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## Projects

### Interiors Awards 2014: Healthcare: Small

By Lydia Lee. Photography by Stéphane Groleau • January 24, 2014



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#### Bloor West Dental Group

Designer: Southside Design

Client: Dr. Carolyn Poon Woo and Gerry Lee Wing

Location: Toronto, Canada

*"This well-executed project sets an aspiration. Lively and modern, it helps relieve dental visit anxiety. Its design shows sensitivity to the streetscape by both blending in and standing out, and its light-filled spaces have a sophisticated palette of finishes." JURY*

At an open house party that Dr. Carolyn Poon Woo held in her new Toronto dental office, a friend said, "You know, this would be a great little bar at night." From its expansive glass facade to its open interior, furnished with midcentury pieces, nothing

about the office of Bloor West Dental Group screams "dentist." Poon Woo, who has had her own practice for more than 20 years, wanted a warm, inviting space where necessary technologies are subtly integrated to avoid intimidating patients.

Toronto-based Southside Design, founded by interior designer Stephanie Kamburis and architect Bruce Stratton, brought Poon Woo's vision to life. She admired Stratton's renovation of a local library branch, and asked the firm to transform a former bank she had purchased. "Dental offices can be somewhat dreary spaces, with painted walls and vinyl composite tile floors," Stratton says. "It has been a fun challenge to take the whole dental office as we know it and turn it on its head," Kamburis says.

The design team called for a complete overhaul of the 5,000-square-foot building on busy Bloor Street West. In addition to a new facade, they designed a new roof with a large skylight to bring daylight into the center of the linear space. The ground floor had to be raised to meet code and that necessity became a virtue, giving the reception area, elevated above the street, a stage-like presence.

As patients ascend the entrance ramp, they take in views through the entire space. The clinic's interior features linear and modern elements, softened by organic curves and natural materials. "We put a lot of thought into choosing natural materials and how they would work subconsciously to remove that negative association with the dentist," Kamburis says. The reception area is defined by a series of posts and beams clad in walnut, which frame a limestone-clad wall and walnut-paneled reception desk with a white quartz countertop. The curvy desk and Noguchi coffee table contrast the crisply tailored BassamFellows Tuxedo sofas.

A wide range of lighting fixture types were selected for a relaxed atmosphere. In addition to natural and ambient fluorescent lighting, a row of metal-halide fixtures highlights the limestone wall, which also has a long, narrow niche lit with LED strip lighting. In lieu of artwork, the designers created a lively linear pattern of fluorescent lights covered in amber and white 3form acrylic panels. "We shy away from ornament and try to design visual interest into the space," Stratton says. "Here, we designed the lighting so you can change out the acrylic easily and rebrand the space. It extends the shelf life of the design."

Within the 11 treatment rooms, the design team created soothing environments. Reflecting a trend in dental clinic layouts, the rooms have no doors and are open to the hallway, instead of being entirely enclosed. Narrow glass dividers with walnut frames between rooms allow natural light to penetrate. Rear-delivery units, located behind the patients' chairs, have pass-through cabinets that can be accessed from both sides, allowing sterilized equipment to be replenished without disruption. When patients are at their most vulnerable, staring up at the ceiling, Southside Design's innovative ceiling coffers, lined with walnut acoustical paneling, provide a reassuring sense of continuity.



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"The designers really listened to what we wanted and incorporated all the functional things that we needed," Poon Woo says. "I think the design's success is that it not only looks good, it functions very well."

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