“Good design will pay off”
An interview with Drs Mona Patel and Marcus Riedl

Just as in dentistry in general, where aesthetic aspects are becoming ever more important, dentists today are pursuing intentional design of their dental practices. With the launch of four new design lines, Dentsply Sirona Treatment Centers presents dentists with the opportunity to enhance workflows and treatment efficacy through clever and cutting-edge solutions while conveying their individual style. Dental Tribune spoke with German dentist Dr Marcus Riedl and Dr Mona Patel from the US, both of whom have ensured careful design of their practice environment based on their needs and preferences with a Dentsply Sirona line, about the role of aesthetics in daily dental practice.

Dental Tribune: Design can convey emotions and distinguish a dental practice from others. In your opinion, what relevance does design have in this regard?

Dr Mona Patel: In the US market, it has not played an important role for a long time. Now, with the newer generation of dentists, design aspects are increasingly significant. I think it is just as important as the type of equipment that one purchases or the insurance one carries, because image is everything. In my opinion, the design of the practice is a direct reflection of how one provides care as a dentist. This correlation was not present in previous generations, but it is now.

Dr Marcus Riedl: In Germany, it has not played an important role for a long time. Now, with the influence of design in our practices is increasing. One has to consider that we spend almost half of our lives in our practice, so we should feel comfortable. For example, I love the mountains, skiing and the atmosphere of the Alps. Incorporating this love for nature into the design of my practice gives me a holiday feel at work.

When deciding on a particular design or the overall look of your practice, what did you put special emphasis on?

Patel: Dental anxiety is a huge component of what we have to manage, so we need to create an environment that first and foremost has a calming, spa-like feel and reduces our patients’ anxiety when they walk through the door. Secondly, in my practice, I wanted the design to be evidently smart, because that reflects my meticulous personality. I equipped the whole office with Dentsply Sirona products—in fact, it was the first all-Dentsply Sirona office in the US. I wanted to showcase the high-tech equipment and design a nice, simple office around that—not to compete with the equipment, but to enhance it.

Riedl: For many of our patients, the design aspect is just an outer shell, since they come to us for the content. We designed our practice for patients to feel at home. When they come into the office, they do not see any units at first. As for dental phobia, in my opinion, reducing anxiety mainly is the responsibility of the staff. However, a calming atmosphere is a great support, of course.

Patel: In health care, whole-body awareness and preventative health are becoming ever more important. A practice today is not just about treating tooth pain, but about establishing a dental home, creating a place where patients can establish a relationship with their dentist and their hygiene team.

Dentsply Sirona has developed four different design worlds: Embellished Elegance, Cheerful Patterns, Honest Materials and Pure Shapes. Which one did you decide on and why?

Patel: We chose Honest Materials because our practice has all this enhanced digital technology, which can be intimidating. I wanted to balance this digital aspect of our practice with natural and organic materials. We have a lot of birch and wood—clean, sleek, simple and balanced materials that hopefully move the focus from the equipment. My design in general is very monochromatic, nothing too messy or cluttered.

Riedl: We too choose Honest Materials, mainly because I like...
nature. In our previous office design, we used the colours white, grey and green. In order to preserve our corporate identity, we wanted to keep these and combined them with a lot of wood and glass, because we wanted to convey the nature aspect to our patients. Technology is cold and patients do not want to be confronted with it directly, so we created the look of a mountain lodge. Our floors are even called “valley station”, “middle station” and “mountain station”, for example.

Do you feel that patients appreciate the effort?

Riedl: Some do, some do not. Patients who share the same values as we do feel more comfortable than those who think the design is unnecessary for dentistry or think it makes the cost of their care more expensive.

Patel: Good design does not have to be expensive. Nevertheless, for some reason, if one puts a great deal of effort into the design of one’s practice, it is perceived as though one put a lot of money into it, which is not always the case.

Would you say that the investment in the design is also reflected in the success of the practice?

Patel: In the US, many things are based on return on investment. It is easier to convince oneself to invest in a CEREC or CBCT device, because one sees an immediate return on investment. However, trying to convince oneself to invest in the design with nicer cabinetry or floorplans, where there is not a direct return on investment, is more difficult. But, I am a firm believer that if one works in a beautiful and happy place, it reflects one’s standards and that is the greatest return on investment. Patients see that. If one sees that love is in every detail, the financial aspect fades in importance, the design fulfills one as a person and one’s patients appreciate the resulting work.

Riedl: Sometimes, it is about the little things. For example, my wife puts fresh flowers in every corner of the practice, which I love. However, design polarises. It divides our patients into at least two groups. Those who are interested in and impressed by our design appreciate it, of course. Others do not. I believe that treatment units and high-end equipment establish a sense of professionalism, quality and exclusivity. No patient can judge a dentist’s quality and knowledge at first sight, but, in the eyes of the patient, design and technology often are equivalents for quality, so good design will pay off.

There are countless treatment units on the market and they differ a great deal. What did you consider when deciding on a system?

Riedl: The treatment units are our workbenches—very expensive ones (laughs), but workbenches nonetheless. It has to be stable, easy to use, intuitive, ergonomic and comfortable for the patient, as well as for the dentist and the assistants—and, of course, easy to clean. It has to aid our treatment and therefore our daily work as a dentist. It is like the systems in one’s car or a smartphone. A good design, of course, is welcome too. That is why the Teneo was our system of choice.

You both use Teneo. What sets the unit apart from those you have used before?

Riedl: As a dentist, I have always worked with Sirona, now Dentsply Sirona. Therefore, there was no question of the brand I would choose. In our previous office, we used the M1 for almost 30 years—I, of course, used it only for about ten years—and I did not want to change my habits and movements during treatment. Comparing the M1 with the Teneo is like comparing an old Mercedes-Benz with a new one. It is the same quality. The Teneo might be not as solid as the good old M1, but has more features that are useful.

Patel: I was designing a new office, so I had a clean slate to work with. I did a great deal of research and comparisons. For me, the look and the design were important, as were functionality, integration, longevity and being able to sanitise it easily. I was instantly drawn to Teneo, because, as I said, I do not like clutter. The fact that everything was integrated was an instant attraction to me. I found solutions to all my wishes in the Teneo. It was an easy decision to make and we designed the office around the units.

Thank you very much for the interview.