

Mint's sustainability nets award, new clients

Southeast Portland's Mint Dental is the first clinic of its kind to receive a coveted LEED award

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It's a scene repeated countless times every day in dental offices. The dentist walks in and washes up at the sink while making small talk. But what happens if there's no sink?

Two years ago, Portland dentist Jason McMillan and his wife, Rebecca, relocated his Mint Dental practice to new quarters in Southeast Portland.

By design, Mint Dental has no sinks in the exam rooms. Instead, the dentist and hygienists use hand sanitizers, a practice endorsed by the federal Centers for Disease Control.

Last summer, because of its sink-less exam rooms and countless other green elements, Mint Dental became the first clinic of its kind to receive the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership for Environmental and Educational Design, or LEED, platinum designation, the highest level in the green-building rating system.

The investment in sustainable design has paid off in the two years since Mint opened in its current space. The company doesn't disclose total revenue, but the practice gained 800 new clients — half its practice — and Mint increased revenue by \$300,000 last year.

The practice's eight employees appreciate the healthier air quality, and the hip design has attracted a new generation of patients to the practice, which relocated from an old, inaccessible 900-square foot building in outer Southeast Portland in 2007.



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Under Rebecca McMillan's guidance, Mint Dental is saving money, growing profits and attracting clients.

Jason McMillan purchased the practice shortly after he graduated from Oregon Health & Science University's dentistry program.

It came with a thriving, but aging client base, and a cramped office that wasn't accessible to people with disabilities. Before long, he found himself looking for a better location, closer to downtown and transit.

Eventually, the couple settled on an empty 2,900-square-foot space at Southeast 14th and Morrison streets, not far from the Morrison Bridge. The cavernous space was in a former grocery being

renovated into a small shopping center with co-tenants that include a wine shop and Nostrana restaurant.

The couple wanted a green project — the dentist bikes to work from Eastmoreland and Rebecca McMillan once worked in the construction industry.

With guidance from Portland-based Green Building Services, which counsels business on how to design green buildings and to qualify for the coveted LEED plaque, they designed a unique space that looks more like a spa than a dental office.

The result is a uniquely sustainable

space, from the sink-less exam rooms to air scrubbers to energy-efficient electrical systems to the doors and hardware Rebecca McMillan salvaged from antique stores and building surplus yards.

Between the dentist and the clinic's three hygienists, Mint Dental calculates it used to go through hundreds of thousands of gallons of water per year just washing hands. Paper towels added to the waste stream. Eventually, McMillan hopes to add a partner to the practice, which would have created more water and trash.

Since the CDC actually recommends dentists use chemical hand sanitizers as a more effective alternative to hand washing, the design team led by Paolo Design Group elected to scrap the sinks. Sinks are such a given in the dental world that the couple had a hard time finding counters that didn't include them.

The U.S. Green Building Council awards its LEED plaque chiefly for what takes place during construction and what goes on beyond the wall. Its criteria encourages recycling construction waste, mechanical systems that cut water and power use, low-emission materials that contribute to healthier air quality. Mint Dental boasts all of those.

It's proven to be a solid business move. The clinic's existing clients stayed with it through the move from outer Southeast Portland, and at the same time, it has helped the practice recruit patients who appreciate its green-minded approach.

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