

PortlandTribune

This Mint goes green

Dentist's office hopes to mix pearly whites with platinum LEED rating

BY ERIC GOLD

Pamplin Media Group, Mar 11, 2008

The first thing you notice at Mint Dental Works is what's missing: the smell.

A state-of-the-art ventilation system at Mint eliminates medicinal odors, which can cause anxiety in some patients.

The system also is one component of the new office's environmentally friendly approach to the design and operation of a dental practice.

Dr. Jason McMillan, a graduate of the University of Oregon and Oregon Health & Science University's dental school, says you can't separate your health as an individual from the health of the environment.

When he and his wife, Rebecca, who co-owns the practice, began work on a new location, in a former grocery store on Southeast Morrison Street, they wanted to tend to both.

The end result is a dental office that stands to be the nation's first to be certified under LEED, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards for green building. (The McMillans' application is being processed; they are expecting a platinum rating, the highest one available.)

Entering the office, a visitor will notice the high ceilings, exposed wood beams, and a cool green color. The McMillans used as much salvaged material as possible in designing the interior of the space, finding refurbishing doors and decorative accents from the ReBuilding Center, Craigslist.org and Aurora Mills Architectural Salvage in Aurora.

They had the specialized cabinetry, with storage for various dental tools and supplies, custom-made Skyblend, a recycled particle board produced by Dillard-based Roseburg Forest Products.

The material has none of the fume-producing urea-formaldehyde that often is added to such wood, a contributor to the clean air enjoyed by staff and patients alike.

A round table in a private consultation area, Rebecca McMillan says, is made from a piece of flooring salvaged from the nearby Grand Central Bowl, the site of one of the couple's first dates.

Saving water is key to the green checkup. As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend for the health care environment, the McMillans use alcohol rub instead of soap and water for handwashing sinks in the examination rooms.

They also have a waterless evacuation system, to vacuum a patient's mouth without using the gallons per minute required to turn the propeller of the typical water-driven system. These practices save 220,000 gallons of water each year, Rebecca McMillan says.

A digital X-ray machine uses 40 percent less radiation than the older film radiography. (About a third of dentists now use digital radiography.)

The health risks of radiation, Jason McMillan says, are "a concern that comes up regularly with my patients." Digital radiography also doesn't need any toxic film-developing chemicals, which can get into the ground or municipal water supply.

The digital model has other benefits, too, he says, such as the ease of sharing images with specialists over the Internet. He also is able to manipulate the image to bring out certain aspects of hard and soft tissues in



JIM CLARK / PAMPLIN MEDIA GROUP
Hygienist Kellie Kewi cleans the teeth of patient Pat Witt at Mint Dental Works, which prides itself on environmentally friendly practices.

For fillings, Jason McMillan substitutes a resin for the standard dental amalgam, which contains mercury and other metals. He says this is more due to concerns about the environment than about any direct health threat posed by amalgam.

Any mercury from patient's existing fillings that gets into his evacuation system is caught by a sediment canister and kept out of the water supply.

Software specifically designed for dental practices allows the office to use less paper. Jason McMillan hopes to take the practice fully paperless in the summer, when the software developer rolls out an update that will have more advanced health record-keeping features.

"The idea was that we would build a space that functions like a dental office, but doesn't feel like one," McMillan says. "We're providing health care. We should do it in the healthiest environment possible."

Mint Dental Works

1401 S.E. Morrison St., #108, 503-254-1323

www.mintdentalworks.com

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