

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**

G *Mary Kathleen Rose, BA, CMT, has been practicing shiatsu and integrative massage since 1985. She is the developer of Comfort Touch, consulting to hospices and other medical organizations nationwide. She produced the video Comfort Touch Massage for the Elderly and the Ill and is the author of a textbook of the same title. www.comforttouch.com.*

G *Mary Ann Foster, BA, CMT, has been practicing and teaching massage and movement in the Boulder/Denver area since 1981. She has diverse trainings in movement and structurally integrating therapies, teaches at the Boulder College of Massage, and wrote Somatic Patterning: How to Improve Posture and Movement and Ease Pain (EMS Press, 2004). www.emspress.com.*