

## Heritage building creates design challenges

*In part one of this two part article, we look at the challenges faced by Dr Chris Ho before embarking on the renovation of his practice in the Sydney suburb of Balmain.*



**D**r Chris Ho has a two plus one operatory practice in Balmain in the Leichhardt council district of Sydney. “Because I own the building and because of the major shortage of suitable floor space available in this suburb, I wanted a solution that allowed me to stay in my existing premises and yet still have room for growth.”

“The brief to Medifit was for four fully functional operatories in a modern and timeless environment. They got the basics right on the first go. We fiddled around with some minor planning until what seemed like the impossible was achieved. All this from a very old building with a lot of existing structural constraints,” Dr Ho said.

Dr Ho graduated from dentistry with first class honours from the University of Sydney in 1994 and completed a graduate diploma in clinical dentistry in oral implants in 2001. He previously worked in Macquarie Street in Sydney before starting his practice in Balmain in 1999. Since that time he has built a very busy practice that has a strong emphasis on implant and cosmetic dentistry. He has a network of referring dentists that he places implants for and mentors inexperienced dentists in case planning and restoration of different aspects of implant treatment.

“I wanted to create a practice that was modern, inviting and could cater to the

growing number of patients that we were experiencing in the general and implant part of my practice,” he said. “We had grown from a single practitioner, to one with a hygienist and have just kept on getting busier and busier. We had no room for anyone else as both surgeries are utilized, so we embarked on designing what I hope will be a state-of-the-art practice that my patients, my staff and I can be comfortable in.”

“When we started the design process it was under the assumption that because we were not touching the outside of this eclectically styled and heritage listed building, that the council would not wish to involve themselves in our interior proposal to any major degree,” said Geoffrey Raphael, Design Director of Medifit.

“Although we were proposing some structural alteration internally, our proposed works had to be submitted for development approval. The council attempted to force our client into some external and internal works which were never budgeted for and in our opinion were not necessary to meet the charter governing the heritage of this area.

“We hired a heritage consultant, Peter Robinson, who knew both the area and the building and together convinced the planning department that the eclectic nature of the building really did not warrant this kind of heritage consideration. After many

months of negotiations, we successfully gained our Development Approval on what was close to our initial submission.

“The development approval process for many councils is forever becoming more and more arduous,” Mr Raphael said. “Without knowledgeable representation, you can easily be led into a non-viable solution. The solution may suit a particular council’s view of heritage or other issues, but may be detrimental to your operation or to your offer to your clients.”

“I was very impressed from the very first moment I met the team from Medifit,” said Dr Ho. “I had prepared a brief of everything that I had envisaged for my practice from the colours to the ergonomics of how I wanted my practice to flow and work. A site measure was undertaken and a sketch plan was drawn up at no obligation. From the very first plan, I began to feel the first creeping excitement and emotion that has been steadily building. They got it right pretty much straight away.

“I always had a very large waiting room that was very comfortable and wanted to keep that same feel that all my patients have enjoyed. They managed to design a waiting room that could seat four three-seater sofas which I feel gives a softer feel than the usual individual chairs. We wanted all the surgeries to be in close association to each other and with the sterilization room nearby. I had also asked for a vanity area for patients to place make-up and compose themselves after their appointments.

“The consultation room was also designed so discussions could be done in a non-threatening manner away from the surgery. This was all managed superbly and



I cannot wait to see the final results.”

The evolution of the design centres on the four operatories utilizing a space that was previously under-utilized in the existing floor plan. The new rooms are spacious and concentrated in one ergonomic area.

The floor plan was settled on and the three-dimensional design began with a brief of contemporary, clean, simple lines with floating elements. The waiting area, which was formerly the kids play area, is designed to portray an open gallery feel, with low height contemporary furniture and glass tables to increase the perception of space.

In order to achieve this clean-lined feel in an older building, the walls will all be re-lined and new flush ceilings and lighting will be installed throughout. There are very few existing walls remaining in the new fit-out and those that remain will be clad.

The scheme of colour and finishes is again contemporary and clean which will transform the interior of the practice from its existing “old world” feel to a modern, up-to-date, clean contemporary environment, more suitable to the patrons of the area.

The surgeries are coloured in light and bright finishes and designed for Dr Ho’s particular methods of practice. Medifit’s modular cabinetry system came to the fore here and all aspects of the operational requirements have been met.



Before the renovation



Making it all fit medifit

The refresh area is combined with the operatory access to maximize space usage and is screened from the waiting area.

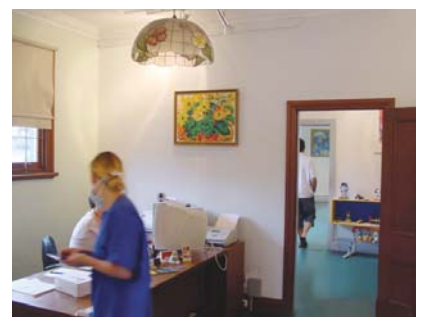
Behind the scenes are the staff, steri, OPG, consultation, practice manager, laboratory areas and toilets. The areas have been design to tie into the interior in finish and feel. All have been custom designed to Dr Ho’s particular practice and management styles.

Dr Ho is using state of the art materials throughout. After research and discussion with Phillip Betts of Dupont Corian Australasia, it was decided on the basis of longevity, sterility and low maintenance that Corian would be used extensively as benchtop materials in surgeries and sterilization areas.

Medifit has used three dimensional computer graphics to show Dr Ho his interior before it is built.

“The computer software packages we utilize to compile these images allow us to generate the interior at real size in a virtual computer space,” Mr Raphael said. “We then map the various finishes onto the surfaces using scans of the actual finishes proposed, including carpets, veneers, paint, etc. Then we apply lighting in line with the style of lights proposed to create the light and shadows, as would be the case in reality. The computer software analyses all of this and we select the view or views we want to show.”

Medifit commenced construction on the project on August 7 and is due to finish on September 20, a six-week programme, which is a formidable feat with an old building such as this. Medifit’s east coast General Manager, Mr Sam Aquilina, is Sydney-based and has over 25 years experience in project management and site supervision from coast to coast of Australia.



“I believe with proper and comprehensive project planning combined with the knowledge of what is required from each trade, a project of this nature can be expedited within a tight programme to minimize the disruption to our clients ongoing operations and hence cashflow,” he said.

Part 2 of this article will appear in the Surgery Design special feature in Australasian Dental Practice Nov/Dec 2003.