



# STYLE COUNSEL

## DESIGN WITHOUT COMPROMISE

**Can perfection strike twice? With high expectations for round two working with architect Richard Mitzman, Michael Cheung of Maple Orthodontics didn't just want 'wow'; he wanted 'jaw-dropping'. But what was the outcome with a 'design from function' approach? Sarah Gates investigates**

**W**hen Michael Cheung approached Richard Mitzman to be architect on his new orthodontic practice, he knew what to expect. The pair had worked together on Michael's previous Slough-based practice and the results had been spectacular. However, the building shell was pre-war and it had begun to show its age; it literally began to fall apart. 'It was such a shame to have the whole thing stripped out,' says Richard, 'it was totally functional – it looked beautiful, just like it had done the day it was finished.'

### PASTURES NEW

But it was time to move on. Michael found a five-year-old, purpose-built office block with underground parking right at the end of the high street, also in Slough, East Berkshire. At this point, Richard and his team stepped in to select the right unit. They chose one that maximised natural light and offered the right

square footage. Michael took this opportunity to downsize – five surgeries became three. The open plan, 2,000-square-foot unit also had to accommodate a waiting room and reception, two offices, a kitchenette, a staff changing room and toilet. As an orthodontics practice entirely reliant on referrals, taking a unit on the second floor was a sensible choice; secure and out of sight.

### THE BRIEF

Michael wanted to achieve a practice much like his previous site, with a few tweaks to the original design. He wanted to mimic the bright and airy feel, achieved with the curved glass partitions, but in recognition of a maturing client base, he traded in a youthful and funky colour scheme for something more sophisticated and glamorous. But the overall finish had to be 'jaw-dropping' – a talking point for patients and staff alike.



*'The space as we found it was completely open plan, bar one pillar,' says Michael. 'The landlord supplied a basic suspended ceiling and carpets. The ceiling was replaced along with new light fittings, ceramic floor tiling in the public areas and a rubberised tile in the clean core area.'*



'Michael wanted a more glamorous finish this time round,' says Maneesha Sonawane, associate director for Richard Mitzman Architects. 'He wanted the red carpet experience for his patients. We interpreted this as a 'runway'; a line of LED uplights set into the floor, which leads you to the reception desk – also lit with integrated lighting, giving a floating feel (see inset). Michael also wanted a statement light feature above the desk, so we suggested a bobble chandelier (pictured); a modern take on a design classic to give a bit of sparkle.'



Michael found new premises in a modern office block located at the end of the high street in Slough, West Berkshire. Up on the second floor, security is excellent and, since attracting customers off the street is not required, the practice location adds to its exclusivity



Armourcoat's Flow wall: 'The wall here is quite long so I asked Richard and his team to make a feature of it. I was shown the Flow wall and I knew immediately that I had to have it. I wanted patients to take notice of it, but also for it to be subtle,' says Michael. 'It was the first time we had used this three-dimensional wall, but we have used it again since. It's quite a feature actually; the photos don't do it justice, but it's reasonably easy to maintain – you can clean it well with its hard surface which is important in a dental setting,' explains Richard. 'It is lit so the 'waves' are accentuated, but subtly; shadows wash down through the elements of the piece,' adds Maneesha.

### COOL RUNNINGS

The project went smoothly and from start to finish of the building process, took just six months to complete. 'We had to apply for change of use, but this was straightforward,' explains Richard. 'It was a bit difficult coordinating the air conditioning and drainage with the building's existing system, but we employed a M&E consultant (mechanical and engineering) to help us do that. The unit had suspended ceilings and raised floors on pedestals, which made things very easy – we could just run the services behind them. We made the glass curve tighter and neater this time round, so it was a progression from the first. The practice is HTM-01-05 compliant as per the guidelines at the start of 2010.'

### DESIGN FROM FUNCTION

But the most crucial element of the design for Richard isn't something that you can appreciate in photographs. 'It's all about dual circulation,' says Richard, 'where the patients move around the outside and the staff on the inside of the glass curve. You've got a completely separate circulation for patients and for staff and we try to achieve this for all our practices. It makes for a much calmer atmosphere – no bottlenecks – people can move around easily. It seems terribly simple but it takes a lot of time and effort to work out.'

'I'm proud of the workings of the practice – dual circulation, cross-infection control, decontamination – all are an integral part of the design. When you design in this way, it all comes out looking terrific as well. It doesn't look clunky – it looks





Michael decided to bring the Belmont dental chairs from his previous practice with him, so a colour scheme had to be developed around the three. The chairs, green, pink and blue, were married with a more sophisticated palette of mauve, lilac and blue.

Lighting is an integral part of the design too. 'It's thought of right from the beginning really,' says Richard. 'Zuntobel lights are suspended from the ceiling, projecting light down and up, which means no glare for the patient and a clean look.' Maneesha adds: 'This scheme is more energy-efficient compared to Michael's last practice. We used more compact fluorescents that are low energy. It's a softer light in the public areas – the reception area, the waiting room and the patient corridor. Then in back of house (the kitchenette, the sterilising area and so on) we used a brighter, task-orientated light.'



The Steriwall is a signature design feature of Richard's dental practices and one that he has been producing for years. 'We are improving them all the time,' says Richard. 'In this practice, Michael wanted a high gloss lacquer finish in line with the more sophisticated look, and it looks really clean. We have to make sure that there is enough clean storage and plenty of room in the sterilising areas, but this is all part and parcel of the basic design – it's not an add-on.'

purposeful, and that comes only when you design from function. It's like a well-oiled machine.'

### NOT FOR PROFIT

Having completed a similar project before, Michael was realistic and informed about costs. So, unsurprisingly, the practice came in on budget and on time. But for Michael,



Running adjacent to the Flow wall sits a display integrated into the curved glass and retail area. This 'shop window' houses the team's trophies and certificates, designed in such a way so not to take over the waiting room and reception. The certificates have been scanned and printed on acrylic, then suspended on wire, much like house details in an estate agent's window.



The curved glass partitioning was a feature of Michael's previous practice that he wanted to repeat here, and it is in fact his favourite design aspect above all else. 'It lets in so much natural light so the space is very bright and airy. It doesn't feel claustrophobic, and this is important because I work long hours – 13 hours each day usually. When you spend so much time at work, you have to have a space that you don't resent at the end of the day,' says Michael.

this progression was never profit-driven. It was a project without compromise, to create a space to wow patients but perhaps more importantly, his staff. 'I have low staff turnover because I treat my team in such a way that anywhere else would be a disappointment. I want my staff to feel that they own the

practice too, that my success is their success. The money will look after itself if you get that right.' And as the fourth practice project since the start of his career, it looks like Michael has.

Maple Orthodontics: [www.coolsmile.co.uk](http://www.coolsmile.co.uk)

Richard Mitzman Architects: [www.richardmitzman.com](http://www.richardmitzman.com)

Zenon Builders: [www.zenonbuilders.com](http://www.zenonbuilders.com)

SPS Dental: [www.spsdental.co.uk](http://www.spsdental.co.uk)

Armourcoat: [www.armourcoat.com](http://www.armourcoat.com)

