

Crossing Abbey Road



Refurbishing a dental practice on one of the most iconic roads in the UK was never going to be easy, but with a little help, **Diana Spencer** saw her dream realised

When Dr Diana Spencer first walked into Abbey Road Dental in January 2011, she knew at once that it had the potential to provide the perfect practice to facilitate her desire to move from working for a corporate dental provider to being once again a single practitioner, working close to her home in north London.

Cosmetically, the Abbey Road she walked into 12 months ago is a far cry from the one that exists today. The last refurbishment had been almost 20 years ago and Diana's vision was to transform the single, quite large surgery into two smaller surgeries – one dental, one for the hygienist, plus a decontamination room. The whole project is testament to how a little creative thinking can provide workable solutions, even in the tightest of spaces.

Diana was immediately aware of three important factors that would define her decision. Firstly, the building was already a dental surgery, and therefore did not require permission for 'change of use'. Secondly, it was an old building with high ceilings, big windows and, therefore, plenty of natural light; this gave the rooms a light, fresh feel and was also a benefit when the time came for shade matching. Finally, Diana felt the location itself was excellent: in the centre of a parade of shops, in a highly residential area on perhaps one of the most iconic roads in England. In

summary, it was through these three factors that Diana recognised the huge potential of the practice. 'I knew from the moment I walked into the practice that it was a perfect match for my needs,' she says. 'The three

factors that went through my mind each have to be a given: they cannot be bought in or created if the foundations are not already there, and I knew immediately that the physical attributes of the practice would let me realise my vision.'

Beginning the search

The purchase of the practice was agreed in January 2011 and finally went through in June of the same year. But with an opening schedule for the middle of October, Diana knew that time was of the essence and there was a need to work in partnership with a highly efficient company – and ideally one that could provide everything she needed to complete the project.

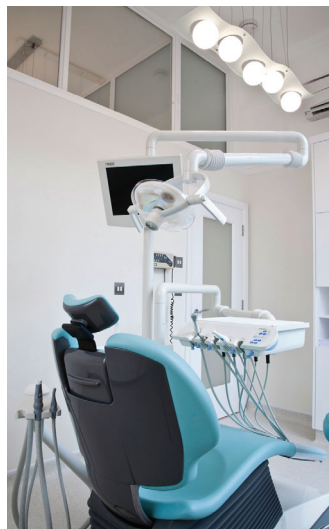
She decided to visit Henry Schein Minerva's London showroom at Marble Arch as this provided the most convenient location for Diane to begin her search. She phoned Henry Schein Minerva and made an appointment to see Dan Payne, the equipment specialist. By the time this meeting had ended, Diana felt she had not only found the perfect practice but also the perfect team to help her create the practice she wanted.

'After my meeting with Dan I felt immediately that he understood exactly what I was trying to achieve: a private,

family-oriented, general dental practice – one that can operate as a central part of the local community. He was understanding and empathised with my ethos and then demonstrated his understanding through his actions,' says Diana.

Diana introduced Dan to her builder, Nalko Nedialkov and interior designer, Charlotte Heather, both independent tradespeople chosen by Diana. Charlotte worked to create a calm, light space with welcoming colours, elegant soft furnishings and interesting funky designs. 'Dan was reliable, communicated regularly with myself and the onsite builder and ensured that every detail of the clinical areas was taken care of,' says Diana.

The Abbey Road Dental project provided a great challenge for Dan and the team at Henry Schein Minerva, as it required innovative and creative design to ensure that not a single centimetre of space was wasted. This is often a much



more difficult task than when faced with a design that has the luxury of surplus space. But a challenge is what makes Dan's job interesting and, thanks to his engineering background, he was able to help with the surgery layout himself. Having visited the practice and talked at length with Diana and Nalko, Dan designed a two-surgery layout, a waiting room and a small but fully compliant decontamination room. He ensured that cabinetry and equipment had just enough clearance to avoid any clashes, while the ceiling height was used to great effect to create additional space for storage. Glass-topped partition walls suggested by Nalko made optimum use of the existing natural light, and helped the small surgeries feel light and airy.

Bespoke designs

Diana chose to equip the surgeries with identical Sirona C8+ treatment centres, which provide everything she needs in a neat compact unit that makes best use of the available space and gives the impression that the surgeries remain spacious. The surgery cabinetry was also bespoke designed and manufactured by Premier Cabinets and fitted by Henry Schein Minerva. The use of light colours throughout the surgeries provides the illusion of space and optimum use of drawers and pull-out units means surfaces remain uncluttered, despite the

restriction in floor space. Although digital imaging is something that was not installed at the time, provision was made for this to be added at a later date, again something that Dan took account of in terms of short-, medium- and long-term planning. The lighting in the surgery (cleverly sourced by Charlotte) was a specific request from Diana who was opposed to the use of traditional strip lights.

She says: 'I set Charlotte a challenge to find lights that were compliant, yet more aesthetic than strip lights. It was discovered that any lighting was permissible in the surgery so long as the units are completely sealed: once again, a solution was found to my problem.'

The logistical planning for the fitting of the surgery equipment is something that requires intricate attention to detail. The water and electrics provided by the builder, Nalko and his team needed to be perfectly matched (both in terms of timing and specification) with the needs of treatment centre, compressor, autoclave and every other piece of equipment that was brought up the winding staircase over a two-day period. The additional pressure of a relatively short time scale and a scheduled re-opening that was non-negotiable meant that everything needed to run like clockwork during the installation. Dan visited the practice two days prior to the installation, just to make sure that everything was in order prior to installation and a team of six Henry Schein Minerva engineers worked for two days to finally fit the surgeries and decontamination equipment.

Diana was particularly pleased with how the actual fitting of the surgeries completely met her expectations. 'We agreed an installation date and I was told it would take two days, and it did, – no excuses and no problems that were not immediately overcome,' she says. 'The whole project was run with professionalism and expertise. These people really know what they are doing.'

Diana and her

team were given brief training during the hand-over process, but again Dan was on-hand to provide some additional telephone support to answer queries prior to opening.

Specialist advice

As part of the decontamination room design, Dan had helped Diana with various aspects of compliance for CQC and with HTM 01-05 and ensured that at every stage of development, guidelines were being adhered to. The ability to call on the support of Henry Schein Minerva's decontamination specialists is a real advantage in this area. With guidance constantly being updated, the need to stay abreast of changes is very important, particularly when advising a practitioner. Dan's advice was extremely helpful and an important contributing factor when Diana received her visit from the CQC inspector on 9 October, just eight days before the scheduled opening.

'It was the attention to detail that I found so impressive and made the project run so smoothly. Dan was working on a number of practice refurbishments at the same time as mine, all of them completely different from each other but I never once felt that mine was "just another surgery",' says Diana. 'Dan adapted his knowledge and experience to transform the specific vision I had articulated to him into reality. He established a good working relationship with the designer and builder, and the flexibility to be able to call on internal expertise across a range of different disciplines in order to exactly meet the needs of an individual is a real asset for Henry Schein Minerva and was a real benefit for me.'

Dr Diana Spencer has created a practice based on very firm philosophies about establishing long-term relationships with patients based on trust, compassion and empathy.

She wanted to create a space that offered professional excellence, up to date technology and pleasant, welcoming surroundings. The mutual support and creativity offered by Dan Payne, Charlotte Heather and Nalko Nedialkov and his team made the process a joyful adventure. **PD**

For more about Abbey Road Dental visit www.abbeyroaddental.co.uk.

