

talk about touch

WITH MARY KATHLEEN ROSE AND MARY ANN FOSTER

AMBIENCE: THE HEALING ENVIRONMENT



A good way to check the ambience of your own room is to receive a massage in your space from a colleague.



MARY ANN FOSTER: One of the basics of a successful massage practice is creating a welcoming environment that makes clients feel comfortable in anticipation of their massage.

MARY KATHLEEN ROSE: While traveling last year, I stopped by a recommended massage clinic. A friendly therapist greeted me at the door, showed me into a dimly lit massage room, and left me to undress and get on the massage table. As my eyes adjusted to the light, I noticed that the image on the wall was a larger-than-life painting of a reclining nude female.

MAF: That would make me uncomfortable. What kind of place was this?

MKR: It seemed reputable. The therapists were licensed, and it was part of a chiropractic clinic. I do appreciate good art, including figure drawing and painting, but it just seemed like an odd choice for décor in a therapeutic massage clinic.

MAF: First impressions are so important in a successful massage and bodywork practice. I always gauge recommendations by asking, "Would I refer my Aunt Betty here?"

MKR: The sights, sounds, and smells that you encounter when you walk into a massage clinic create the ambience and affect clients' expectations.

MAF: Certain things are a must. The room itself should be clean, warm, and well-lit, with easy access to a bathroom. Clients need a comfortable place to sit, as well as a place to put their clothes and personal items.

MKR: It is important to have adequate indirect lighting to ensure physical and psychological safety, but best to avoid using overhead lighting, in order to create a relaxing environment.

MAF: A client once told me he got a massage in a dimly lit basement room filled with icons of a religious nature and strongly scented candles. Although he enjoyed the massage, he was uncomfortable in that setting, so he didn't go back. I wonder how many clients who seem to respond well to a massage don't return because something in the surroundings put them off.

MKR: Water features can be annoying for some people. Personally, I have endured too many plumbing disasters in my homes over the years to relax to the sounds of trickling water inside a building coupled with the hum of a motor. My sister tells me these fountains make her feel like she has to pee.

MAF: And yet, someone else might enjoy the feature. So the therapist just needs to be sensitive to that and ask the client before the session begins. A few of my pet peeves are ticking-tocking clocks, headache-inducing scents, and animals begging for attention.

MKR: There are many elements that do contribute to a healing environment. The visual impression we create also says something about the work we do. A painting or image on the wall that evokes a feeling of calmness supports the practice of relaxation massage. Informative anatomical charts can set the tone for an orthopedic massage practice.

MAF: It's also important that we, as practitioners, enjoy our own work spaces. I like to have colors and artwork I enjoy looking at while I work.

MKR: Yes, there is room for individual creative expression. Choices in office décor can be pleasing to us, as well as appeal to people of different backgrounds and tastes.

MAF: Even though it's important that we are comfortable in our own work spaces, first and foremost, the setting must accommodate the needs of the client. For example, a small step stool would help a short client get on a tall table.

MKR: A good way to check the ambience of your own room is to receive a massage in your space from a colleague. This can help any practitioner become aware of what might need some attention and what is working well.

MAF: I never noticed how distracting a small unpainted spot on my ceiling was until I received a massage on my own table.

MKR: And I realized how much I enjoy the warm coziness of my own massage room.

MAF: With this attention to detail, we invite our clients to step into a world where they can immerse themselves into a therapeutic and rejuvenating experience. **m&b**

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