

# Sculpting, architecture and dentistry

**MANY OF YOU WILL REMEMBER RICHARD MITZMAN AS A RESTORATIVE DENTIST OF GREAT REPUTE. TEN YEARS AGO, HE GAVE UP HIS PRESTIGIOUS PRACTICE TO BECOME A SCULPTOR, BEFORE CHANGING DIRECTION AGAIN TO STUDY AS AN ARCHITECT. RICHARD IS NOW A DENTAL PRACTICE DESIGNER**

**Tell me about your early dental career.**

I graduated at University College Hospital (UCH) in 1967 and went straight into general practice because I wanted to buy myself a car. After six months I realised how much I still had much to learn and decided I needed to get back to dental school.

**How did you go about that?**

I had always got on well with Professor Prophet and was lucky enough to be given a house job with him. I was fairly unique at that time, being his first houseman who had actually been in general dental practice.

**Where did you go from there?**

After my spell at UCH and a further six months in practice, I met Dr Max Walter - a long-established and respected private practitioner in the West End. He persuaded me that my future lay with him as, at that time, he was looking for an associate, but he insisted I study for my DDS at the University of Southern California - I accepted with great alacrity.

**Was it difficult to gain entry?**

Not really, Professor Prophet gave me such a good reference I did not even need to sit the entry exam: I went over there in late 1969. I studied under the Dean - Professor Ingle as well as Niles Guchet and Rex Ingram. Being the first student they had taught from England I only did restorative dentistry.

**Was there anything you found inspirational there?**

Yes, I discovered gold onlays - my first sculptural experience. I made onlays for nearly all my patients and completed 200 of them by the time I finished. I gained my DDS after only 15 months and then returned to London. I joined Max Walters' practice and in three years had doubled the practice size.

**What did you learn from working with Max?**

I learned practice management, patient management and diagnosis and found him to be a great mentor. Sadly, after three years he died and I was left to cope with both his and my own patients. The most difficult aspect was having to deal with prosthetics, endodontics, periodontics and removable prosthodontics. I solved this problem by taking on four associates in each of the specialities, all of whom had American degrees.

**So you ran a very successful practice then?**

No, in fact I found I had never worked so hard for so little as the practice overheads were very high. So I began to develop my own practice management ideas.

**And you only used gold for your restorations?**

No, I completed some amalgam restorations in the practice. An amalgam done really well, under rubber dam is fine. And remember in some patients amalgam lasts, while in others it does not. However, I am sure gold is still the best

material and the three quarter crown the best restoration. One can keep the margins away from the gingivae and preserve some natural enamel. Rex Ingram taught me to do three quarter crowns which could not be seen by careful carving to alter the light reflection. However, the amalgams I did were very much influenced by Jacobson who did huge sculpted amalgams.

**Yes, I well remember the beautiful amalgams you placed way back in the 1970s - it was little wonder you were called the Amalgam King. Were you well settled in practice?**

Not really, I have always enjoyed finding a problem and solving it, so in 1981 I set up Baby Orthodontic Products, which introduced the orthodontic soother and teat steam steriliser for baby bottles. Fifteen years ago, I started Compudent with five colleagues and Indra Patel. These software programs were based on practice management techniques for running successful private practice. Compudent is still going strong though I am not now involved with it.

**How did you move into sculpture?**

I was busy in the practice and was doing a lot of lecturing. I felt I could be do this for another 20 years, it all looked very predictable. I had never given anything else a chance and wanted to see what would happen if I sculpted full time. I was able to sell the practice,

and in May 1987 laid down my mirror and probe, went to Italy and spent four years carving in marble.

**Was this successful?**

Yes, I had my first show after three years at the Boundary Gallery and this was followed in 1991 by another one. I held further shows regularly up to 1995. I have several pieces displayed in the Floersheimer Collection in Switzerland.

**Where are these situated?**

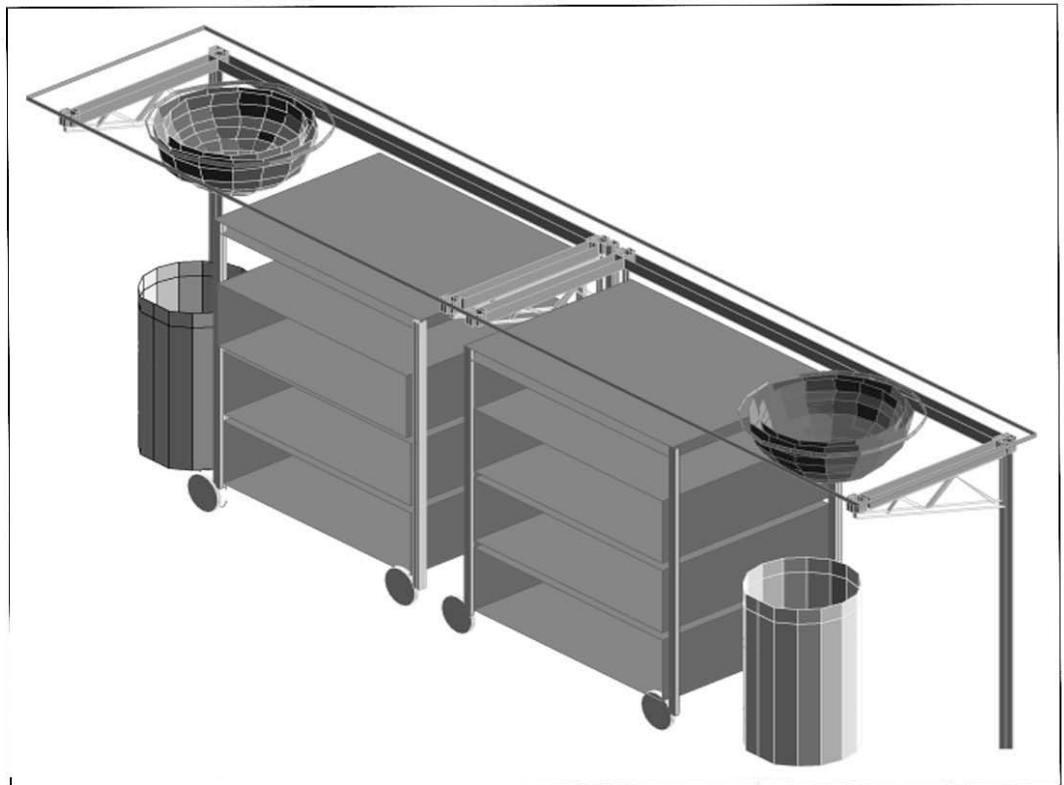
They are in Locarno, one on a terrace overlooking Lake Maggiore next to sculptures by Maillol and Arp, another between two Gris paintings. I also have a white marble abstract next to a rose period Picasso. By this time, I felt that making solid objects, which are placed to view, was very limiting. I wanted to be more spatial. So, I decided to take up architecture. I enrolled at the University of North London on a part-time BA degree course and having completed this I am now finishing my ARIBA which I will complete by December this year.

**How did this lead to your interest in practice design?**

In 1993 I designed a few dental practices with Robert and Ingrid Zipper who were interior designers. Now I work on my own and have advised several practices.

**Are you involved in any other areas of design?**

Yes I developed a new method of painting - the 'Magic Paintbrush' with which anyone



can paint with no spill and no mess. This is currently being marketed as a toy by a Japanese company. I also designed and developed a new baby buggy which negotiates stairs, again working with Japanese manufacturers. This is all plastic, folds to a carry-on and stores in the footwell of a car.

**Where do you see your future?**

As a designer of practices, products, interiors and building and solving problems through innovation. I am presently teaching myself drawing and 3D design and plot manipulation on computer. This is the stimulus to keep learning.

**Are these constant changes very unsettling?**

Yes, it can be difficult - for instance, my income is very variable, but I am on a constant learning pathway which is very exciting. The reason I did not stay on as a sculptor was my need to keep on learning instead of repeating all the time.

**Where did your principles of practice design differ from the usual ones?**

Let me give you one example - cabinets! These usually contain drawers full of unused instruments, which means the surgery cannot be cleaned properly and can only be used by one dentist. Usually, practitioners do not have enough dental chairs so they can't work efficiently. What is worse, these clutter all the work surfaces. My idea is to eliminate as many drawers as possible. The more drawers there are the more they become filled. My designs are based on totally clear work surfaces and everything is stored in mobile cabinets beneath them - including the computer screen. This means the surgery can be sterilised between patients in minimum time by merely wiping over the surfaces and setting new trays. Preferably, the surfaces should be glass which can be seen to be clean. All occasionally used instruments are contained within the central storage and sterilising areas.

**'My designs are based on totally clear work surfaces'**

**What do you see as the future of dentistry?**

Dentistry itself is an anachronism. We can prevent most of it and a good deal is iatrogenic. The dental practice as we know it today won't exist in the future. There must be more delegation and an increased use of ancillaries.

**What will the dentist do?**

The dentist should continue to deal with clinical problems and for difficult areas that can't be looked after by anyone else. The increasing use of ancillaries means we must get used to the idea of every dentist having two surgeries and all my practice designs are based on this. The extra surgery is essential and becomes an escape valve to reduce pressure and stress.

**Thank you, Richard - we will be able to see how your ideas for practice design are implemented when I describe the latest practice you have just completed in next month's (October) issue. ID**