

Something to Smile About

By **BETSY DIJULIO**

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Does an anticipated visit to the dentist's office conjure up thoughts of anesthetics rather than esthetics or sedation rather than meditation?

If so, you can leave those notions outside the fashionable front doors of two dentists in Hampton Roads. Doctors Thomas J. DeMayo and Lisa Marie Samaha are among those who are putting a new face on the practice of dentistry.

With their focus first and foremost on the patient's experience, both dentists have opted for sophisticated spaces with streaming sunlight and upscale contemporary design. In these stylish environs, stainless steel is as common as surgical steel and beautiful ceramic is just as likely to be found on tiles as it is on teeth.

Choosing flooring, finishes and fabrics was second nature to Susan DeMayo who worked as a freelance interior decorator before choosing to manage her husband's practice. Dr. DeMayo has been a dentist for 26 years and an endodontist for 13.

"Starting from scratch" in a gutted space on the second floor of a Bayside office building, Susan eschewed her personal taste for traditional French Country antiques to create a sleek but welcoming contemporary suite of offices and operatories.

A glass brick wall and tiled entrance creates a mini foyer that allows Susan to stop what she's doing as soon as she hears the door open so that she may greet patients face-to-face. A contiguous and curving sweep of Corian is more on a par with a trendy home breakfast bar than an office reception counter and feels far more welcoming than, as Susan describes, "a typical square window that people shut in your face."

The adjacent waiting area could easily be mistaken for a cozy living room with its stylish upholstered sofa and side chairs, large leather ottoman, handsome lamps and artwork bearing a distinctly Decorum and Storehouse flare. Ditto the powder room with its attention to detail and the wine cooler with bottled water that replaces the ubiquitous office water cooler.

Susan's choice of upholstery, wallpaper and accessories with an understated yet mod circular motif is fresh and fun, while the taupe, sage and cream color palette keeps the atmosphere calming. A "tweedy" carpet, neutral granite-look floors and Corian counters throughout continue the understated and calming flow from room to room. Dark woods in the public spaces and natural wood with frosted acrylic accents in the offices provides the best of both worlds.

Though root canals may never be one of life's greatest joys, the DeMayos have certainly bent over backwards to make this "un-nerving" experience as pleasant as possible.

In practice since 1983, Dr. Lisa Marie Samaha, decided in 2004 to relocate her practice to Newport News' tony and eclectic Port Warwick community. Her widely-recognized Port Warwick Dental Arts Center for Cosmetic Dentistry and Dental Medicine and her dental Institute bearing the same name occupy both floors of the handsome building. When Institute functions are not in session, the second story doubles as

EVEN THE POWDER ROOM IS ANYTHING BUT BUSINESS AS USUAL AT THE OFFICE OF DR. DEMAYO.

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The Upper Gallery where Dr. Samaha maintains her art studio.

Over 200 paintings by Dr. Samaha, an accomplished and prolific watercolorist working in a wide range of styles with a similarly wide range of subjects, grace the walls of her practice. In many ways, the paintings embody the philosophy of her practice where, as she asserts, "Everything is artistically done."

Though she worked with an architect and interior designer, Dr. Samaha confesses that she "had to make every decision" herself. Here, as in DeMayo's offices, hip yet tasteful contemporary furnishings "wow" as they welcome. In the living room style lobby, a high-backed sofa upholstered in tone-on-tone plum fabric coordinates with four similarly proportioned side chairs in shades of plum, taupe, sage, gold and brown. This rich color palette is carried throughout the space and is enhanced by warm dark woods, faux stone finishes and black accents on the reception counter and elsewhere.

The lobby, with its vaulted ceilings, windows and transoms is flooded with light and offers patients their first glimpses of the tranquil Koi pond, fountain and meditation garden, with their faintly Japanese undertones which are echoed indoors in artwork and accessories such as shoji screens. The consultation room and all of the treatment rooms also provide patients with expansive views of the garden through large picture windows.

Here serenity intentionally and artfully reigns.

As these cases illustrate, when dental professionals are as concerned about patients' feelings as they are about their fillings — *ba-dum-bum* — one result is visually stimulating interior spaces that relax and reassure. •