

# The people, the plan, the practice

**Gary Bettis, Architectural Director of Dental Design and Planning Consultants explains how he designed a dream practice for his client**

**M**any practices start life in domestic premises that have undergone minor conversion works. The practice is defined by the existing layout and rooms tend to be assigned according to their size. For example in a house, the living room becomes the reception/waiting area, and the dining room becomes a principal treatment room, with staff room facilities occupying the existing kitchen at the rear. As the practice grows the constraints of the building become increasingly apparent and the dentist has to either relocate or expand. In either instance this is the perfect opportunity for a dentist to review his or her practice in terms of its overall size, the services that are on offer, and the practice profile.

Dr Mike Patel



It may be that your existing practice has the capacity to expand. It is therefore wise to consider all available options before sourcing alternative premises. There may be opportunities to take on additional space such as a flat upstairs, or in the instance of a semi-detached house, the neighbouring property. There may also be the possibility of a rear or side extension, subject to the boundaries of the existing site and planning permission being granted.

This article demonstrates how a small ground floor dental practice can be modified to create a more ergonomic and space efficient environment. The existing layout was reorganised and a small side extension added to accommodate the dentists expanding needs.

### The dentist

Mike Patel qualified in 1977 from the University of London. Since then he has developed a strong interest in cosmetic work and has attended many hands on courses. He has a strong passion for dentistry and has built up a good reputation within the local community. He openly admits that he enjoys coming to work and his enthusiasm has influenced his staff and his daughter who has recently qualified in June. Mike hopes his daughter will now join him at the practice.

### The previous practice

The building was constructed in 1964 and the first owner set up a dental practice within the ground floor maisonette. Mike took ownership in 1980 and in the following years purchased the first floor flat and converted the rear garden into a car park.

Yew Tree Road Dental Practice is ideally located within a primarily residential area within a few minutes walk of the High Street. The existing practice looked like a typical 1950s residential detached property. From the outside the only indication that it was a dental practice was the existence of a small brown sign on the frontage. The entrance was located at the rear of the premises and on entering patients would immediately find themselves within the Waiting Room. To reach the Reception they would have to walk through the Waiting Room and proceed down a small corridor. The Staff Room was accessed via the Waiting Area – both patients and staff lacked a sense of privacy. Despite this, the practice operated smoothly but it was unable to reach its maximum productivity.

The initial patient base was all NHS. Today he is private, only seeing children on the NHS. The team consists of three dentists, including Mike, two part time hygienists, a practice manageress and five part time dental nurses/receptionists.



Figure 1: Original exterior elevation



Figure 2: Refurbished exterior elevation

# Design and construction

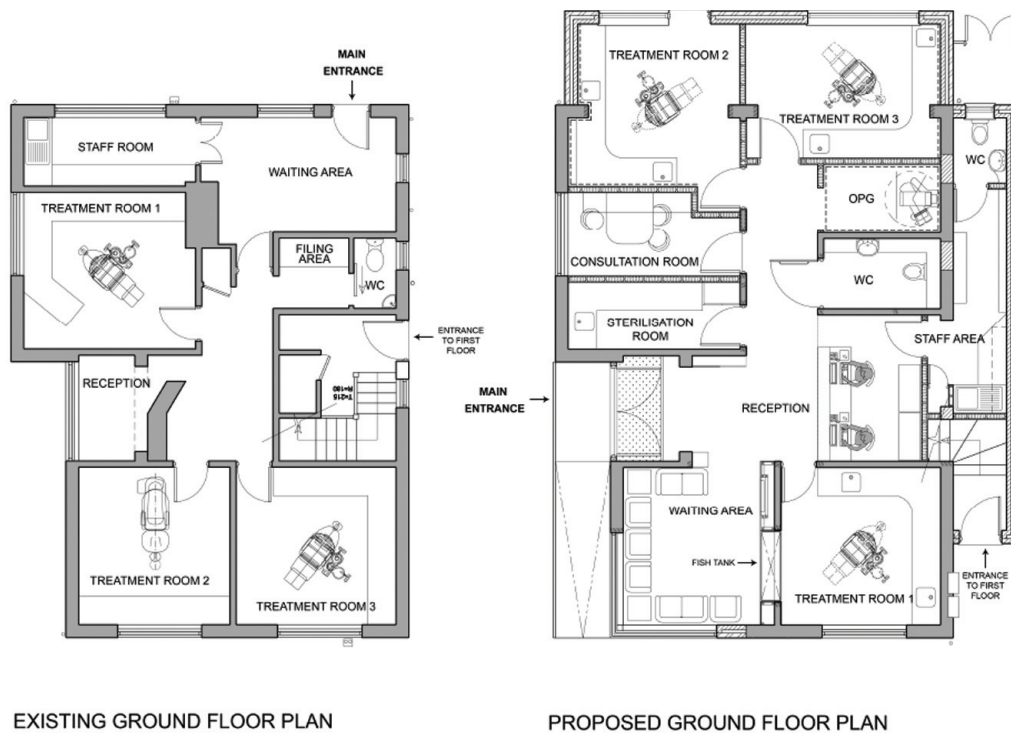


Figure 3: Existing and proposed floor plans



Figure 6: Practice logo and brand incorporating tree motif extracted from feature decorative wallpaper



Figure 5: Principal treatment room with integrated aquarium

## Our brief

Mike's vision was to create a more welcoming and efficient practice that catered for his existing patients but also attracted prospective patients within the area. He wanted to remain family oriented but also appeal to adults looking for more specialist services such as cosmetic dentistry, implants and facial aesthetics.

His original intention was to incorporate the first floor flat into the practice. He applied to the Planning Department for 'Change of Use' but despite a petition of 2000 signatures in support of the proposal, the application was refused as it would have meant a reduction on the amount of residential property within the area.

Mike was extremely disappointed with the outcome but nevertheless determined to carry out the refurbishment works. Although the scope of works had changed our brief remained the same. The practice needed a separate Sterilisation Room, a Disabled WC facility, OPG Room and Consultation Room within the existing premises.

## Design strategy

Our design strategy was twofold. Firstly to accommodate Mike's requirements within a more confined space, and secondly to create an identity that would raise the profile of his practice and deliver a strong and consistent marketing message.

## Creating a spacious environment

To overcome the lack of existing space we

made an application to the local authority to obtain planning permission for a single storey side and rear extension to the property. This gave our proposal the necessary additional space that would allow us to fulfil our client's brief. Secondly we decided to reduce the footprint of the stairs leading to the first floor flat, gaining an additional five square metres of space.

To resolve the issue regarding the point of entry into the premises the solution was simple. We relocated the entrance to the side and introduced a gentle ramp. This overcame the change in floor levels and satisfied the requirements under the Disabled Discrimination Act 2005. To further increase the sense of space we proposed a large frameless corner window within the waiting area. This not only increased the amount of natural daylight but also provided better views to the outside. (See Figure 3 existing ground floor and proposed ground floor plans).

## Raising the practice profile

A strong brand is invaluable as the battle for



Figure 4: Waiting area with new large frameless corner window

new patients intensifies day by day. A brand is the source of a promise to your patients. It forms a fundamental part of your marketing communication and one that a practice owner must not be without.

Mike's logo was created through the rebranding of the practice name to Yew Tree Dental Care and the extraction of a motif from the decorative wallpaper used in his interior décor scheme. This was incorporated into his exterior signage and his business stationery.

## Staying open for business

We advised Mike that building works would take approximately three months. With this in mind he decided to relocate his practice in order to stay open for business. He tried to rent local premises but it did not work out. He considered renting a mobile dental clinic or buying a second hand one. He even flew to Edinburgh to look at two mobile dental clinics which were for sale. They turned out to be unsuitable.

He came up with the obvious solution. He would transfer his current practice, dental chairs, cabinetry, reception desk etc. all upstairs whilst the works were taking place.

## The new practice

### Interior

The practice is now more patient-centred. Patients enter a lobby where they are immediately received by the receptionists giving a positive first impression.

It is light and airy. The colour palette of beiges and browns balance the more striking lime green colour chosen for the waiting area chair upholstery, the merchandise display and feature walls. Flock wallpaper

with a lime green pattern has been used to highlight specific areas within the practice. It is a refreshing change from the uninspiring blues of the previous décor scheme.

The existing practice had a relaxing aquarium, which was very popular with Mike's patients. His new brief was to retain a fish tank for waiting patients and to incorporate an additional tank within his treatment room. We came up with the idea of integrating it within the wall between his room and the Waiting Area for ultimate relaxation of his patients.

### Exterior

The new highly visible sign has been installed just under the line of the roof attracting attention to passers by. The sign incorporates the logo which has been developed using an extract from the flock wallpaper design. It compliments the design scheme and the colours chosen for the interior.

The red brick façade was painted white in order to make the building stand out and freshen its overall appearance. A glass canopy helps to define the entrance and provides shelter to patients.

## The end result

The new practice is a great success for many reasons. It reflects Mike's vision of having a stunning, ultra modern, high tech practice, whilst also remaining friendly and warm.

The new layout is more streamlined and efficient. Patients and staff can easily orientate themselves within the building. There is a relaxed and informal atmosphere. Cross infection control is more easily managed and maintained. It is an environment that enhances productivity, and improves the quality of life for both Mike's patients and staff. **A**

Figure 5 (left): New entrance with ramp, glass canopy and frameless corner window



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