

## Open Up and Say, Ahh

### Dayton Dental Collaborative building oozes tranquillity

By Peter Bracher

lawns that open up the room and offer a connection with the natural world.

The various connections with the outdoors are a conscious part of the design. They began with the interests of the owner, who is a pilot and wanted views of the sky. They become an important part of the effort to create a soothing atmosphere. The creation of open, uncluttered space and the abundance of natural light also contributes to the serenity of the place.

Collaborative building. A high level of design and finish is characteristic of everything from the door handles to the light fixtures. Many furnishings were custom-made for this project to provide a high degree of functionality (as in the sterilization room) as well as a consistency of style.

This elegant building has been thoughtfully designed for people — staff as well as patients. It proves that going to the doctor doesn't have to be a downer.

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DAYTON DENTAL COLLABORATIVE BUILDING

If you have ever lost your way in a maze of narrow corridors and confusing turns trying to get from your doctor's examining room back to the waiting room, you will appreciate the merits of the Dayton Dental Collaborative office building. It eliminates virtually all the petty annoyances of the typical medical office.

Very aware that a trip to the dentist is a high-anxiety undertaking for many people, the architect, Jennifer Shelhouse of Martin-Beachler Architects, also tried to create space that helps patients relax. If a building can minimize stress, this is surely it.

This unobtrusive structure, completed in 2003, recently won a well-deserved honor award from the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects. It sits back from Far Hills Ave. in an area where conventional medical offices line both sides of the street south of Rahn Road. The simple brick, limestone and glass building steers clear of the current fashion for offices that makes them look like houses in a suburban plat. Unlike its neighbors it will, 50 years from now, remain a good example of early 21st-century contemporary design.

This design emerges from the building's functions, the organization of its space, and a carefully considered program. The result is a pleasing, sculptural structure placed in a surprisingly natural setting. Its interest comes primarily from the interplay of right-angled and curving forms. Its most distinctive feature is a

roof that evokes the curving line created by air flowing over the wing of an plane.

What is almost startling for a first-time visitor is the clarity of the building's layout. As you enter the reception area, a wide passageway leads directly to the check-in desk. To your right is an alcove with a table, a phone, an Internet connection for a laptop computer, and a bookcase — a thoughtful amenity for patients-in-waiting.

To the left, a spacious waiting room is flooded with natural light from a semi-circular window wall. Instead of a blaring TV and heaps of dog-eared magazines, the tables offer a selection of art books — drawings by Escher or art glass by Chihully. It is a pleasing, comfortable space with glimpses of the natural setting that the large, suburban lot provides.

The open, two-story treatment area is organized around a simple, circular traffic pattern. The layout of treatment rooms along the perimeter of this space can be understood at a glance. The corridor is a generous five feet wide, and the color-coded treatment rooms are easy to find. The space is full of light from clerestory windows that also offer changing views of the sky. Windows at the end of the corridors frame views of the outdoors.

This sense of spaciousness extends to the treatment rooms themselves. Floor-to-ceiling windows opposite each dental chair provide patients with views of treelines, shrubbery, and

This atmosphere has been reinforced by countless other details, from soft, New Age music to the images of clouds incorporated into the graphics in the corridors.

The unexpected choice of warm gray walls, reflecting a personal preference of the owner and coupled with blonde wood, is not a dated decorating cliché but one more way of projecting a feeling of tranquility.

Indeed, the striking attention to detail is one of the special features of the Dayton Dental