

# A radical break with tradition...

The editor went to visit a Birmingham practice designed by Richard Mitzman

A BRAND new Richard Mitzman surgery design opening just round the corner from the Dentistry 2000 exhibition was too good a chance to miss, so it was with alacrity that we accepted the invitation to view.

Dental surgeries seem to have looked much the same for millions of years — all my practising life anyway. Equipment moves steadily ahead becoming more wondrous almost by the day, yet the layout of it remains boringly unchanged. Cabinetry round the walls, chair in the middle, perhaps an antique desk in there somewhere for the more daring, and that basically is that.

Richard Mitzman has other ideas. A dentist himself, he has now metamorphosed into an inspirational designer of surgeries and practices, with a steadily growing clientele of, shall we say, the more avant-garde practitioners, who has consequently, an increasing influence in the breaking of a stultifying mould. His designs are based largely on two major philosophies. The first, reaching back to his own days at the chair-side, is the certain knowledge that all dentists are basically messy animals. Give them a surface or a set of drawers and they will quickly cover or fill them with junk and clutter. Secondly, following on from this, dentists need to be

weaned off their traditional thinking that they can only operate from one surgery. Two are far more efficient, with one being made ready while the other is in use. The idea fits in well too with the current views on infection control. The big question of course is whether these aims can be fulfilled at reasonable cost, and although one never likes to pry into other peoples costs, this particular problem may well have been largely solved in the practice we visited.

## Purely NHS

Dr Steve Clements' surgery in Castle Vale, Birmingham, is purely NHS. "And I can't really ever see it being otherwise," he told us. Originally having obtained most of the first floor in a newly developed building, the whole undivided 2500 thousand square feet of it, he was a bit stuck for ideas so contacted Mr Mitzman for some inspiration. The result, as we saw, is a light, colourful, innovative, state-of-the-art practice in which the principal and his staff are just beginning to enjoy practising dentistry, as they find their feet amidst the welter of unexpected routines that are so very much part and parcel of advanced design thinking.

Radical breaks with tradition are never easy to

describe — and this practice really has to be seen to be appreciated — but I will do my best. Entry to the premises is orthodox, as one walks directly into a spacious reception and waiting area of almost disappointing ordinariness; apart, that is, from its very bright and cheery colour scheme and comfy seating. From then on, though, innovation begins. Beyond the reception area, and encompassing the perimeter of the whole operating area, which covers the rest of the floor space, runs a corridor along which patients are shown into any one of the five surgeries, with each entered through full-width frosted glass sliding doors. Along the backs of the surgeries runs another corridor, a mirror image of the first, communicating with each, both by door, and also by a set of highly ingenious "pods" through which paper work, instruments and materials can be passed back and forth, "magiced" in and out, to and from, the service areas behind. It is a clever and discrete way of exchanging items without bodies actually needing to enter the holy of holies. As a result, the surgeries themselves, although virtually little more than cubicles, look surprisingly roomy, due partly to the unique lack of general clutter, and partly because of the marvellously space-enhancing effect of their frosted glass front "walls". Mitzman thinking, of course, precludes all cabinetry so the essential instruments of any surgery are kept in three small units mounted on castors, which when not in use can be pushed back flush with the wall; another clever contribution to the sense of space. The dental chairs are also examples of Mitzman imagination. Each has the three essentials of operating light, spittoon and delivery system attached, but all cleverly modified so as to pivot and swivel just about



▲ Reception area

▼ Frosted glass adds to the light and airy feeling of the practice



▲ Steve Clements and Richard Mitzman at the official opening of the practice on March 31

▼ The specially modified Pelton & Crane chair came from America



Steve Clements relaxes in one of his comfortable waiting room chairs

every which way, a dodge which creates unusually generous amounts of space round the chair; enough certainly to accommodate both the "normal" and "cack-handed", be they dentist, nurse, doctor or anaesthetist, while at the same time suiting all the various procedures of modern dentistry.

## Reassuring

All surgeries are finished quite simply in white. This

might sound stark but is certainly not the case when seen for real; in fact the great simplicity, and lack of clinical bits and pieces, adds up to the sort of thoroughly professional atmosphere which must be reassuring for even the most apprehensive of patients.

For the moment, Dr Clements and his staff are still working on routines for their new way of life; quite a difficult undertaking I would

imagine in their new and "unusual" surroundings. The knack of saying goodbye to one patient, for instance, and then darting out of ones "back door" to greet the next within a few seconds could in itself take time to master; and from the nurses angle, "posting" the right things through the correct port at the right time into the back of a surgery might get quite fraught until well practised in the art.

Having at last seen a

Mitzman surgery in the flesh so to speak, and observed the ingenuity and lateral thinking which goes into its design, I now find it much easier to see why his ideas are spreading among those who are looking for individuality. Whether

some of the more striking features are entirely practical, or just flamboyant styling exercises, only time can tell. Richard himself is of course supremely confident of every-

thing he does and *Dental Practice* already has an open and warm invitation to view his next project. It will be again be accepted — with alacrity of course.