

Oh Christmas Tree, Oh Christmas Tree



Nothing is safe nowadays from consumer scrutiny and the image police, and that includes what you hang up in the practice at this festive time of the calendar.

Of course it is no different to anything else in the complex confusion that we dub the modern world of sophistication and taste. The way in which we decorate our homes and our practices is now governed not so much by the simple delight of celebration as by the subtle, or not so subtle, whims of market forces, fashionable taste and the 'right' image. Everything to do with Christmas has moved on so that if the humble bed-hung stocking was to be filled with a piece of fruit, a jigsaw puzzle and a colouring book, Santa would be kick-boxed back up the central heating flue. More likely that the foot of the bed is to be adorned with an Apple (computer) a jigsaw that builds into an actual version of Thunderbird One and a colouring book capable of being programmed into a 3-D virtual reality rainbow ride (batteries not included).

All of which makes the way that you decide to festoon your work place of greater importance still. There are various practical and health and safety matters to take into consideration. Paper chains trailing nearby a bunsen flame might be an obvious example. However, the melting feet of plastic sleigh-pullers placed unthinkingly on the top of the autoclave may not necessarily become noticed until the owners slump over as if with a variant of mad reindeer disease and slowly combine their substance with the saliva ejectors, pretty streaked colours notwithstanding.

But what if you still use paper chains for example? Do they still make paper chains? Or better still does the practice team make their own? What does that say about the surgery, as busy fingers craft multi-hued chains from sticky paper and snipped-up estimate forms?

And what if they are last year's paper chains carefully, or not so carefully, resurrected from the cupboard under the stairs, where for the last eleven months and a week they have been garlanded around shelves groaning under the weight

of dusty and abandoned orthodontic models?

Modern décor demands modern approaches to Christmas image creativity. There is no point whatever in having had the waiting room expensively refurbished with sea-green upwashers only to have a plastic Father Christmas galloping across the lighting design as if emerging from the watery depths of Davy Jones' locker.

Finally there is the matter of the practice Christmas Tree. This too has probably spent the lion's share of the year stuffed in ignominious isolation in the loft or the

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garage or under the stairs with the paper chains. That is assuming that it is an artificial one. The arguments will rage forever as to whether it should be a 'real' one or not but with the quality of the plastic ones improving so markedly it is often difficult to tell the difference. And this is where the 'label' culture starts to get a foot in the door. Do you have a really rather splendid 'private' Harrods Narvik-Blue Norwegian Spruce delivered to the back door, or a modest 'NHS' Woolworth's Central European Fir that you pick up yourself and bring on the bus? And although Maureen, because it is always Maureen who decorates it, always with the same baubles, protests loud and long, maybe it is time to visit a 'Christmas outlet' to select from the mind-numbing range of tree accessories.

In this festive frenzy, pause for a moment to ponder just how bizarre a specialty is a 'Christmas outlet' compared to say a practice limited to endodontics?

What adorns the branches are no longer merely coloured globes attached to the tree with bent green pipe-cleaners but authentic acrylic copies of Victorian pink fat ladies in crinolines. Or dried fruit, pre-1929 racing cars or replicas of fourteen types of Native American loaves of bread all guaranteed to be formed of different grains (NB not suitable for children under five or the visually impaired). Then again, china animals that bear no traditional relation to Yuletide at all. No hint of a sheep or donkey lowing in a stable but Taiwanese made alligators with sound-chips croaking 'Away in a manger' in a tinny electronic, speaking-clock type of a way.

Indeed, tradition may have gone out of the window in total. The tree may not even be a tree at all. A swirl of spiral wire bedecked with tiny pin lights might 'represent' the season in a steely starkness that says more about your clientele than a cuddly, fuzzy-felt nativity scene ever could. But no matter how high one sets one's sights, the guiding factor will be the choice of the dental team. Strive as you might to instil a sense of third millennium chic into the practice interior design concept modality, if Maureen wants her balls they'll be hanging from somewhere. Deborah will never concede the squeaky angel that patiently squats above the entrance door until Twelfth Night wings its inevitable way. Malcolm will resign for sure if he can't spray the fake snow 'Merry Christmas from all at Brighter Smiles Dental Practice' (the can always runs out before he gets to the final 'ce' and he has to write them in with typewriter correction fluid). And quite right to! A very Happy Christmas, however you choose to decorate it.

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