

suburban life



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Through Center City Orthodontics and Meera Thomas Interiors, the husband-and-wife team of **Dr. Tejy Thomas** and **Meera Thomas** strive to leave a lasting impact on the communities they serve. page 66





Movers and Shakers

by **BILL DONAHUE**

THROUGH CENTER CITY ORTHODONTICS AND MEERA THOMAS INTERIORS, THE HUSBAND-AND-WIFE TEAM OF **DR. TEJY THOMAS** AND **MEERA THOMAS** STRIVE TO LEAVE A LASTING IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

The love story between **Tejy Thomas** and **Meera Thomas** seems tailor-made for a summer beach read, the kind of epic romance that crosses oceans and spans decades.

The couple met when they were toddlers growing up in Oman, and eventually became high school sweethearts. Although they went their separate ways after high school, each emigrated to the United States—him to pursue a dental degree at the University of Pennsylvania, her to study architecture at the University of Colorado in Denver—where they would later find their way back to one another. They got married, started a family, and supported each other’s career ambitions: for Dr. Thomas, to start his own orthodontic practice, and for Meera, to establish her own interior-design firm.

“When I had made the decision to open a practice in downtown Philadelphia, I was still working full time in South Jersey,” says Dr. Thomas. “I had talked to Meera about my vision and I knew I wanted it to be patient-centered. She designed and constructed everything, from the elegance of the overall aesthetic, to the patient flow, to the aspects of my personality that I wanted to bring into the practice. The feeling you get when you walk through our doors are all thanks to her.”

His practice, Center City Orthodontics, started with one location in Philadelphia over 10 years ago and expanded to Cherry Hill, New Jersey, in early 2020. Meera designed both offices, each to suit its surroundings and patient demographics; the Philadelphia office is sleeker and more sophisticated, as it caters mostly to adults who live and work downtown, while the Cherry Hill office has a more family-friendly vibe to appeal to its



Dr. Thomas with patients of Smiles Change Lives



Examples of interiors created by Meera Thomas and her team



mostly suburban clientele.

"I'm nothing without my team," Dr. Thomas adds. "Our practice has grown to three orthodontists and an 18-person team who staff both offices. Now that we're in the post-pandemic era, it's interesting to look back on how far we have come. It's been a rollercoaster ride over the last three years, but the need for our services has actually been significantly higher since the pandemic."

Dr. Thomas recalls the past few years as a challenging time, yet he says some good came from the pandemic-induced shutdown. Remote and virtual appointments have dramatically enhanced patient convenience, for example, and the practice as a whole has become more streamlined by necessity.

"Coincidentally, when the pandemic started I was President of the Pennsylvania Association of Orthodontists," he recalls. "I was very busy working with the Department of Health on regulations and safety protocols, trying to get orthodontic offices back open. I'm proud to say we were able to get orthodontic practices in Pennsylvania back up and running in eight weeks."

On a personal note, Dr. Thomas and his team used the downtime to get more philanthropic. From helping local public schools with technology to providing free orthodontic treatment to children in need through a national nonprofit called Smiles Change Lives.

One particular experience that profoundly

changed the trajectory of his young life compelled him to return the favor.

"I was a teenager when I had life-changing orthodontic treatment and reconstructive jaw surgery," he says. "I went from being a shy 15-year-old kid to a confident young man. My orthodontist changed my life, and I am blessed and lucky to be able to provide that care to my patients today and make a difference in their lives."

'A Good Team'

Meera grew up in a family of doctors, but she never felt medicine was a good fit for her. Rather, she was drawn to "everything colorful and creative." She studied architecture after high school, and worked for an architecture firm in Oman before coming to the United States in 2003. She worked for a residential-focused firm in Colorado for several years before coming to Philadelphia six years later, when she reconnected with the man who would later become her husband.

"Over the years I have narrowed down what I have wanted to do with my career," says Meera, the owner and principal designer of Meera Thomas Interiors in the Philadelphia neighborhood of Northern Liberties. "With my firm, I'm a big proponent of 'elegant comfort,' and I love working with empty nesters and growing families. I want my designs to make a home feel like it's a place to be lived in, not a showpiece. I like to learn

about people's lives so I can make a palette that reflects who they are."

While Meera Thomas Interiors focuses primarily on residential clients, Meera enjoys working with commercial clients, too, especially doctors and dentists who "want to bring their brand and their personality into the space."

Although Dr. Thomas and Meera are unique, they share some commonalities: creativity, ambition, and a focus on providing positive outcomes for their respective clients. They also complement one another, such as their "divide and conquer" approach to maintaining the household, making sure their 12-year-old daughter gets to theater rehearsals and swim meets, and their eight-year-old son never misses soccer practice.

"Tejji has always encouraged me to be my own self-advocate," she says. "That has helped me understand the positive impact my skill set can bring to others. His work ethic is spectacular, and he loves his work. Center City Orthodontics is his baby, and every morning he is prepared and excited to get there."

"All of this works because I married Superwoman," Dr. Thomas adds. "I've learned a lot about design from Meera. She goes out of her way to learn about the person she's designing for and what's important to them. I have worked with [other designers] in the past, and they tend to give you their view on your things. With Meera and her team, the look and feel of my practices are an extension of me."

While each of their respective enterprises has come a long way, Dr. Thomas and Meera have bold plans for the months and years ahead. Center City Orthodontics is planning to open a third location in Northern Liberties, and Dr. Thomas is in the process of creating a philanthropic foundation of his own so he can help more local children in need. Meera, meanwhile, intends to "keep building community and making connections" through her firm, with its team likely to grow from four designers to six.

"Meera and I grew up together, and we have built a life together," Dr. Thomas says. "My practice and I would not be the same without her, for so many reasons. We are excited to be a part of the Philadelphia community and give back to the city we love and call home." ■

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