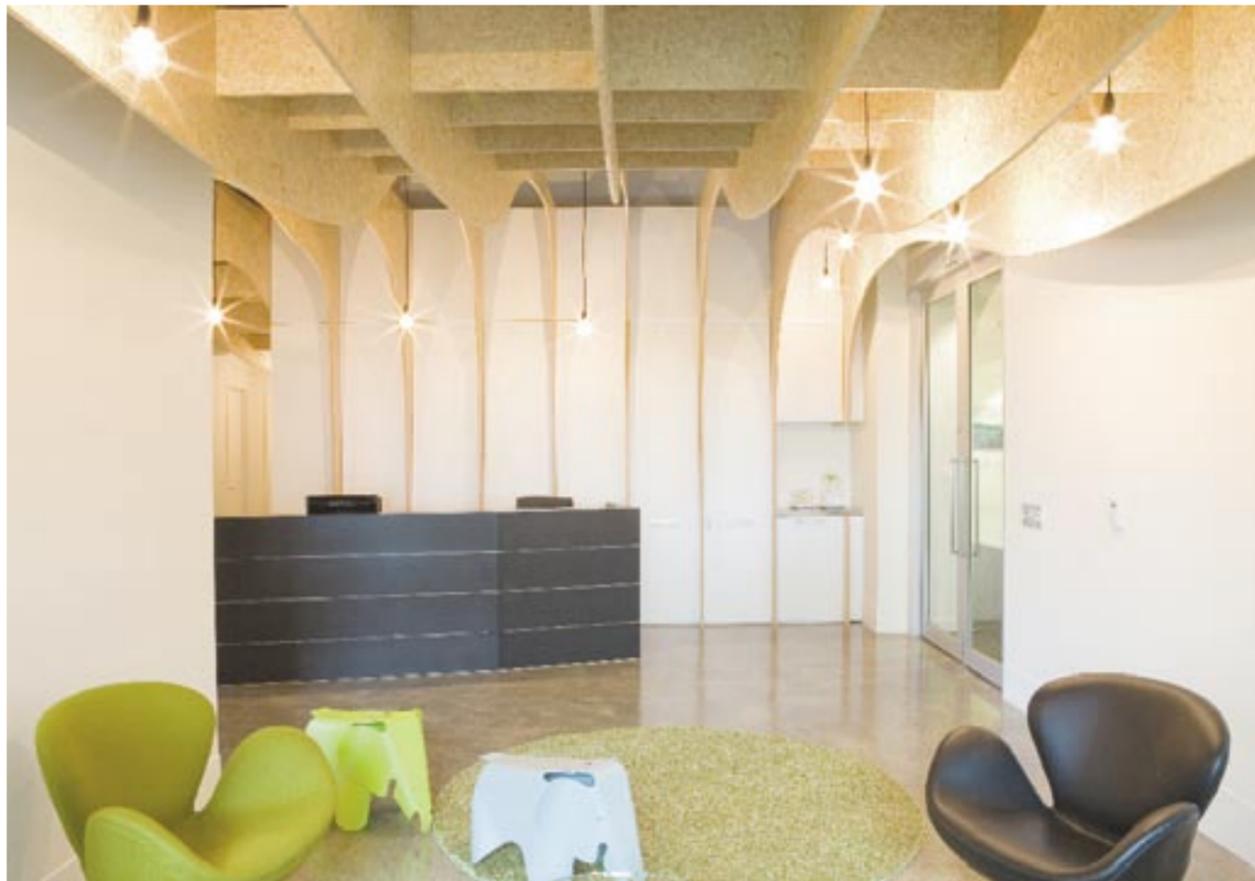


Three-dimensional perspective



Tim Dorrington Architects medical clinic design features a series of contoured ceiling-attached fins manufactured from strand board. The fins also descend down the wall behind the reception desk, providing some visual texture to the otherwise neutral wall and drawing the eye down to floors of polished concrete. The ceiling feature was router cut, delivered in 80 pieces, and assembled on site by one tradesperson.

Clinical Trials

Breeding an atmosphere of good health at a new women's health clinic. Photos: Emma-Jane Hetherington.

Medical clinics, well-worn places where the lino wraps up the walls and the tang of disinfectant hangs heavily in the air. In the waiting room it's hot, too hot, and the carpet is as worn as the magazines.

Or not, as the clinic on these pages shows. Admittedly, here's a specialist women's health clinic; perhaps there's more room for mould breaking?. Still, the form of this clinic would have been quite different if the client - Dr Anil Sharma - didn't have a rebel streak, a vision of something better.

Sharma enlisted Tim Dorrington Architects for the clinic design. Architects Tim Dorrington and Sam Atcheson say that he had done his research, singling out commercial interior projects (RCP in Parnell, with its semi-industrial aesthetic orchestrated by RTA Studio, was one) that he thought interesting. The rationale behind the clinic design was to create a sense of comfort and confidence. The design challenge was to take the elements Sharma liked and find a treatment appropriate to the space.

That space, however, when empty, was not particularly interesting. There was no heritage value, and, says Dorrington, the only thing really going for it was the "ceiling height and a big old oak tree" outside the window. There were also budget constraints, so certain treatments weren't possible. However, from adversity arises innovation. The architects, with Sharma's assent, treated the clinic's exam rooms and reception desk as four individual objects within the space, unified under a distinctive ceiling treatment.

"Effectively we treated it as one big room," says Atcheson, "with a series of fins over the top of a series of objects that are related but sitting more loosely. The rooms have subtly different heights and angles, and the rectilinear reception desk is placed

on an angle to reinforce this idea."

Under the ceiling of the clinic, and across the tops of the rooms and common areas, runs a series of undulating wooden fins that define the space without making it feel compressed. The slots between the fins offer just a peek at what lies beyond. Says Dorrington, "Every decision we made was based on the most efficient way of doing something - hence the use of strand board on the ceiling, which usually goes unseen under floor coverings such as carpet. It's not generally a finish material. We looked at using plywood but the inherent grain meant marrying joins inconspicuously was a problem. Strand board has no grain."

The fins are functional and a strong visual element, but they also contribute warmth, which goes some way to achieving the 'residential feel' Sharma wanted. Custom-built plywood furniture in the exam rooms furthers this natural warmth. The eco-ply beds in these two rooms contain built-in storage and nifty pop-out shelves, while the carpet and hand basins seem more house-related than health-related. Aside from the surgery, which as far as I can tell has all the necessary accoutrements one would associate with such a place, there is little here that is medicinal.

The furniture in the reception is also typically residential. I wonder if it took all of Sharma's resolve to avoid taking the feminine metaphor to the nth degree by adding some 'Womb' chairs.

Despite the client's pre-design predisposition to the semi-industrial, the result here makes only subtle nods to that aesthetic: polished concrete floors, irregularly positioned dolly lights and glimpses of inner workings through the ceiling fins. This design is refined rather than semi-industrial; a collection of well-fitted parts.

Client Q+A: Dr Anil Sharma. ProDesign// What was your brief to the architects?

AS// From memory, feminine, friendly, warm, relaxing, different, open, not too weird...

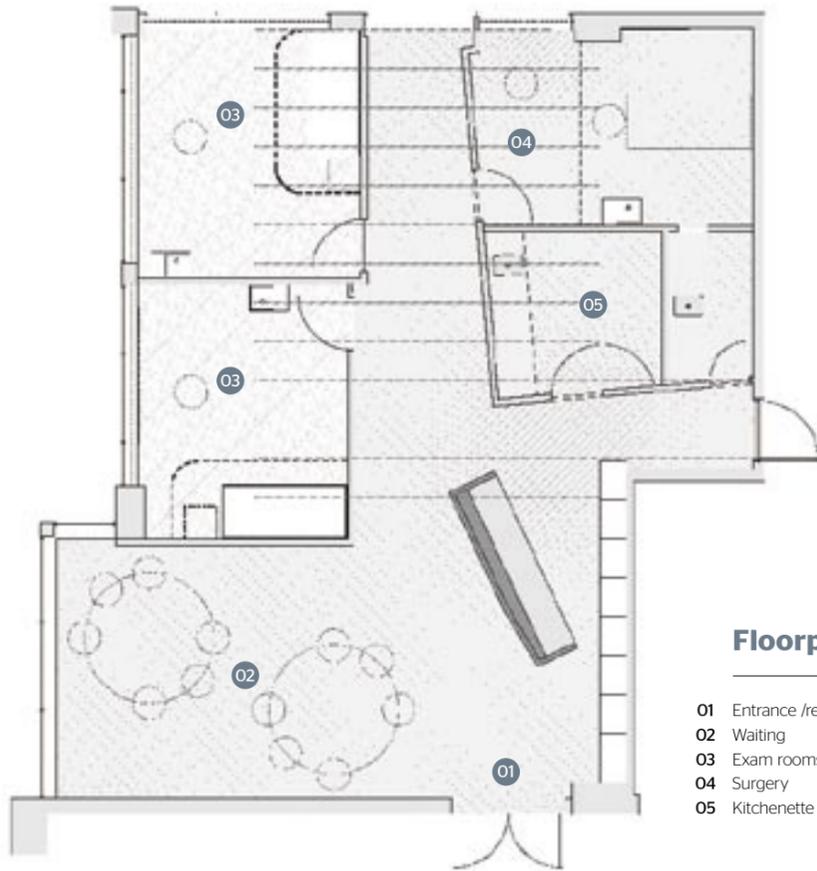
PS// Why look beyond the typical medical aesthetic?

Anil Sharma// There are many reasons this type of fit-out appealed to me. The overriding one was that I have to work there for the next 15-20 years and will spend at least two to three days a week there. I wanted something original that I had a hand in making. Other issues included the provision of a different aesthetic to people - patients, their kin and friends - who in many other ways are demanding a better balance between form and function. I see patients of all ages and the responses so far have vindicated the vision. I wanted to provide a pleasant, relaxed space that held a new visitor's interest and hopefully alleviated some of their anxieties. I also wanted to make a positive move away from the traditional.

PD// What were the influences that led to this more overtly architectural design? Had you visited clinics with a similar treatment?

AS// No, I hadn't seen anything like this, although there is a place in Ponsonby that has pods and is quite space age. I knew I wanted polished concrete floors and open ceilings. Tim and Sam suggested wooden fins and pods. Unfortunately the budget and need for functionality did not allow mobile offices on wheels! My wife Rachel and I loved the strand board solution, and we also wanted to pay a little homage to ply, as in the ply in Kiwi bach kitchens, and hence the kitchenette bench and patient exam couches in plywood. **MB**

Exam rooms at the clinic are on the left. Subtle variations in depth and height create the impression that these elements are individual objects. The surgery and kitchenette are on the right. The subtly angular treatment (see plan, below) is reinforced by the position and shape of the front desk.



Floorplan

- 01 Entrance /reception
- 02 Waiting
- 03 Exam rooms
- 04 Surgery
- 05 Kitchenette

Selected credits

- Client** Dr Anil Sharma
- Designers** Tim Dorrington Architects
- Project manager** Cemac Auckland
- Services consultant** AFS Total Fire; APG Thompson
- Glass Work** Glass Projects
- Window Treatments** Mr Sparkle
- Paint** Meredith Painting
- Flooring** Basically Floors
- Lighting** Team Cabling
- IT** Clique IT
- Rugs Carpets** Irvine International
- Textiles** The Fabricroom
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