

Style focus: Friel & McGahon Dental

Winners of Most Attractive Practice at the 2016 Irish Dentistry Awards, **Fergus Friel** explains how vision and persistence paved the way for award-winning surgeries

In March 2015 we opened the doors of Friel and McGahon Dental for the first time, with high hopes and empty pockets. It was the culmination of nine hectic months, and represented the greatest gamble of our careers: entering into the financial unknown as a married couple with four young children to support.

My wife Aimee (McGahon) and I studied dentistry in the Dublin Dental Hospital, Trinity College, in 2002. After both working for a year or so in Dublin, we moved to Aimee's home town of Dundalk, where we worked for a decade as associates in private practice. This period of our life was productive, settling in to a new life in a provincial town, getting married, having four children and all that goes with family life.

But when our work circumstances changed we were given the impetus to evaluate where we wanted to be in 10 years' time, so we began to consider the option of opening our own practice.

Dr Fergus Friel BA BDentSc

Fergus graduated from Trinity College Dublin in 2002. Originally from Mayo, he moved to Dundalk in 2003 and has been working in the region ever since. He is a member of the Irish Dental Association and enjoys the variety of general dentistry as well as the challenge of more complex cases. When he's not in the surgery, Fergus can be found obsessing over his garden and finding new ways of stopping his two dogs from wrecking it.

I had reservations about how viable it would be to open our own practice in such challenging economic times, particularly as we had a young family to support. But then I had to consider that we were known in the area and that we had a clear vision of what we felt would make a successful practice, so as time went on, it felt more like a calculated risk than a foolhardy gamble.

By the time I announced my intentions to Aimee on a walk through Dundalk town centre one afternoon, she was relieved that the penny had finally dropped and we could now get on with our plans!

Location and vision

Finding a location was the easy part as we had spotted a commercial space available in a great location within the town. What's more, it was completely unfinished inside, which had the advantage of allowing us to dictate the layout and design.

Our architect, Frank McGahon of McGahon Architects, immediately understood our vision for the practice and created plans that not only catered for the very specific needs of a dental practice, but did so in a way that filled our practice with light, giving a bright and airy atmosphere.

The task of pricing with builders followed, and thankfully Mark Courtney of House 2 Home offered to take on the project at a very competitive price. He came to us with a reputation for very high standards in terms of finish and detail and we were satisfied he could meet our exacting standards.

For us, the practice needed a level of finish that would reflect the high standards of care we hoped to offer.

Finance and building

Financing the project was our next step, and this was a tense period. The lender we eventually proceeded with, Ulster Bank, took an interest in us as individuals, taking into account our presence in the locality and our vision for the practice.

Our accountant Joe Durnin and solicitor John McGahon provided great support in navigating this phase of the project. Securing finance was probably the biggest step in the process and brought home that this was something that was really going to happen.

Once building commenced the project took off very quickly indeed. We were very lucky because our architect, builder and equipment suppliers Daire O'Neill and Simon Shawe from DMI were very willing to work together, so any problems that we encountered were quickly resolved.

Dental practices have very specific electrical services demands by their nature, and our electrical contractors, Evan Henry Electrical, were invaluable in meeting our needs, often calling on-site at short notice to keep the project on course.

Colours and décor

In terms of décor, we wanted the overall look to be clean, streamlined and airy. Our architect created a beautiful, bright reception area that has made the most of our large

WE COULDN'T HAVE
DONE IT
WITHOUT...

Architects

McGahon Architects

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Builders

House 2 Home

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Electrical contractors

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Equipment suppliers

DMI

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Web/graphic design

Smudge Design

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Irish Dentistry Awards 2016
WINNER



A light and spacious waiting and reception area



A glimpse into one of the bright and airy surgeries



Aimee and Fergus chose a cyan-coloured A-dec dental chair



Aimee McGahon and Fergus Friel

corner windows. We have a waiting area that has a glass partition wall dividing it from the reception for a light and spacious feel, while still giving the reception area the privacy it requires. This glass partition has a beautiful ash frame that divides the glass panels and reflects the slats of the corner window unit.

We also used glass blocks to divide the three individual surgeries. This has allowed light from the floor to ceiling window in the first surgery to carry through to the adjacent second and third surgeries. In addition to brightening up the surgeries, the floor to ceiling glass window connects patients to the outside world and is a relaxing view to look at while undergoing treatment.

We were reassured by a reputation for reliability with A-dec dental chairs and I had built up a good rapport with Daire from DMI in the infancy of our project. Aimee fell in love with the cyan colour and the 'space age' stitch work on the upholstery.

We found that white, grey and cyan were a beautiful colour combination, so we have painted the walls white and have light grey marmoleum flooring, while cyan was used as a feature colour on the doors and other small details of the décor.

We used high gloss white surgery cabinetry, keeping the drawer combinations

symmetrical where possible, and even had a custom designed high gloss reception desk made to complement the high gloss surgeries.

Selecting each finish or item of décor was made easier by having a clear vision of what we wanted and staying faithful to that.

IT FELT MORE LIKE A CALCULATED RISK THAN A FOOLHARDY GAMBLE

This colour scheme was carried through to our practice uniform, logo and website, retaining a streamlined effect.

The final finish

We have never looked back since opening our practice 12 months ago, but it is not without its trials and tribulations. We work far longer hours than ever before, but it is a long-term investment and we are rewarded in the short term by a feeling of doing something for ourselves. The heart and soul of any practice is the people who work there, and we have been very fortunate with the team behind us.

We entered the 2016 Irish Dentistry Awards to help showcase our practice and gain some much needed publicity in our first year of business. We also thought the awards ceremony looked like a fun night out and a chance to further boost staff morale.

We asked a professional photographer to capture the important details of our practice, which we felt made it stand out from the rest. We felt it was crucial to photograph the practice in a way that did justice to the efforts we put in to the design process. Winning Most Attractive Practice this year was a great boost!

Personally, I have learned a lot about myself throughout this process, not least that when my cautious approach threatened to stifle progress, Aimee's positivity allowed things to regain momentum again. Yin and yang. Controlling my workaholic tendencies is the next step. 📌

