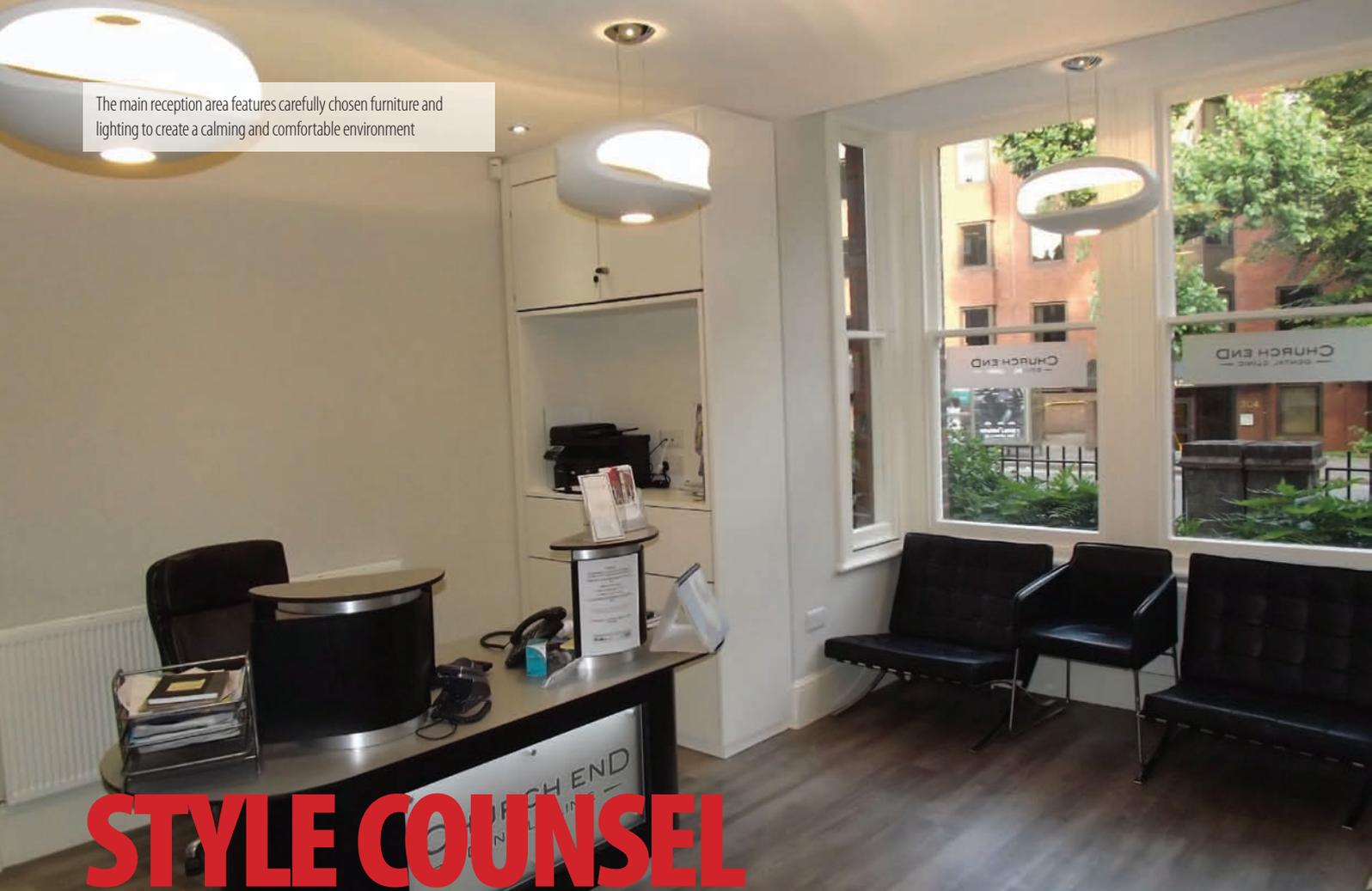


The main reception area features carefully chosen furniture and lighting to create a calming and comfortable environment



STYLE COUNSEL

VICTORIAN SPLENDOR

When CQC put a question mark over the future of the practice founded in his parents' garage, fate smiled on Neeraj Agrawal as the building he had coveted became available to buy. He told Andy Myall how he put together his new practice, Church End Dental Clinic, in North London

Dr Neeraj Agrawal regularly passed by the imposing three-storey Victorian property at 313 Regents Park Road, Finchley, whilst he was working at the practice established by his parents, coveting the property and thinking how perfect it would be for a dental surgery.



Neeraj Agrawal is passionate about providing NHS dentistry to the people of North London, 'The NHS works for me, it served my patients well for so long and without it I wouldn't have a practice,' he said

His father, a dentist, and his mother, who took on the role of practice manager, set up a single-chair practice in the garage of the family home in 1969, where it stayed until earlier this year. Neeraj qualified in 1995 and became principal of the family business in

1999. With the advent of CQC, he was very aware the family garage would struggle to meet new legislation, and when the building at 313 came to the market, Neeraj made sure he was the buyer.

THE VISION

The building itself is a stately Victorian town house, built in 1883, originally as a residential premises, spending time as a dentist surgery in the 1950s and 60s, before being converted for office use - during which time

it was also reduced in size to facilitate the building of a modern office block in the back garden.

The imposing property has plenty of period touches, the wrought iron work lantern over the entrance, large windows and decorative tiling and brick work. Location wise it's perfect for a town practice; five minutes from Finchley Central Underground station, close to local amenities and on several bus routes, with a stop right outside the front door.

'Buying the property was stressful,' said Neeraj, 'I had to beat the vendor down on price, and I still think I overpaid, but I was happy to have the property I'd wanted for so long. Getting the planning permission for change of use from B1 to D1 was a separate long-winded process, as it would be with any Council, but the Planning Department conceded in the end after lengthy negotiation'

His vision for the practice was 'to create an



The building itself is a stately Victorian town house, built in 1883, originally as a residential premises, spending time as a dentist surgery in the 1950s and 60s

environment where patients felt comfortable and confident, and are able to relax. I wanted it to be beautiful, but not pretentious,' Neeraj added.

The architect appointed was Alan Tate from Grey Associates, who had wide experience, including some work with dental surgeries, but it was his attitude and a good start to the working relationship with Neeraj that secured him the job.

'As part of the remit I gave Alan, I felt that other practices that I had seen/read about, had been refurbished to be really cutting edge, but risked looking out of date in a year or so,' Neeraj said. 'This is an ornate, decorative building, I wanted to reflect the beauty of that inside, nothing too fussy. I wanted the building to feel as light as possible, and to distract patients from the idea that they were in a dental surgery. I feel this has been achieved from the feedback so far.'

BUILDING WORK

After a recommendation from Matt Rowlingson at Clark Dental Ltd, Neeraj chose to work with Aspects Building Contractors Ltd, whose first job was to gut the interior of the building. The Victorian structure was sound, but the drop ceilings were removed and some internal walls were moved to reconfigure the ground and first floors.

The length of the building work was underestimated: after acquiring the building in June 2011, building work started the following month and was scheduled to be completed by November. It actually went on



The building accommodates CQC requirements, with a dedicated sterilisation room on the ground floor



Above & right: The Victorian property features plenty of characterful decorative brick and tile work alongside period details



until March, just before the opening in April.

During this period Neeraj continued working at the existing surgery. 'There was no point in having a fit over the delays, I didn't want the work to end up being rushed.'

'I was very lucky with who I've worked with,' added Neeraj. 'Aspects came in and took responsibility for the work, liaising directly with Alan if problems arose. In addition, every member of their team understands dentistry and the ergonomics of a dental surgery. This meant I could work and not be hassled with every little detail as might have been the case if I had used standard builders. Using a building firm with a sound understanding of dentistry was the best decision I made. As for the decorator, Mark; he was simply genius!'

The ground floor was to house Neeraj's main surgery, with the reception area at the front of the building looking onto the road, with the main sterilisation room and an X-ray room at the rear. The first floor was to house a second surgery, as well as two further large rooms for use as surgeries or treatment rooms in the future, with the

intention of leasing one out. There was also to be a patient lounge/consultation room.

'Some work was needed to make sure the building had the right size rooms, so nothing felt claustrophobic.' The top floor was earmarked for a staff room/kitchen and an office for Neeraj.

THE LOOK

Neeraj felt lighting was key, so key in fact that he purchased eight wall lights from Heals even before the new practice was even a possibility. 'I was already building images in my head of soft lighting coming up and down from the walls.'

The large hanging lights in the reception and the upstairs surgery and were chosen for their beauty and their impact both internally and externally, they're also visible from the street through the front windows on both floors. The curves of these lights (Foscarini O-space) is echoed by smaller ceiling lights used elsewhere.

Neeraj's main surgery downstairs has the classic Victorian features of large windows and tall ceilings. 'I wanted to maximise natural daylight,' said Neeraj, 'it keeps me sane and calm, and the same for my patients.' Lighting in the surgeries comes from LED ceiling lights with diffusers. The surgeries also utilise LG Art Cool air conditioning units, which are hidden away behind interchangeable art prints, 'these were expensive, but in line with my idea of beauty,'



Neeraj's main surgery benefits from natural light through the large Victorian windows, which carry the practice logo etched into the frosted glass

Neeraj commented.

The reception area is based around neat and classic monochrome colours, which ensure occasional highlights, such as the pink clock and console table, stand out more. Other walls with the practice are home to quirky pieces of art. The Barcelona-inspired chairs were chosen for their classic design and complement the dark walnut veneer desk, which was bespoke made and sourced by the architect. 'The chairs, lighting and reception desk all have gentle curves, complementing each other and also gives the practice a relaxed feel,' he added.

THE DETAILS

When it came to fitting out the surgeries Neeraj went for a balance between what he knew and looking for recommendations from others. For his own surgery he chose the Kavo 1058 chair (a brand he says he's always been loyal to), supplied by Laurence Goff at Dental Directory. For the chair in the second surgery Neeraj spoke to colleagues and fellow dentists, and on the strength of recommendations went for an A-dec-500 chair, supplied by Clark Dental Ltd. 'As a family-owned firm, Clark Dental are very attentive and their back-up service and team are fantastic,' Neeraj said.

The surgeries and the decontamination room have Corian worktops for ease of cross-infection control.

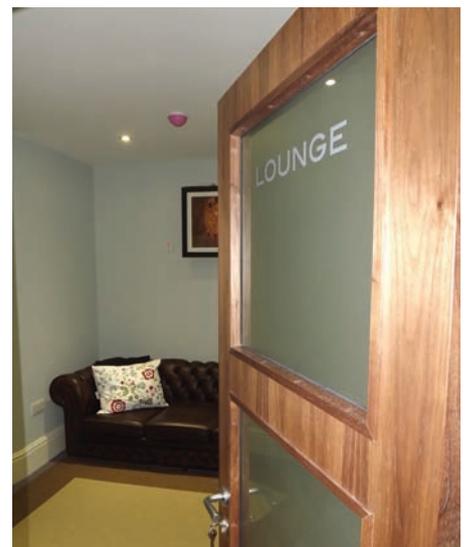
When branding the new practice,

'Churchend' comes from the area of Finchley the new practice is situated in, and Neeraj purposefully chose the word 'clinic', so as to, in his words, 'not pretend to be a spa or a gentleman's club.' The same clear but distinctive font is used throughout the practice, even etched into the frosted glass on those internal doors, establishing a strong look and identity for the practice.

THE FUTURE

As you might expect, the new building and location has had a hugely positive effect on the business, with 15-20 new patients signing up every week. Going forward though, Neeraj is committed to maintaining a mixed NHS practice. 'The NHS works for me, it has served my patients well for so long and without it I wouldn't have a practice,' he said. Further changes are set for the future, with Neeraj hoping to create an implant referral practice, expanding the team to include associates and specialists, hoping to become a Dental Foundation Training practice, and possibly leasing out a room on the first floor to a therapist or other complementary profession.

'I'm happy being mixed, sums up Neeraj, 'I see a wide socio-economic group, I have a great relationship with my patients which is the part of dentistry i love, I like to get to know my patients and make them feel like they're not just another number. The future is bright!'



A comfortable patient lounge provides space for consultations away from the surgery

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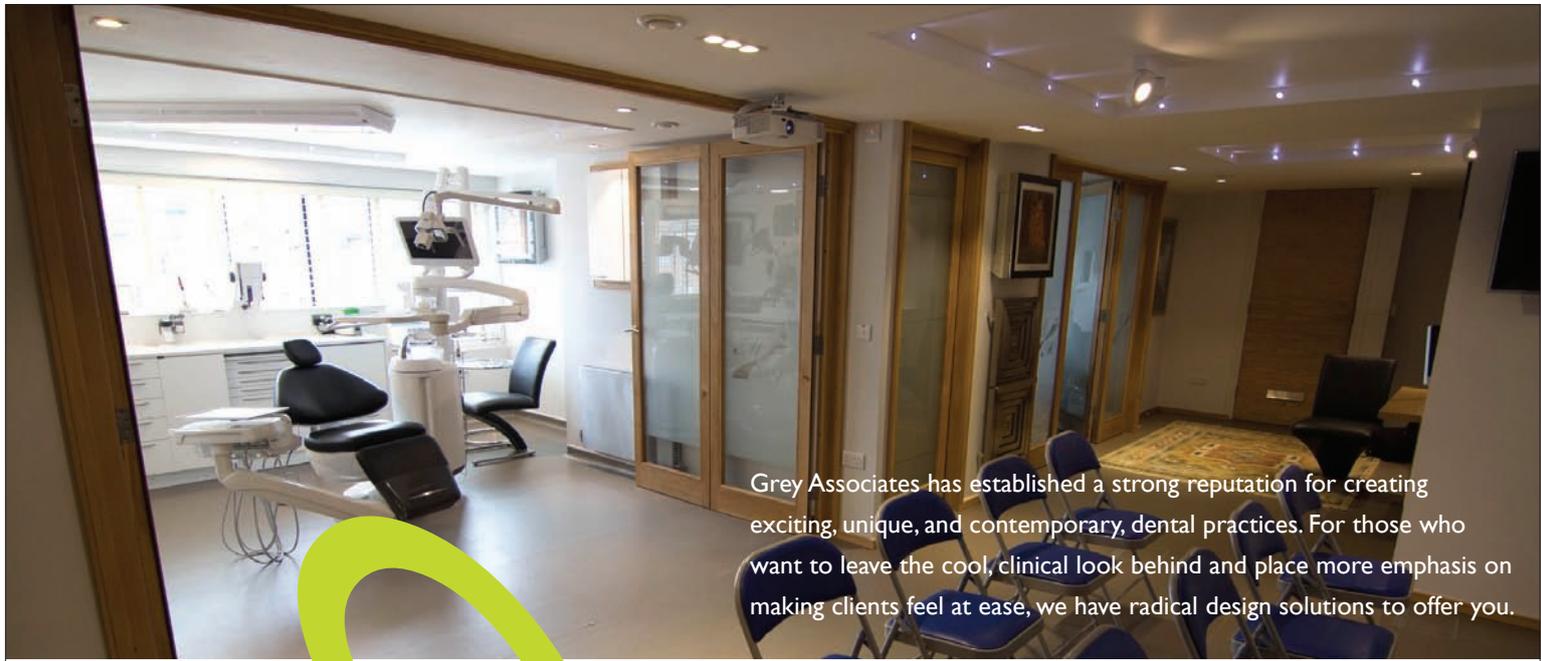
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