Many floor surfaces, such as vinyl, can also be utilised as wall panels creating a wrap effect. Another aesthetic option on the market today is 3D wall panels. Russell says they are excellent as feature walls, and can come vinyl wrapped, making them suitable for use within surgeries. "Downlights on the 3D panels help to cast shadows and enhance the depth of field of the pattern," he says.

Acoustic panelling also needs to be considered when designing a dental practice. "They vary in material from timber to MDF and fabric, and come in a vast array of cut-out patterns, and in both wall and ceiling panels," Russell says. "These panels not only serve a functional purpose, but can be used as feature design elements to create a points of interest in the practice."

Adsett says the choice of insulation depends upon the environment within the surgery. It's worth appointing an expert in acoustic performances to suggest products the builders can use to achieve a certain acoustic rating.

"We've used double-laminated glass between surgeries to get a better acoustic performance. A lot of the time we use a ceiling tile or there is perforated plasterboard that cancels out some of the reverberation."

Another way to reduce noise is getting the right type of doors. Solid core, rather than hollow core doors, will reduce noise transference. "If you have glass, make sure it's double-laminated and there are really good seals around the doors to stop sound coming around," says Adsett.

It's also important to think about the layout to minimise external sounds. "Don't put the noisiest rooms—the surgeries—right next to the reception or consulting rooms. It's worth positioning quieter back-of-house areas in such a way that they buffer the surgeries and the lab," says the architect.

After all, there's nothing worse for an anxious patient than listening to a high-speed hand-piece while waiting for their appointment. □