



## Building a dream practice from the ground up

**D**r Michael Lucas and his dentist-wife Tania are savouring the accomplishment of their dream of building their ideal practice. Located in the Adelaide suburb of South Plympton at 577 Marion Road, it is housed in purpose-built premises that represent the culmination of three years design, planning and finally construction.

The idea was born in July of 2001 when Dr Lucas had greatness thrust upon him. After graduating in 1994, he went to work for Dr Tony Jackson at the South Plympton address, was offered partnership a year later and eight years on, found himself running the show after Dr Jackson opted for an early retirement.

"It was mid-2001 and I found myself to be the sole owner of a practice which although had an exceptionally large patient base, was in dire need of a facelift," Dr Lucas said. "I had some deci-

sions to make. The next few years were to be an amazing journey in a bid to fulfill the goal of building our dream practice.

"You know deep down when you're on a good wicket and something clicks to tell you now is your time. Our practice is only 7 kms from the Adelaide CBD in an upward moving demographic area and located on the corner of a major arterial road with an ever-increasing volume of traffic. The moons were aligned everywhere, so we just needed a quick renovation we surmised."

Dr Lucas began the project in August 2001 when drafts were drawn up for the renovation of the existing building. Once engineering reports were presented, however, it was apparent that the building was severely run down and would require an almost total reconstruction.

"It made more sense to start from scratch to create an ideal purpose-built

premises," Dr Lucas said. "But the question was where would we go during rebuilding? We needed to keep working. It all seemed too hard and the project was put on the back burner for a while. Meanwhile, by a stroke of good luck, the adjacent block at 575 Marion Road came up for sale. We immediately snapped it up with the intention of temporarily relocating there during the rebuilding process."

Thanks to the suggestion of a colleague, Dr Greg Jaunay, however, Dr Lucas decided to rezone the blocks to create a single block with double frontage onto Marion Rd. This would allow them to continue working in 577 during the demolition of 575, build a new surgery on that site, move in, and then demolish the existing surgery to make way for a car park.

"The plan was perfect. Now all we needed was a design for the new premises. A second group of architects were com-



missioned for concept plans, none of which were terribly exciting. Fortunately during our installation of Dental 4 Windows software in September 2002, we met Daryn Bungey from Henry Schien Regional. Daryn subsequently put us in touch with Geoff Raphael from Medifit and finally the project was on track.”

The following week, Dr Lucas met Geoff Raphael, Director of Design for Medifit and immediately cliqued.

“For the first time, someone was asking me all the right questions. After several conversations with Geoff, concept plans were drawn and colour computer images were generated. Finally we were onto something!”

“When we first met Michael, he showed us some plans compiled by another architect,” said Geoff Raphael, “and it was plain as day to me that what was presented was a beautiful, but an architectural-only solution. What Lucas Dental needed was a balanced approach between aesthetics and the practical needs of life in a dental practice.

“Within a week, after some exhausting briefing sessions, we had a Strategic Master Plan back to Michael. The plan didn’t show the three dimensional form of the building as yet simply because if the plan didn’t answer the outcomes of the operational requirements of the interior,

what use was there in showing a building which the client may fall in love with and which will forever constrain the interior outcomes as they develop.”

Dr Lucas said that in the end, Mr Raphael designed a modern building with a very functional internal layout complete with six surgeries and enough parking for 17 cars within a week.

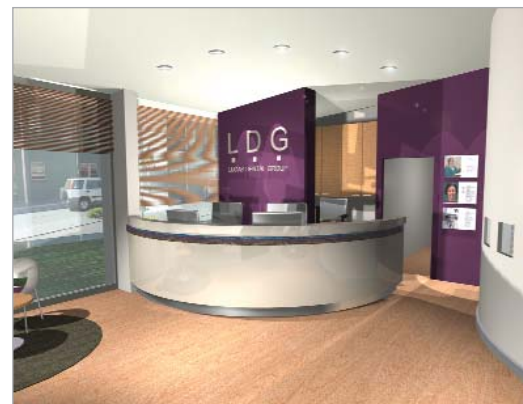
“I then met Medifit director Sam Koranis and from the first time we met, it was evident that the business relationship would flourish into friendship,” Dr Lucas said. “Sam understood what I wanted and was just as excited as I was. Over the next 12 months, it was all put together. Our dream to build a modern, architecturally designed dental surgery was slowly becoming a reality.

“We commissioned Folland and Panazzo Architects to make the transition through council as smooth as possible. It involved the demolition of two houses, the rezoning of one block to commercial and the retitling of the block. Geoff was also able to leave enough spare land (555sqm) for future use if need be, while still incorporating all we needed within our surgery.

“Although Medifit was based in Perth, I always felt in control. They were only a phone call away, even just for a chat and reassurance. Medifit’s communication



3D concept graphics by Medifit





was clear and precise. Once the layout was complete, it was time to talk to Vanessa, their interior designer. Tania and I were delighted with her extreme patience, professionalism, expertise and speed. Sample boards of finishes and materials, photos of fixtures were exchanged at this point.

“Geoff’s knowledge of compliance issues from electrical to waste management to radiation protection measures was also

invaluable. The documented standards in relation to design and operation of a dental surgery are numerous and it was important to have someone on our side who new them back to front in order to keep our surgery safe and compliant.

“Geoff was able to incorporate exactly what we asked for into the 235 square metres including two private consult rooms for client interviews and treatment plan discussions by our treatment coordinator Rebecca, and a private staff courtyard leading off the staff room for those lovely sunny days when you just need to get out of the building.”

The wide, long corridor with its high vaulted ceiling floods with natural light and opens out to the six treatment rooms. The four main rooms have their own private courtyard incorporating Japanese-style gardens and unique water features. Each surgery is equipped and fitted identically so all staff can move between rooms with ease and efficiency.

“Tania and I chose to install new Planmeca compact dental



units," Dr Lucas said. "Their small footprint and amazing comfort give the surgery a feel of space and provide ultimate comfort for clients. Progeny digital x-ray facilities have been placed into each room along with intraoral cameras, so as to not have to inconvenience the patient, by getting up and moving rooms all the time."

The sterilization room is located centrally to allow easy access from all treatment rooms. The practice's CEREC Milling unit can also be found here, placed behind an innovative glass-sliding hatch to keep noise to a minimum while allowing clients to view their new restoration being made. A W&H Assistina 301 Plus keeps all handpieces well maintained.

All equipment is autoclaved using a Tuttnauer 2540EKA autoclave for large loads and a compact Statim 2000S for quick cycles. A separate room provides storage for lab work and is fitted with equipment for model pouring and stent manufacturing.

"Tania and I wanted all clinicians to have an area for paperwork. Geoff cleverly provided this by incorporating private workstations each fitted with desk, computer, telephone, lockable draw and overhead storage. A generously sized storeroom with plenty of adjustable shelving for stock is also located within easy access to all treatment rooms and sterilisation.

"The design includes all that we wanted and more. Medifit's presentation of costing was thorough and the estimated time line of construction reasonable. It was then up to Richard Crabb from Medfin to provide leases and loans in order to keep our accountant (and Peter Costello) happy. Finally we signed and the project was underway.

"As design was unfolding, our team of staff at Lucas Dental was continually growing. A third dentist, Dr Mat Dawson, joined us as an assistant dentist. At this time we also introduced our

hygiene team - experienced hygienists, Sue, Lyn and Kristie. From a group of six we grew to 13 over a period of three months. We really needed to move!

"Opportunity was given to all staff members to have a say in what they would like to see in our new surgery. A suggestion board was placed in our staff room and all suggestions discussed at our regular staff meetings.

"Suggestions that were carried on into the new surgery included creature comforts like a ducted vacuuming system with dust pan activators in each surgery to make sweeping up simple after procedures, individual climate control split wall air conditioning systems to cope with bodily variations in temperature, ceiling mounted monitors with individual TV capabilities, dental assistants' call buttons, temperature and foot controlled taps, large staff room with kitchen facilities including dishwasher, oven, fridge, freezer and insinkerator, plus of course a Gaggia coffee machine. Washing machine and dryer facilities were installed for on-site laundering of staff uniforms. Staff also have their own separate toilet and bathroom area fitted with individual lockers for safe storage of personal belongings (*I do apologize to my wonderful staff that I could not incorporate the 12 person spa and twin sun beds... maybe next time!*).

Sight and Sound Technologies provided all of the special cabling requirements to the practice. The surgeries all have ceiling mounted LCD TVs that allow the patient to watch TV or a DVD and listen through headphones wired to the dental unit. The TV and DVD is modulated throughout the practice or, if desired, staff can allow the patient to view what is on the dental team's computer screen such as x-rays of intra-oral camera images.

"The completion of our rooms took a little longer than expected due to unforeseen incidents of vandalism, but finally the day came to move. The transition took nearly a week as the old building had to be emptied ready for demolition. It was a week of smiles as we enthusiastically set-up our new working environment, where everything had its place, was clean, light, bright and organised.

"The general response from patients was amazing, with most of our existing clients unable to believe they are actually at the dentist. They say 'they've never been into a practice so nice' and 'it doesn't look that big from the outside, but it's amazing what you can do when you now know it should be planned inside', but my favourite was - 'This place oozes class!'

"Morale between staff members has been boosted. What a great group we have. They are all so proud of what they now have and everyday they show it off, which is made apparent by their enthusiasm each morning. Comments left on white boards like 'this place rocks' and 'we are simply the best' are lines that tell us that sense of ownership has been taken onboard by them all!"

"Our design processes, right from our early briefing sessions with Michael and Tanya, captured their business goals, their personalities, dreams and their whole business ethos and practices," said Mr Raphael. "We take great pride in having produced a complete dental