

SPACE

FIT FOR PURPOSE

Isokinetic's new sports rehabilitation clinic on Harley Street is a cutting edge facility in a period setting. Viel Richardson meets some of the people involved in its creation

When Isokinetic—whose cutting edge facilities and innovative approach have made it one of the world's leading sports rehabilitation businesses—decided to expand beyond its Italian homeland, Harley Street was deemed to be the perfect place to locate a London outpost. But finding a suitable space for a highly specialised, and sizeable, facility was always going to prove a challenge.

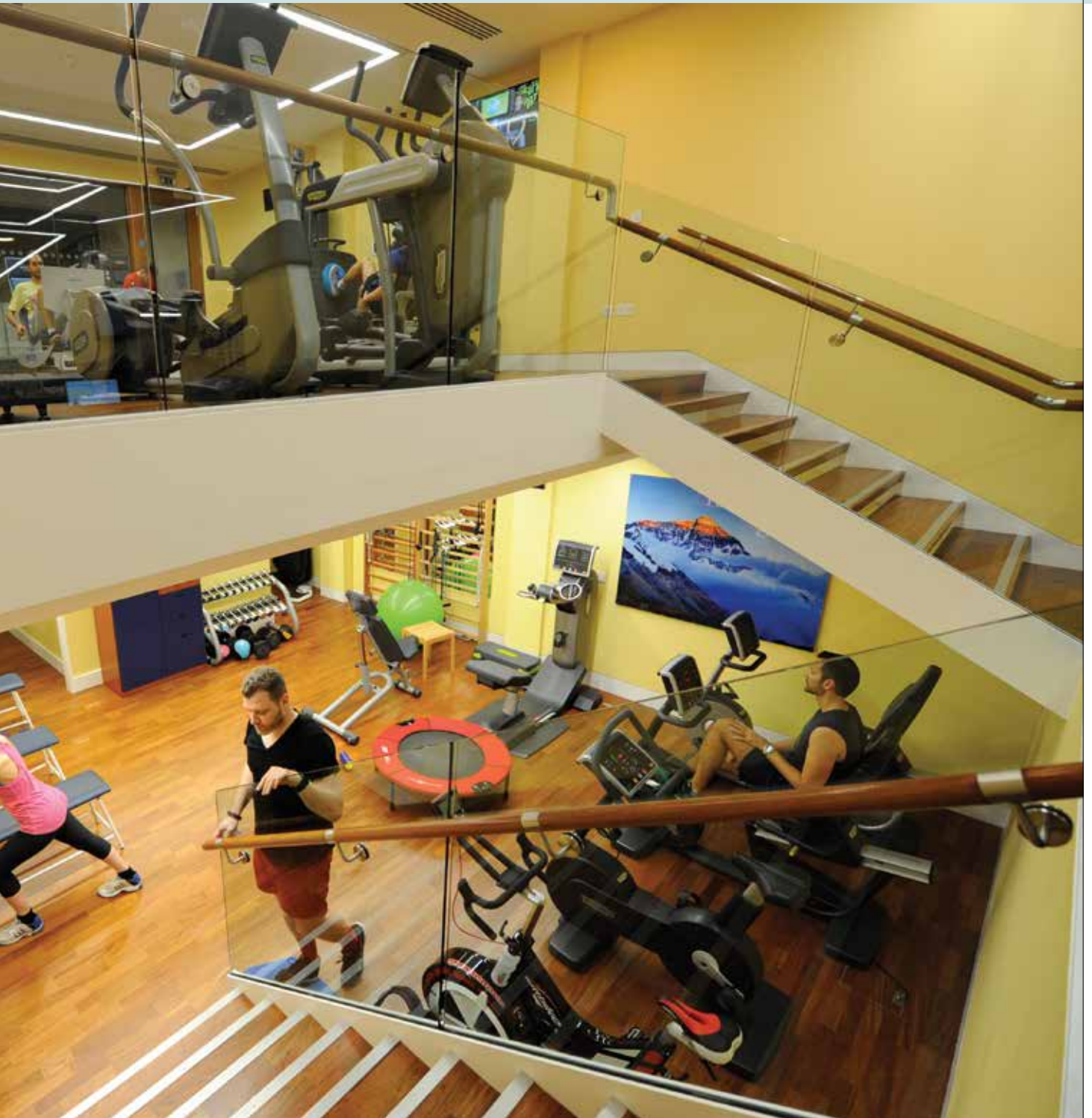
"We knew what we wanted from the London premises," says Mike Davidson, managing director of Isokinetic London. "And we wanted it to be here in Marylebone." However daunting the task of creating a world class clinic on a Georgian street might be, it was a challenge that Isokinetic was determined to meet head on.

Isokinetic was founded in 1987 by Dr Stefano Della Villa, a pioneering sports medicine practitioner. Over the ensuing 27 years the company has revolutionised the way in which sports injuries have been treated by developing its own specialised and highly effective approach to rehabilitation.

"We started in Bologna and now have seven centres spread across Italy," Mike explains, "so we had a clear idea of what we wanted this new London facility to achieve: not only what we do but very importantly the way in which we do it. Everything—from the type of treatments we offer to the temperature and light levels in each space—has been developed using feedback from clinicians and patients alike, and it is all fundamental to the success of the business. It was imperative that none of this was lost, as this was to be our first facility outside Italy."

A Harley Street address is a major draw for any medical company, but its grand townhouses were built with ballgowns, not theatre gowns, in mind. The Howard de Walden Estate, Isokinetic's landlord, has a strong track record of creating state of the art medical facilities in its period buildings, but the work involved in doing so is pretty monumental. The clinic's proposed location added an extra complication, as the two Edwardian properties ripe for conversion sat back to back rather than side by side.





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“Our brief was to come up with a coherent, modern, high-tech physiotherapy clinic, combining the existing properties at 11 Harley Street and 3 Wigmore Place,” says Anna-Marie Lutterodt of Sonnemann Toon Architects, the practice tasked with overseeing the project. “Isokinetic had a very clear idea of what they needed to achieve, so we visited some of their facilities in Italy to gain a better understanding. What became very apparent was that the environment was absolutely crucial. Environmental conditions like the temperature, humidity and airflow for each space needed to be controllable to a very fine degree. At the same time, they were insistent that the emotional impact of the rooms had to be a positive one at every point throughout the patient’s progress.”

The final design would have to complement the Isokinetic way of doing things. “Their system is based around having five stages of recovery, starting with pain management progressing through motion and flexibility, strength and

endurance, coordination and motor skills, and ending with work on a patient’s sports specific movement skills,” Anna-Marie explains. “We had to ensure that the design was based upon creating spaces that not only accommodated each stage, but flowed in a sequence that complemented this sense of progression.”

At the front of the facility there are the consulting rooms where patients start on the road to recovery. Behind these—in a space which used to be the open courtyard—there is a large split level gym. Heading downwards, a beautiful hydrotherapy pool fills the newly dug basement. Heading upwards takes you into the 3 Wigmore Place side of the facility, which hosts the fourth and fifth stages of recovery as you move up through the building.

It all adds up to quite a complex operation, and given the nature of the Edwardian houses the facility could easily have descended into a rabbit warren of narrow corridors and isolated cubicles. It was very clear to all concerned that this should not

happen. “The design we arrived at was aimed at supporting the psychological side of the client’s rehabilitation process. Because of the visual links created between different areas in the building, as you move through each stage of the process you can look back through the building and appreciate how far you have come, as well as looking forward at the stage you are working towards,” Anna-Marie explains. “So for example, we put in large skylights on the gym roof so when you are in the consulting rooms you can look down into the space where the physical aspect of your rehabilitation process will begin. And on the top floor of 3 Wigmore Place, where the very last stage of recovery takes place, you can see across to

LINKS

Isokinetic
11 Harley Street
isokinetic.com

Howard de Walden Estate
020 7290 0901
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where you started on the road to recovery—you can see the path you have travelled. It is a lovely touch.”

It all added up to a hugely ambitious undertaking, and one that Mike says could not have succeeded without the support of the Howard de Walden Estate. “The Estate’s vision is to establish the Harley Street area at the centre of the world of healthcare,” he explains. “Simon Baynham, and his colleagues at the Estate were really committed to the project from the beginning, as they see the establishment of our facility here as part of that project.”

The Estate has provided not just the physical facilities, but a wider environment in which they can thrive. “You have the high street, the restaurants, hotels and parks, right on your doorstep,” says Mike. “There is so much more to recovery than the clinical aspect—some of our patients come in with quite serious injuries, and will need considerable treatment, so the environment surrounding the treatment facility is extremely important to their overall wellbeing.”

The smooth progress of the venture was tested by a message Mike received while watching Belgium playing Algeria at Goalball during the London 2012 Paralympic games.

“It told me that we had been refused planning permission for the original proposal we had submitted,” he recalls, “and it was a real blow. Our plans had included us adding another floor to the Wigmore Street premises, and we were refused permission to add that extra level.”

As the saying goes, necessity is often the mother of invention. The solution was not to be arrived at by tinkering with the edges of the existing design, but a radical rethink of the internal configuration of the building. “This was definitely the low point of the entire project,” Mike says. “But it was also the point where everyone, the Estate, Sonnemann Toon and us at Isokinetic, really pulled together and collaborated at our closest in order to find the best solution. Seeing what we have now, none of us can imagine the building being any other way.”

“One of the biggest challenges was supplying the services to the new

layout,” Anna-Marie recalls. “A radical change in design also meant a radical redesign of all the environmental systems and controls. The initial design had incorporated a very efficient use of space as we wanted the service runs to be as unobtrusive as possible. We now had to repeat that with the new configuration, and while we achieved it I have to admit we did hand the contractors a bit of a challenge in terms of installation!”

Mike, who has watched the staff and clients using the facility on a daily basis, sums up the feeling of everyone involved when asked about his views on the final result.

“I think the flow and atmosphere of the building works beautifully,” he says. “It is a real testament to the talent and commitment of everyone involved. The Isokinetic London facility really epitomises the company’s core ideals and we are all proud of what has been achieved here. I think it beautifully balances the feeling of a home, which is the classic Harley Street practice feel, with facilities that are very 21st century.”