

ALICIA PET CARE CENTER

From cars to cats: A lot of thought went into remodeling the storefront of the building, which previously served as an automotive repair shop.

# Time for a tune-up

The phrase “purrs like a kitten” has a whole new meaning in this former automotive repair shop. Alicia Pet Care Center in Mission Viejo, Calif., provides a different kind of service.

BY STEVE BENNAKA  
ASSISTANT EDITOR



**Room to breathe:** Exam rooms have separate doors for clients and staff to maximize traffic flow.

In theory, it seemed like the perfect fit. Dr. Matthew Wheaton needed more space and a more efficient layout for his practice, Alicia Pet Care Center in Mission Viejo, Calif. The building he had his eye on was a former automotive repair shop, teeming with empty space and endless possibilities. Unfortunately, making such a drastic facility conversion isn't easy, a fact made all too clear to Dr. Wheaton throughout the building process. But despite the numerous setbacks and headaches, the Alicia Pet Care team worked together to build their dream hospital—one in which they could finally work comfortably.

Dr. Wheaton's previous facility, a 2,000-square-foot, three-exam-room space built in the 1970s, wasn't working for the team anymore. "It was all very compartmentalized and horribly inefficient," he says. "There was a lot of wasted space." In addition to the poor layout, the reception desk was built at an odd height, leaving team members to stand uncomfortably or sit meekly behind the towering counter. Also, due to an awkward wet table and treatment area orientation, dental work was a real pain for team members. "It was a backbreaking place to work," Dr. Wheaton says.

**REBUILDING AND RENOVATING**

Dr. Wheaton began searching for a new facility and soon came across a leasehold in the former repair shop. The space was essentially a large, empty box, except for four enormous car lifts and one empty office. But while the open layout left plenty of architectural possibilities, the building wasn't set up well for a veterinary clinic. The storefront included just one small entry door and a large, roll-up garage door. And neither the original sewer system nor the air conditioning unit met the clinic's needs.

Making matters even more complicated, Dr. Wheaton's construction team was working in conjunction with the landlord's construction team, which did some of the repairs and renovations. And although he wasn't able to move in until a month after originally planned, he says things have gone great so far. "A year into it, I'm very happy with everything about the place," he says.



**Rest and relaxation:** Dr. Wheaton gave team members plenty of space to kick back and unwind in the break room.

**Massive makeover:** Where large automotive lifts used to sit (above), clients at Alicia Pet Care Center now enjoy spa-like amenities. Comfortable seating, a custom wood ceiling, and a saltwater aquarium add to the lobby's serene atmosphere.

**ALL THE BELLS AND WHISTLES**

Walking into the reception area, clients might wonder whether they're in a veterinary clinic or a fancy spa. Gone is the roll-up garage door, which Dr. Wheaton

*Text continues on page 33*

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FLOOR PLAN Alicia Pet Care Center



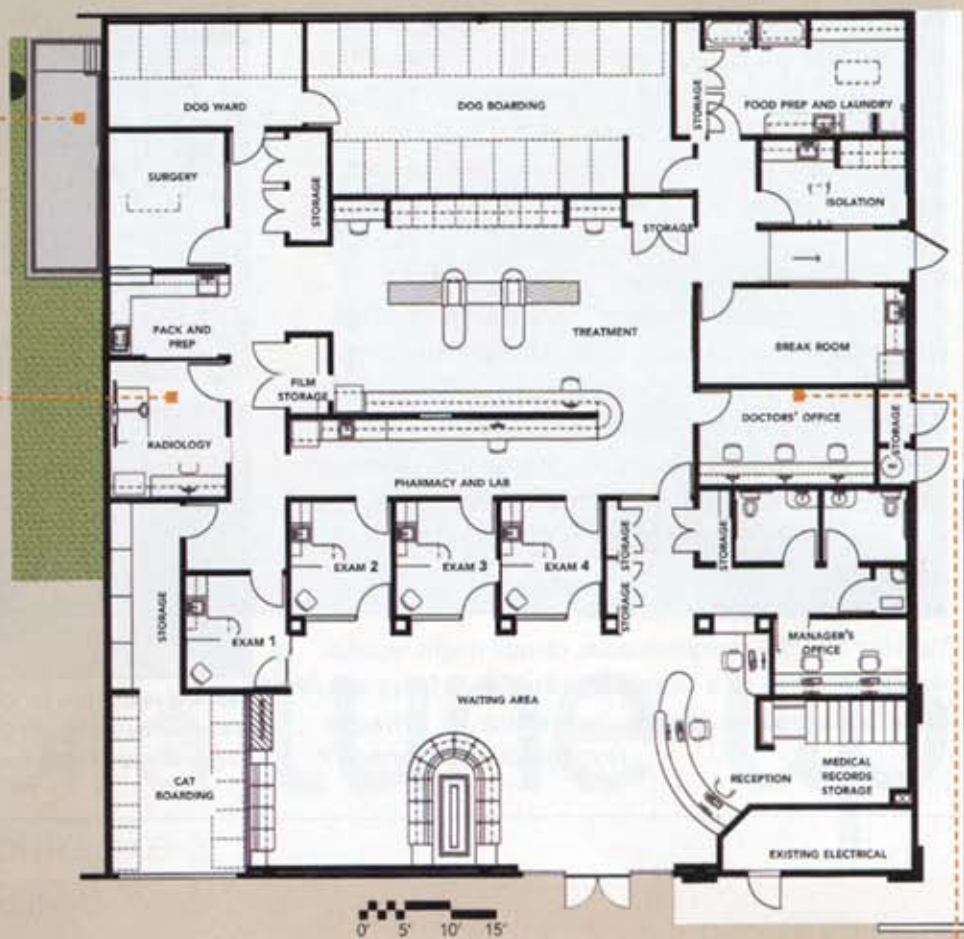
**Potty porch:** An outdoor pet relief area minimizes inside messes.



**Tech tools:** Dr. Wheaton invested in lots of new technology.



**A space to work:** Dark wood shelves highlight the doctors' office.



**Surgery:** The surgical suite's location just off the treatment area creates a "cohesive hospital environment," Dr. Wheaton says.



**Hub of the hospital:** The treatment area was designed as a centrally accessible and strategic visual control point for its related functions.

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replaced with a new storefront and set of entry doors. Green accent walls and seating provide a splash of color in an otherwise tranquil setting. A saltwater aquarium gives clients—and cats—something to look at while they wait. Perhaps the room's most striking feature is its ceiling, which consists of standard black tiles covered by vertical slats of narrow wood. "So many people come in here and give us positive feedback," Dr. Wheaton says.

One of Dr. Wheaton's favorite features is the treatment island, a space that allows team members to work quickly and efficiently. Dr. Wheaton calls the area a "twin-tower system," with lots of drawers

and shelves so supplies are always within arm's reach. Each tower includes a wet table and a dry table so team members can perform dental work on one end and standard procedures on the other end. "It's a really pretty area, but it's also very functional," Dr. Wheaton says.

The new facility has been a draw for clients. "Business has definitely flourished for us in spite of the bad economy," Dr. Wheaton says. These days, the practice is busier than ever. Thankfully, the building's serene atmosphere helps Dr. Wheaton deal with his hectic schedule. "In a way, I'm so relaxed here," he says. "I'm glad we're here, and I'm glad for my staff, too." ■

#### A look at the numbers

#### VETERINARY ECONOMICS

### Alicia Pet Care Center

25800 Jeronimo Road, Unit 100, Mission Viejo, CA 92691  
mypetsdr.com

**Owner:** Dr. Matthew Wheaton

**Associates:** 1 full time

**Hospital team:** 12 full time, 2 part time

**Practice type:** Small animal

**Building size:** 6,000 square feet

**Exam rooms:** 4

**Runs:** 25

**Cages:** 15

**Parking spaces:** 10 client, 15 staff

**Construction:** \$921,000 (building only; excludes land purchase, landscaping, parking lot, etc.)

**Site improvement:** \$176,000

**Professional fees:** \$127,000

**Equipment:** \$297,000

**Furnishings:** \$10,000

**Computers:** \$32,000

**Year built:** 2008

**Architect:** Richard Rauh,  
Rauhaus Freedenfeld and Associates, LLP  
23101 Moulton Parkway, Suite 106, Laguna Hills, CA 92653  
Phone: (949) 716-8899

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