



Even in a small space, light colours make the reception area feel airy and spacious, while the reception desk's internally lit panels help create a focal point

STYLE COUNSEL SMALL WONDER

Creating an illusion of space was the key for Emma and Rhodri John when designing their new practice and brand, Absolute Dental, in Kingsbridge, Devon, says Ellie Seymour

With a rapidly expanding patient base, Emma and Rhodri John hit a crunch point in their original Kingsbridge practice, in terms of sticking to their business plan. 'We'd already made the move from city to country a few years ago to establish a dental practice, and we were happy with our location in Kingsbridge in Devon,' says Absolute Dental's business manager, Emma, who runs the practice she owns together with her dentist husband, Rhodri. 'But we'd completely outgrown our current premises and because we were really focused on our business plan, it meant we had to move if we were to hit the targets we'd set ourselves.'

It took Emma and Rhodri a year to find a new site, which although suitable, wasn't perfect due to the lack of choice in the area. 'We chose a commercial-style building previously used as a tanning studio, in a courtyard with two other similar units,' she says. 'But it was only 100 square metres which meant fitting everything we needed into it was going to be tight,' she says.

'It was almost an empty shell - demountable partitioning had been used to form tanning booths, but it was easy to remove, along with

the suspended ceiling,' she says. 'This was pretty much all we needed to get rid of and clear out in preparation for a rebuild. We kept a small staff kitchen, toilet and disabled toilet at the back of the space, but we had to totally refurbish them.'

DESIGN AND BUILD

Renting the property meant there weren't any planning applications to submit, so the project started right away, completing on schedule in just a little over three months.

Based on a recommendation, the couple chose to work with architects Grey Associates, whose brief was to provide Emma and John with a practice consisting of a generous lounge area, three treatment rooms, a dedicated consultation room, a meeting/office room and a state of the art sterilisation room. 'We had so much to fit in and with only 100 square metres available, we knew this would be a tall order,' says Emma. 'On top of this, we also wanted it to feel spacious!'

They also wanted the practice to make a strong design statement. 'We wanted a cool, contemporary look to reflect our own direction and ethos.'

Initial meetings with Alan Tate of Grey Associates focused on best use of space and design. But rather than launching straight in to picking out fixtures, furniture and colours, they first of all, returned to their existing practice, using it as a platform on which to base their ideas.

'We walked through it with Alan to talk about what didn't work for us and what the problems with the existing space were, so that we could work out our priorities for the future of our new business, Absolute Dental, and what we wanted to achieve in the new building,' says Emma.

It wasn't long before Alan had drawn up detailed drawings of the new space from survey and showed the couple his outline proposals for the new practice.

'At every stage we were consulted and made sure we agreed with Alan's proposals before taking the design further,' says Emma. 'From choosing the furnishings, bespoke joinery and specialised cabinetry to dental chairs, we were involved at every stage of the process.'

Alan was also careful to incorporate Emma and Rhodri's chosen colours - midnight blue, powder blue and white - into the design. 'Alan



Careful use of lighting, flooring and fabrics create a relaxing atmosphere for the consultation room

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used these tones through the practice together with a very restful shade of lavender-grey to some key areas of wall surface. Midnight blue fabrics were chosen for reception furnishings and bespoke items such as the reception desk also reflected the new practice colours.'

Once on site, Alan Tate project managed the build, involving Emma and Rhodri when he needed to and keeping them informed of progress and any problems arising.

ANY ISSUES?

The biggest problem throughout was the issue of space, or lack of it. 'Working with a narrow shop frontage and how to maximise on daylight into a deep space were concerns,' says Emma. 'Although this was solved by using floor-to-ceiling glass partitioning to the front of treatment rooms and an open and spacious reception together with a pale, limestone floor which capitalised on the light available and created surprisingly convincing illusion of space.'

Services were also a bit of a challenge. 'Inadequate available drainage within the building meant the floor had to be dug up to install a drainage channel from each treatment room and the chair position back to the suction pump. It also limited our choice of space layout.'

It also didn't help that they had to find

Above: The narrow shop frontage meant lighting within the building was a key part of the design and execution of the new practice

Right: Treatment rooms feature glass frontages to help daylight reach throughout the practice

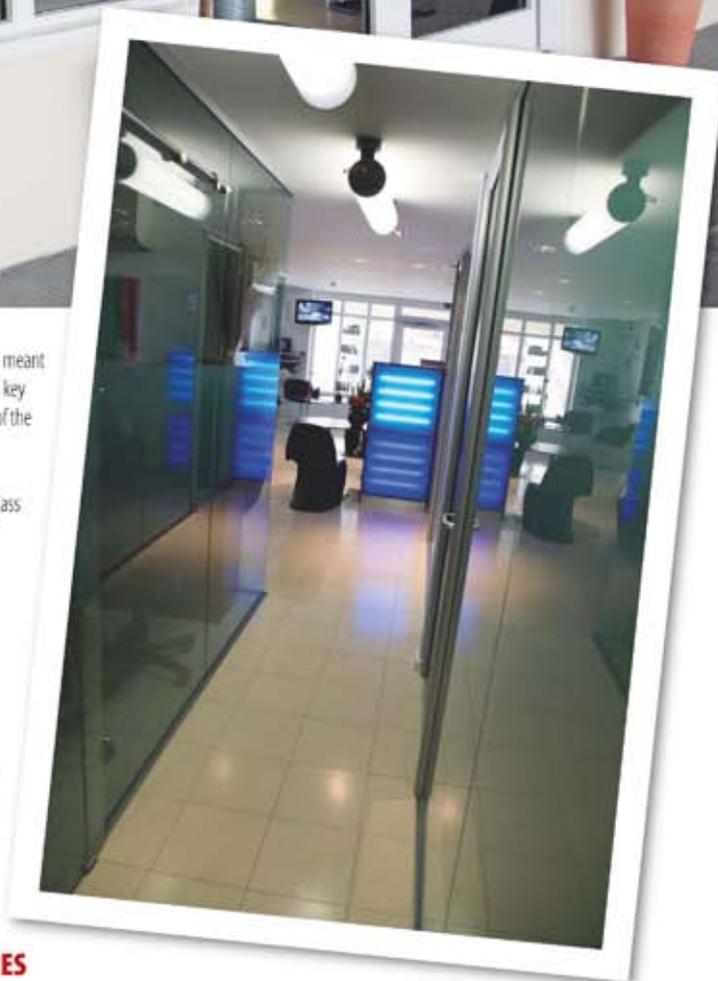
different builders halfway through the build. 'Our builder broke his hand and had to withdraw from the project - finding another wasn't ideal at that stage but we did, and we coped!'

SIGNATURE FEATURES

'Our reception is my favourite space,' says Emma. 'I love that when patients walk into our practice, they come into this lovely spacious and airy reception, backed by a cool, white wall decorated with our embossed logo. The design really works to make a long and narrow space feel really open and bright,' she says.

This illusion of space is helped by the use of a front/reception desk that clings to the wall rather than projecting out and dividing

the room. Designed by Alan Tate and hand built by JKP Joinery, it incorporates a panel of internally lit blue low-level partition that draws the eye to the desk whilst also concealing necessary office equipment. It's always been a popular talking point among clients. 'This is perhaps the most audacious signature piece in the practice and it generates a lot of interest as it's wonderfully funky and memorable,' Emma says. 'Other than that I really love the accent



lighting from Modular Instruments around the reception, because as well as highlighting chosen pieces of art on the wall next to the desk, the lights are a feature in themselves.'

The sterilisation room is purposely eye catching. 'This room is usually well hidden in most practices, but it's made conspicuous in ours by bold colour and lighting as we wanted it to not only be easily accessible but also a proud statement of our regard for the importance of hygiene.'

When it comes to dental hardware all the treatment rooms are fitted with Planmeca equipment fitted by Claudius Ash which incorporates all the usual items, including digital radiograph instruments and intra-oral cameras, while the modern cabinetry and glass work surfaces are designed and installed by Intercontinental.

Absolute Dental's signature colours were used throughout the practice

IMAGE CONSCIOUS

As well as creating a new practice, defining their image through branding was also an important part of the reinvention process. With the help of local graphic designer, Sandra Tate, Emma and Rhodri worked on creating a new image. 'We had an existing brand that related to the name of the old practice, but we wanted to change our title and needed a whole new look,' says Emma.

'We did take blue with us from the old business, but other than that were very open to new ideas. Again we wanted a fresh, contemporary image from whatever new branding we were offered. Sandra came up with a raft of ideas from which we mutually arrived at our chosen colours and brand.'

Now the practice is finished, up and running and fully established, was the hard work worth

it? 'We are delighted with results!' Emma insists. 'It seemed like a huge amount of money to spend at the time, but the build has stood the test of time and still looks as good now as it did when originally completed.'

Emma and Rhodri aren't planning any more renovations. 'The practice is currently running at full capacity with all our treatment rooms being used on a daily basis,' she says. 'Expansion isn't for us. We have built up an enviable reputation for care and customer service and feel expansion could impact on this. In addition to this Emma works nationally as a dental training consultant as well as Absolute being an accredited National Certificate Nurse training centre. Our support team are second to none and look after each other and Absolute Dental as they would family,' Emma insists.

All renovations have their ups and downs and Absolute Dental is no different, says Emma, who insists forward thinking is the key to a successful project. 'We made sure we kept our vision in mind throughout the project, which ensured we achieved our goals and really helped to keep focused on the reasons we were doing it.'

CONTACTS

Planmeca

www.planmeca.com

Claudius Ash

www.claudiusash.co.uk

Grey Associates

www.greyassociates.co.uk

Intercontinental

www.intercontinental.com

JKP Joinery

www.jkpjoinery.co.uk

Correction: Last month's Style Counsel practice, Bright and White Dental Spa in London, is located opposite the owner's home, not the practice she currently works at while she establishes her new practice, as was stated. PPD apologises for the error.

To ask a question or comment on this article please send an email to: PPD@fmc.co.uk

