

# SPACE

# RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY





*Viel Richardson visits the new Harley Street Dental Studio to learn about the challenges of creating the facilities for a cutting edge dental practice in a grand Georgian townhouse*

In Harley Street and its environs, Marylebone is blessed with what is rightly regarded as one of the best medical districts in the world. Every day people fly in from all over the globe to consult leading specialists in a vast range of fields, housed in beautiful, up-to-the-minute facilities.

It is easy to forget, as these patients sit in one of those elegantly proportioned Georgian rooms, what an enormous transformation this represents. These houses were built as townhouses, designed to accommodate a world of glamorous living and grand entertainment—all of which is a world away from the demands of 21st century medicine.

Later this month the new Harley Street Dental Studio—one of the most advanced dental practices in the world—will be opening at 52 Harley Street. This cutting edge facility called for a complete renovation of the Georgian building, which had to be achieved while staying within the strict guidelines imposed on this important conservation area. That is quite a challenge, and for this particular high spec conversion it fell squarely on the desk of building surveyor Barry Greenstreet, who works for the Howard de Walden Estate's refurbishment department.

“Once the general parameters of a renovation have been developed my job is to take that forward in agreement with the relevant architects, consultants and contractors,” explains Barry. “One thing that made this project a bit different from normal has been that the building’s tenant has been heavily involved from a very early stage. It meant that I was also meeting with a small design team from the dentist’s side to develop their concept for the surgery into a workable design. The idea was that we would deliver a building ready for them to bring the equipment to and plug it straight in.”

Based on his experience, Barry says that when it comes to this kind of project there are two main areas to be addressed. The first is the rather prosaic sounding ‘space planning’, which is needed in order to comply with modern regulations relating to emergency escape routes or avoiding bottlenecks as people circulate within a busy building.

“This is often one of the more onerous tasks in terms of complying with building regulations,” Barry explains. “The original layouts simply don’t suit modern commercial use. This is accentuated when a building is being transformed for medical use because there is a whole other level



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of requirements to be met, and the buildings require significantly more services than a normal commercial or residential building. This was the case at 52 Harley Street where the brief meant creating a building that could host the most cutting edge dental technology. So not only do you have the services that you would expect in a modern residential building, we also need to install the infrastructure for all the facilities associated with the dental procedures being undertaken. Take the dentist's chairs for example. The ones being installed at 52 are hugely sophisticated pieces of kit. Each chair requires its own power supply, suction and compression pipework, specialised lighting, associated video screens, x-ray equipment and much more."

It meant that one of the major challenges was just fitting everything in, and doing so while preserving as much as possible of the building's original Georgian feeling and proportions. Crisscrossing the building with a network of visible service runs or bolting multiple air handling units to the face of the

building is simply not an option.

"In order to achieve this, understanding the nature of the equipment to be installed is vital. For example, dental suction and compression equipment is different from the general medical type. You have to make sure everyone is aware of this from the beginning, so you can design efficient and elegant solutions. Designing for the wrong type of equipment could be very expensive and time consuming to rectify if it is not caught in time," Barry explains.

It meant that during the renovation period the clients would visit the site so Barry and the team could sign off structural things like chair positioning and where the wall mounted x-rays should be fixed. "Then at the point where the rooms were starting to look like the finished products the dentists would come to

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the site and look around the rooms to assess how things were shaping up. They would look at things like the positioning of the light fittings or how the storage would work. It is easy to look at a planned layout on paper, but it is different when you are standing in a room. Standing there you can really see how different elements in the room relate to each other and how the space will actually work. It was a chance for the dental team to make those final adjustments to get things just right for when they moved in."

Any modern medical practice is a very complex and sophisticated place, where a great many factors have to work in harmony. Trying to achieve all this within a centuries' old building is especially challenging—but it is a challenge that the Estate continues to rise to particularly well.

So well in fact that when the Harley Street Dental Group opens the doors to this most advanced of dental treatment centres, it will feel completely at home within a building raised amid the sounds of the horse-drawn carriage and the swish of the debutant's gown.