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Making dream practices a reality...

Style Counsel

Fulfilling a vision

When planning her practice, **Dr Anna Olczak** had a very specific vision, and 'tooth' on Waterloo's Lower Marsh fits the bill perfectly as Ellie Seymour found out



'tooth' just had to be
on Lower Marsh





Dr Anna Olczak and her business partner would not compromise on location when they decided to open their new practice, tooth (always with a small 't' they are keen to point out) in London's quirky Lower Marsh, near Waterloo Station. 'We had a specific audience in mind and therefore specific requirements,' says Anna. 'We decided we didn't want to open anywhere other than Lower Marsh. Not near it, not just off of it, only on it! We walked the street every couple of days to see if any suitable units were for sale or rent and pounced once we saw the sign on what was the derelict building that now houses our practice!'

They were looking for somewhere that would fit it in with the vision they had for the tooth brand, somewhere vibrant, quirky, interesting, friendly and also somewhere busy enough to sustain a private practice. 'We didn't want to just move into a generic run-of-the-mill high street,' she says. 'We were looking for something with character where we could be part of the community and add to the street and the community it serves.'

Their target demographic was young professionals and affluent local residents, and the characterful Lower Marsh fitted the bill perfectly.

'It's the sort of place you need to really get to know in order to understand it as it's a real hidden gem,' says Anna. 'We were attracted to Lower Marsh for all the reasons that make it so eclectic – local businesses, independents and a real sense of community.'

'THE LOOK
WAS ALWAYS
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FREE'

The waiting room was designed with a relaxed comfortable feel in mind, similar to a coffee shop...





...and because of that the windows were kept big and clear, not shying away from curious passers by



The reception also acts as a well-presented selection of sundry goods for sale



Clinical areas have a different style, in keeping with their function

THE PROPERTY

In terms of the actual property, they were equally focused and specific in their requirements. 'The absolute non-negotiable was having a high-street shopfront and big open windows. Light was important, but more important was the fact that people could see into all of our public areas without any restrictions. We wanted to create a nice inviting space so didn't want people to feel that they didn't know what was on the other side of the door or the walls.'

The practice is on the ground floor of a newly renovated Victorian terraced property below residential properties.

'Our practice is actually made up of two units that were combined as part of the redevelopment, one was a derelict retail unit; the other a flat-roofed single-storey mechanic's workshop, now the site of our clinical aspects,' says Anna. 'The building was derelict and fire damaged for around 15 years, but now it is the flagship unit on the street. The building was leased to us in shell form, so there was literally just the exterior walls and an empty, unfinished space when we started.'

Today, it's unrecognisable. Outside, patients are greeted to a traditional hand carved Victorian shopfront and fascia that harmonises with the Victorian architecture. Once inside, patients will discover tooth is more than just a dental practice; more of a healthcare experience. 'Our vision was to create a surgery that people would feel relaxed in and happy to come and visit. We wanted people to have the sort of feeling you get when you go to your favourite coffee shop; relaxed, at home, comfortable. The look was always going to be modern, crisp and clutter free, inspired by a trendy East London art gallery, crossed with the professionalism of a corporate office in the City. Light and open spaces were also important.'

ZONES

As well as two surgeries, there's a main reception area, which also works as retail space which as well as stocking all the usual sundries, offers two ranges of organic, natural and cruelty free skincare products.

'Patients can try our testers while they wait for their appointment or talk to one of our team about the best skincare product for them. We also have an Alessi design zone, selling dental-related Alessi designer products.

The practice also incorporates what's called a 'relax zone'. 'This is a waiting room away from the main retail and reception area where patients can choose music from an iPod to listen to through a Bose SoundDock while they wait. They are also free to plug in their own iPod,' explains Anna.

There's an local decontamination unit (LDU), a fully compliant disabled toilet, a 'team zone' in the basement which includes a kitchenette, staff toilet, changing area, table/chairs, as well as giant bean bags for the team to relax on during their breaks. There's also a small office/stores in the basement.

But perhaps the most distinctive feature in the practice is a wall made from fully reclaimed London stock brickwork from the same era as the original building. 'We were originally going to use a product called Slimbrick, but to get the look we wanted, we decided to just go with the real thing,' Anna says. 'We liked the idea that the bricks had already had a life somewhere else and we were giving them a new life to be enjoyed once more. The wall also added a nice urban and raw feel to the project that we wanted,' she says.

The wall acts as a space to showcase select pieces of original street art. 'We wanted it to reflect that our area is close to a world-famous street-art tunnel and is generally in the centre of a creative hub, close to the Southbank Centre, National Theatre, the Old Vic and Young Vic theatres, with many architects and design agencies in the area. The first lot of work on the wall is by up-and-coming street artist, Nathan Bowden. We first saw his work while in Luxembourg, but only through the window of a closed shop. After lots of web research, we managed to identify the artist and track him down, and by coincidence he was from South London too! One week later, we had a commissioned piece of art called The Beefeater II which we describe on our website as just like London - modern, historic and a little bit crazy.'



'OUR VISION WAS TO CREATE
A SURGERY THAT PEOPLE
WOULD FEEL RELAXED IN AND
HAPPY TO COME AND VISIT'

Open
+ wide!

**Surgical areas have a contrasting feel,
but do retain some off-beat details!**



Clinical areas are contained within the practice's second unit, behind the main shopfront



This brick feature wall is used to showcase artwork, a conscious nod to the surrounding district





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DESIGN AND PLANNING

These fabulous results did not occur overnight. 'It took us roughly six months to find the premises,' says Anna. 'We worked with specialist dental designer/architect, DDPC, to plan the space as they understood our needs and compliance issues. Their brief was to give us the surgery space we needed without compromising on patient experience, a good sized LDU and nice open spaces for our patients, along with a retail aspect at the front of the building. We focused on designing the interior ourselves.'

But it took almost 12 months before we got planning permission to change the building's use, and then a good few months more to sign off and finalise some conditions and tweaks.

'Anna contacted us around May/June 2012 and they submitted a planning application, which was validated by August 2012,' says DDPC architectural director, Gary Bettis. 'However, due to the council's inability to efficiently process the application and their subsequent refusal, an appeal had to be launched. The process was heavily drawn out as a result of the council's lack of drive or pace. Thanks to the common-sense approach of the Planning Inspectorate, the council's decision was overturned,' he says.

DDPC remained on-hand throughout the planning permission process to provide general advice in order to expedite the approval. Planning approval didn't actually get granted until after the appeal in June 2013. So the whole process of obtaining planning took over a year.

After these formalities, DDPC could focus on planning the space. 'The

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existing architecture of the building defined the internal layout to a large extent. Anna wanted to take the lead with the interior décor and finishes, so we stepped back - happy to advise whenever they needed our input.

For DDPC, the main challenge was meeting the client's brief and expectations while working with the allocated budget. 'Conscious of the fact that private practices have to look the part, we decided to introduce one or two features that would give it the 'private' look and feel without breaking the bank,' says DDPC design director Shirin Seehra. The interior detailing is minimal with a focus on clean lines and smooth surfaces, which contrast with the texture of the brick wall. This simple and uncomplicated approach helped set up a relaxed environment whilst keeping the spend to a minimum.

THE END RESULT REFLECTS ANNA'S VISION

Despite a few complications with the ventilation routes and air conditioning which were overcome, the build was relatively quick; beginning in October 2013 and taking around three months in total, the practice opening as planned on 2 January 2014.

'We had patients pre-booked in for that day and all of them got the treatments they were booked for without issue,' says Anna.

Anna and her business partner are extremely pleased with the results, and particularly love their reclaimed brick feature wall. 'We love this feature. It really adds depth and brings out the street art we brought and gives the front area the feel we were looking for. We also like the main surgery, the colours go really well, it is bright and inviting and uncluttered and the chair is really comfortable. Patients love it.'

The future for tooth certainly looks rosy. 'We plan to open the second chair in the very near future as we get busier and then who knows? We would expect that we will replicate the model and build the brand by opening another tooth in the not too distant future,' Anna says. ■