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Dental office
Vienna

Architects Vladimir and Nadia Topouzanov
take the ache out of teeth cleaning with
a dental office that's downright cheerful

By Lisa Fitterman
Photography by Gottfried Fraig

Sweet teeth

Not many of us like visiting the dentist. Lying in a faux leather chair, eyes shut tight while trying to keep one's mouth open, isn't exactly fun. But Montreal architects Vladimir and Nadia Topouzanov have found a way to help calm patients' nerves with a bright, airy and decidedly whimsical dental office that's actually fun to hang out in.

Consider as evidence the four-metre-square mural in the reception area, depicting giant pink squiggles of toothpaste. It's much more upbeat than the usual photographs depicting tooth decay and gum disease that dentists tend to put on their walls – a scare tactic meant to remind patients about the importance of brushing and flossing regularly. "Once you enter, you forget why you're there," says Vladimir.

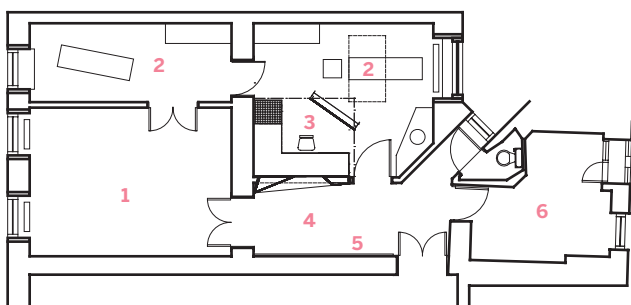
Located in a heritage house in downtown Vienna, the project posed several challenges. With just 45 square metres of space, the original layout was awkward, requiring patients to pass through the treatment area to reach reception. But the building's historical designation meant no major demolition was allowed, and dental equipment had to remain in situ throughout.

Given the limitations, Vladimir (a partner in the firm Saia Barbaresi Topouzanov) and Nadia (who works from home) created three distinct yet linked spaces: a reception area, a waiting room and a treatment area. They cut a three-metre-wide swath in an existing concrete wall and installed two backlit translucent white Plexiglas panels to give the widest view possible between reception and the waiting area. A smaller sliding wall panel of dark blue Plexiglas closes the opening. The dentist's chair is hidden by a larger Plexiglas panel in the same colour, which allows for privacy while also letting in natural light from nearby windows.

White dominates many of the features, including glossy finishes on surfaces in the reception area and on storage units. Even a heater is encased in white-painted plywood, with concentric circle cut-outs, while an X-ray machine is covered in translucent plastic. The understated design gives them a look of funky sculptures rather than utilitarian equipment.

But it's the mural that defines the space. A photograph of toothpaste squiggles enlarged 100 times and mounted on the wall across from the reception desk, the image has become a natural conversation piece. Says Vladimir, "We think of it as a reminder that if patients take care of their teeth, visiting the dentist can be a pleasant experience" – even a sensual one. **AZ**

- 1 Waiting area
- 2 Treatment area
- 3 Reception
- 4 Reception entrance
- 5 Mural
- 6 Office



Opposite A mural of giant toothpaste squiggles makes a refreshing change from the usual pictures of gum disease dentists tend to hang on their walls.

Left A blue Plexiglas sliding panel at reception gives the office a crisp, upbeat mood while providing privacy between patients and staff.

Below White dominates the treatment area, sending out another positive message about keeping your pearly whites clean.

Dental office, Vienna

Visiting the dentist can be a pleasant, even sensual experience

